

GREVILLEA

November, 2014

Welcome to the twenty fourth edition of **Grevillea** an e-magazine to stimulate your thinking!

Why "Grevillea"? The Macquarie Dictionary defines "grevillea" as any shrub or tree of the very large, mainly Australian genus Grevillea family. Many are attractive ornamentals and a number are useful trees. It is also worth noting that grevillea can be very toxic.

So Grevillea is an Australian e-magazine which will cover a large range of subjects as time goes on. We trust they will be interesting (not just ornamental), useful and stimulate (not irritate) your thinking. We aim to have articles that will be short, practical and worth your opening them as attachments.

This edition focuses on **Turning Vision into Reality.**

Peter Armstrong shares his thoughts on this subject drawing on his experience at Samford Uniting. Rhohda White speaks about Wesley Castle Hill, Steve Coster about Queanbeyan and Alan Robinson about the journey of Pittwater Uniting Church. Finally Christine Bayliss Kelly draws together learning from the experience of Parramatta-Nepean Presbytery which has attempted to turn vision into reality but has found this difficult to achieve. Nevertheless there are some important things to learn from that experience.

Email me if you have some thoughts to share. My email address is chrisw@nat.uca.org.au.

I hope you are encouraged by this edition of *Grevillea*.

Grace and peace
Chris Walker

Let me again point people to significant papers from the WCC. Contact me if you would like me to email you a copy.

The Church: Towards a Common Vision (\$10 for hard copies)
Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes
Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World
An Ecumenical Call to Just Peace

Turning our vision into reality

Peter Armstrong

Maybe it runs in the family...my grandfather looked at how he was farming and saw that he could do it differently. Pa Armstrong was one of the first farmers in his district to recycle water he had used in his crops. He also thought there would be benefits in lifting his pigs off the ground (i.e. by building a basic piggery) for better care and health of the animals and was one of the first in his district to do this. My Dad saw a dilapidated property in western Queensland and imagined what it would be like if there was better water access and planning of land use and to a risk with a vision for developing and farming that property. Me...well I was never really into plants or animals but I love seeing who people can be and what a community of faith could be and do locally and beyond.

Turning vision into reality...Why is this important?

Now, before we ask 'Whose vision?' or 'What kind of vision?' let's ask the question "Why is turning vision into reality important?" By vision I mean a picture or description of the way something may be, but isn't yet. A helpful way to think about vision is to do so in three domains - (i) personal; (ii) communal; and (iii) structural. Where *personal* is a description of difference or change or new reality for an individual or individuals; *communal* is a description of difference or change or new reality for the way a group or community exists (i.e. the relationships, characteristics, values, purpose, activities of that group/community); *structural* is a description of difference or change or new reality for structures (i.e. political, economic, resources, infrastructure, staffing, organisational).

An old piece of wisdom from the Bible (Proverbs 29:18) says, "Where there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint..." Another way to say this is "Without vision people lose purpose" Without vision there is no unifying dynamic or clarity of boundaries. And without turning that vision into reality hope can be lost, momentum ceases, and the embodying of that vision won't be found. Words without deeds are simply alphabetic letters arranged on a page: they may say something but they won't do anything unless something of the vision is made real.



The Missionary, Missiologist and Ecumenist, Lesslie Newbigin captures this sense of the importance of vision becoming reality, in regard to a vision for the church, when he said, "The church lives in the midst of history as a sign, instrument and foretaste of the reign of God." [Newbigin, J.E. Lesslie, *The Open Secret*, Grand Rapids, MI, Wm. B. Eerdmans p. 110.] It is the realised experience of the church as a sign, as an instrument and as a foretaste of the reign of God, that the world will know its reality. This is a vision of the church.

What if there is no vision?

A better question is 'What if there is no shared vision?' Because we all have a vision for life...it may not be documented but it will be experienced in reality, for better or worse. No shared vision is

a cause of conflict, division and negativity, and is one of the factors in a vision not turning into reality...not to mention frustration and loss of motivation for ministers.

Turning vision into reality helps a person, a group, a church or a community to become something they are not. Without turning vision into reality we would not have innovations

like democracy, the light bulb, the roof of the Sistine Chapel, the Uniting Church. Turning vision into reality is important!

What is turning vision into reality?

Turning vision into reality is a discerning, courageous and persevering adventure. As a minister of a congregation, a primary role of mine is to turn vision into reality, especially in *pioneering new expressions of the gospel* (UCA Regulations 2.2.1) The Uniting Church has a particular understanding and vision of being church such that it never stays still and never stays the same, it is always on the move (a pilgrim people). The *Basis of Union* in paragraph one says, "...the Church of God is committed to serve the world for which Christ died, and that it awaits with hope the day of the Lord Jesus Christ on which it will be clear that the kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of the Christ, who shall reign for ever and ever." The call to ministry is a call to join with the church and Jesus Christ in *becoming*...turning vision into reality.

What is vital in understanding this call to a vision of a church *becoming* is to realise and recognise that a church's vision belongs to God and that our task as ministers and leaders is to discern together this vision. My experience has been that a vision and call of a church can be traced back to its beginnings. It is almost as if the church's DNA and vision don't change too dramatically over time whereas the renewing, reimagining and contextualising of it is the ongoing and future task.

When I started at Samford Valley I took time, along with the leadership of the church, to listen to and tell the story of the church. In the vision of the church was a strong call to be a community that connects with and serves the (wider) community. We heard a story from 1910 of the then Elders determining to move completely, the church from its then current location, to the newly gazetted village of Samford, a matter of 8km or so. The story goes that they said, "*We need to be where the community is!*" That story has become an anchor for the current church's sense of call to 'be where the community is'. Other aspects of the church's vision became apparent over time as I preached and as we (the church council) engaged a whole of church discernment process. We sought to listen to the vision and values that the people embodied, and aligned these with scripture and theological reflection. This is what we came up with as values of the community of faith:

Building Community... Ephesians 2:11-22 / 1 Corinthians 12:12-27

Offering Sanctuary... Matthew 11:29-30 / James 3:16-18 / 2 Corinthians 5:17-21 / Luke 4:18-20

Sharing Life...John 13:1-15,34-35 / Romans 12:9-21

Living Christ...Philippians 3:8-14 / Galatians 3:26-28

Encouraging Service...Ephesians 4:1-16 / 2 Corinthians 9:11-13

Growing Faith...Romans 1:8-12 / 2 Thessalonians 1:2-4 / Ephesians 2:11-22

The role of preaching was interesting in that as I sought to faithfully bring the word of God to the people certain phrases or words or ideas struck a chord with people and they repeated these phrases in prayers and liturgies without my orchestrating anything. Words such as hope, healing, freedom and justice rose out of preaching on Matthew 4 and others passages, and they became part of the discerned vision.

If vision is about who we are becoming as a community (a *communal* vision), then we sought to give expression through the following words, "***Trusting in God, we will become a people of hope, healing, freedom and justice through Jesus Christ, across all generations, in our 21st century world***".



Another phrase that has become important in terms of vision is the call to *Share the Light* of Christ. For the last two years we have held a whole of church prayer gathering once a week throughout the month of May (with about 70-80 participating over the month) – we call it ‘Pray in May’ – simple but catchy. Out of this prayer time came the words ‘*Share the Light*’ and these words captures our mission...this is what we are to do!

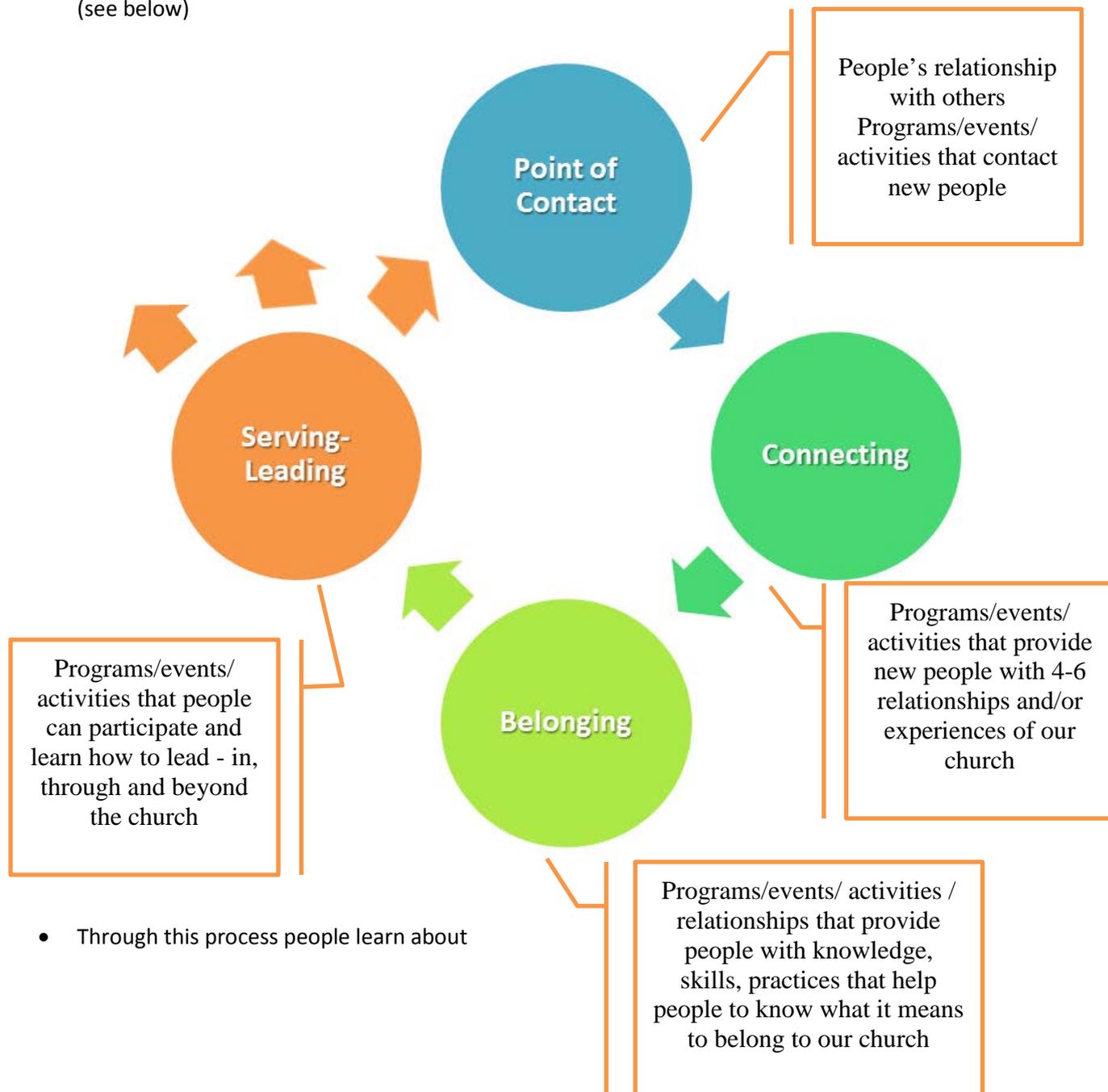
So we have our *communal* vision, our key values and a catch cry...but these are just words without turning them into action. Turning these words into action means to turn these into practices and processes and stories which everyone can join in on.

How do we turn vision into reality?

This then becomes a question of **how** do we turn these words (vision – values – missional catch-cry) into practices and processes and stories?

Below are what we are working on as a church:

- Preaching/Teaching on the vision regularly – either explicitly or implicitly
- Sharing testimonies in worship which engage the vision and use the shared language of the vision
- Having a process for people to become active members of the church embodying this vision (see below)



our vision, values and mission through intentional experiences and programs

- We use these in the orientation and induction into eldership of people, as well as membership.
- At each Church Council meeting we ask the question “What have we heard about/seen that connects with our Vision-Values-Mission?” and “Is there anything that conflicts with our Vision-Values-Mission?”

Through all of these intentional plans there is the understanding that it is the Holy Spirit that is the One at work in people’s lives to bring about transformation – reconciliation and renewal, and that it is Jesus Christ (by the Spirit) who builds the church not us. Proverb 16:9 says “We can make our **plans**, but the Lord determines our **steps**” - this rings so true for vision to become reality. Prayer is at the centre and the margins when a vision turns into reality and being ready to follow the lead of the Holy Spirit in the church and wider community is vital.

The unity of the Church Council and the bringing of the congregation on the journey are really important parts to vision turning into reality. In fact they are mandatory. Therefore learning how to listen, discern, collaborate, lead, resource, equip and pioneer/innovate are all practices to be learnt by the minister and leadership of a church.

However, the starting point to all of this happening is the realisation and recognition that things cannot stay the same. There is a leadership axiom that says, “Change won’t happen until the pain of staying the same becomes greater than the pain of change”. Like getting new shoes as a kid, you had to really feel the pain of the holes in your shoes before you’d put up with the pain of new shoes.

But once the pain is felt, which in terms of church, should be the pain that God feels for a hurting lost world, there is possibility for vision turning to reality.

What if vision turns into reality?

Once heading down this track expect problems, expect resistance, expect conflict and be prepared for these. In Physics we know that **Inertia** is the resistance of any physical object to any change in its state of motion. But, equally so in human communities – there is a resistance to any change of the state of the current reality. Just read the Epistles in the New Testament to see the resistance that this new vision (the Good News of Jesus Christ) had as the church struggled to turn it into a reality.

The Gospel keeps working its way in us, even when we think we have made it in faith. The Apostle Paul in his first letter to the Church in Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 2:13) said, “*Therefore, we never stop thanking God that when you received his message from us, you didn’t think of our words as mere human ideas. You accepted what we said as the very word of God—which, of course, it is. And this **word continues to work in you** who believe.*” Paul knew that the work of turning God’s vision into reality was an ongoing work, so even though the church in Thessalonica had a reputation exceeding Paul’s hopes, he knew that the word of God (the working of the Holy Spirit) needed to keep going.

This is where the unity of the Church Council is so important – it is vital when beginning but even more critical when the church is on its way to turning a vision into reality. This is because it is a normal dynamic that when there is clarity and movement in a certain direction, there will be push back or resistance to the movement. In the last year our shared vision as a Church Council was tested by a few people who reacted negatively to the direction and values we were seeking to uphold and if there had not been unity in the Church Council this

conflict could have become quite divisive and destructive. A salient point to hold in tension with issues of conflict is that resistance and push back can be a healthy check and feedback to vision and values – I like to talk about holding a healthy tension between dissonance and resonance. Without some dissonance decisions may not be robust or owned enough by the majority. (I'm always nervous about 100% endorsement without first going through some dissonance – it can mean that people haven't engaged well enough or they don't care enough).

I thought I would also mention at this point that as well as a *communal* vision it is also important to discern *personal* and *structural* visions. *Personal* vision matters because the church is made up of individuals who all have their own lives. Being aware of and helping people's *personal* vision turn into a reality is an important part of being church – by personal I don't mean individualistic and selfish, but rather the unique call, gifts and passions that are personal that serve the church in loving God and loving people.

Structural vision matters as well, depending on the size of your church. Having a one – five year + *structural* vision makes some aspects of church very concrete for people (some people are gifted in these very concrete matters) and are important for the medium to long term life of the church (e.g. building plans, staffing plans, resourcing plans, etc).

At Samford Valley we began a long-term structural process where we asked every group/ministry in the church this question – “What do you need (in resources, building, property and staffing) to see your ministry/group flourish?” The responses formed a brief for the Church Council, a development team and an architect to come up with some concept plans. This was the beginning of a process, that now sees us working with eight consultants (everything from ecologists, hydrologists to audiologists) to plan and submit a 10-15 year Building-property plan to our regional municipality.

This structural plans/vision along with the communal and personal visions work together to provide an overall vision that is being worked out into reality. The work of cultural change and actioning vision is ongoing.

If vision turns to reality there will be joys, struggles, celebrations, doubts, poignant times and lots of God-people moments that will cause you to praise and pray.

I pray God's blessings upon anyone who seeks to join with God in turning vision into reality...take care, have fun and may God be glorified!

Turning Our Vision into Reality: A Reflection on Ministry at Wesley Castle Hill

Rhonda White

Sometimes vision is overrated. It is often used as if there is a clear destination or that someone knows where things are heading. What happens to vision when the lights go out, when confusion reigns and we damage one another in our panic?

For Wesley Castle Hill the passing of Proposal 84¹ effectively turned the lights out on the congregation. About 1/3rd of its membership walked away to join other churches and perhaps another ¼ slipped away to avoid the bitterness of the conflict. When the storm was over and the lights switched back on, the remnant that remained were damaged, confused and deeply saddened. The themes of faith that sustained them were drawn from the experiences of the Israelite's wanderings in the wilderness. Tribes were established, judges appointed, new rules received and manna and quails provided sustenance. Slowly, step by

¹ A decision of the 10th Assembly in 2003 regarding sexuality and leadership (Assembly Minute 03.12.04, varied by Assembly Standing Committee Minute 03.69.03) is often referred to as Proposal 84

meandering step, vision was restored. Not a vision of a destination but a vision of the continuation of the journey which involves being a community of faith who welcomes all and who is intent on being a blessing to the community that they serve.

So how do these ancient themes play out in practice?

The Appointment of Judges

“When Jethro saw everything that Moses had to do, he asked, ‘What is all this that you are doing for the people? Why are you doing this all alone, with people standing here from morning till night to consult you?’then Jethro said, ‘You are not doing this the right way. You will wear yourself out and the people too.....’²

The traditional structure of eldership and church council was an enormous burden on a few willing souls. Having once been a large congregation (by UCA standards) Wesley Castle Hill’s structure was complicated by many groups struggling to be and do what had worked in the past and sometimes without reference to one another. The Church council was frequently bogged down in micro- management so that meetings were frustratingly unproductive and those charged with the responsibility of eldership were faltering under the weight of pastoral needs and governance. Many people felt trapped in their roles and responsibilities believing that there was no one else who would step up if they stopped. It was not sufficient to encourage tired people to let go of their ministry in the hope that someone would pick it up. Some activities were no longer sustainable and some were terribly under resourced. An initial strategic planning day was set aside with the express purpose of evaluating all of the activities we were involved in and those that were not sustainable. All groups were invited to be represented and these representatives acted as judges. Resources were identified and priorities established. Reconnecting the groups through the judges highlighted the need for a much more supportive and collaborative structure that allowed people to participate within the capacity of time and talents that they had to offer. Ministry Support Teams were established.

The Establishment of Tribes

“When the Israelites set up camp, each man will camp under the banner of his division and the flag of his own clan. The camp is to be set up all around the tent.”³

Four Ministry Support Teams were established and charged with the responsibility of micro-managing their areas of responsibility. They reported to each other through the church council and they were to function as support for the myriad of groups that constituted Wesley. These Teams are:

- Pastoral care
- Stewardship
- Outreach
- Education

The role of the Teams is to resource and support the various existing ministry groups and to encourage new initiatives. Empowering people in leadership has seen the development of some significant new ideas ranging from community based seminars to supporting community fundraising events and seeking to address some of the needs of the wider community. In this way groups and programmes remain fluid, responding to the needs of the community as they are identified. Leaders are inspired and encouraged to respond to the leading of God’s Spirit all the while supported and resourced and made accountable in a creative and life giving way.

² Exodus 18:14ff Good News Bible Australian edition. The Bible Society in Australia 1976

³ Numbers 2: 2

The Church Council is now freed up to be responsible for governance and strategic direction.

All positions are for a limited three years with no opportunity to re-nominate for the same team or council. One third of each team is retired annually and replaced by newly elected members. This has proved to be beneficial in a number of ways

In addition, a Communications Committee has more recently been established to bring uniformity to both our internal and external communications and to better develop communications between the teams, groups and committees.

This structure enables those who are new to the congregation to find a way to participate in leadership. It also keeps the teams fresh with new ideas and different ways of operating making them more responsive to the changing needs of the community. It also provides an opportunity for people exercising different gifts and to explore areas of service not previously open to them.

The Law is Received.

“today I am giving you a choice between good and evil, between life and death.”⁴

It might seem odd to be speaking about the Law in the context of a wandering congregation. The 10 Commandments functioned for the Israelites as a picture of what life with God might look like. Wesley Castle Hill needed to refocus that picture which had become somewhat distorted by the angst and pain of strained relationships. A theology of Grace has become the foundation for the way in which we handle conflict, for the way in which we address the needs of the community and for the way in which we read and interpret the scriptures.

This Theology of Grace demands:

1. That all people recognise themselves and each other as loved and valued by God.
2. That respect for another's opinion is paramount to engaging in authentic conversation which informs and transforms
3. That we practice confession and forgiveness
4. That we seek the deeper story before disengaging a relationship

Under the Law of Grace we are freed to explore issues of faith, to identify and examine inconsistencies in our belief systems and to be informed by the faith and experiences of others who may be very different to us but in whom we might see and hear the Spirit of God.

Manna and Quails

The sustenance for this journey is found in the liturgy of the gathered community. Attempting to reflect the diversity of the community in liturgy was proving to be disjointed and making it difficult for people to connect with the worship. Using the principles of inclusion in worship means being aware of the many ways we can exclude people by words and images and seeking to provide liturgy that engages people in the many different places of their faith journey. Highly structured liturgy and the presence of the tradition in, liturgical dress, liturgical colours and use of the lectionary provides a source of familiarity and comfort enabling disciples to engage in worship. Prayers and songs and sermons are contemporary, reflecting the need for intentional inclusion.

Short, intensive (4-6 weeks) and specific bible studies and theology discussions have also become a regular feature of discipleship at Wesley Castle Hill. Along with standalone

⁴ Deuteronomy 30:15

seminars organised by the Education Team, exposure to the newer developments in scholarship in a manner accessible to those who are seeking different understanding, has become the sustenance of discipleship and the grounding of our vision of the journey in which we participate.

The reality of the vision of journey is that we need to be constantly attentive to the changes in our community. Living in a suburban, transitioning to urban, environment actually enables the process of theological attention and missional direction. Each group is charged with this responsibility and the congregation is charged with the discipline of an annual evaluation and review. Vision as a destination does not work for Wesley Castle Hill but acknowledging the journey, even blindly at times, has helped Wesley Castle Hill find its place in the “Sydney Bible Belt” as a church that works hard to welcome and include.

Turning our vision into reality – Queanbeyan UC

Steve Coster

“Turning the Vision into reality” doesn’t just happen, it takes some creative and courageous thinking, it requires risk taking and it requires tapping into what people actually want or feel called to do.

Over the years, I’ve seen and been involved in lots and lots of thinking and talking that, despite best intentions, has not managed to turn the UCA around. I’ve been part of many conversations, issued many a ‘call to arms’, reverently invited a deeper level of commitment, prayerfully sought the help of ‘angels’ – but the bottom line is, if people don’t want to do it, then it doesn’t happen – theologically I’d say ‘the Spirit doesn’t work in a vacuum’.

The Whole of Creation Reconciled and Renewed

These words will have a familiar sound to those acquainted with the UCA *Basis of Union*. They are the words that the Queanbeyan Uniting Church chose as their vision statement well before I arrived here nearly three years ago.

Much of my 20+ years of ordained ministry has been based on a healthy dose of borrowing ideas that if I’m honest might be better called ‘low grade plagiarism’. There is a necessary skill in ministry in seeing, reading or hearing about a good idea that someone else has and contextualising it for your own situation – obviously it doesn’t work with everything, it needs to be a reasonable fit to begin with.

Queanbeyan Uniting Church has for its 150+ year history been a healthy church: it’s a church with a good sized congregation; is well located and connected within its community; has a living and dynamic faith; and a strong and balanced focus on worship, witness and service (I’d also add a healthy approach to discipleship).

In the last few years QUC has experienced something of a growth in the numbers of young adults and families that have connected with it. These ‘new people’ have connected with an existing congregation with a firm base and strong history of being a committed and faithful people, including a very strong Youth Ministry history.

In the last 18mths we’ve tried a number of different approaches. The first major one, that was unsuccessful, was the move to two morning services. It did not take long to discover we had lost more than we had gained. This is not to say that a second service will never happen in the future, but not as a first step, and not until/if we are properly ready for it.

Asking a deeper question....

Instead we've begun asking some deeper questions. Who are we? What makes us tick? What is important to us? Thinking through such questions we realised we were asking questions of discernment. One of our members, Daniel Mossfield, who had recently gone through the 'Period of Discernment' noticed that we were asking the same questions he'd pondered in the POD.

So, as a congregation we entered into a Process of Discernment – inspired by others but designed to fit locally. We began individually through guided personal reflections, seeking to understand something more about ourselves, asking what we valued, and what was important to us as individuals. We then entered a group stage, where together we reflected back to one another about our gifts, skills and abilities. Finally, together as a whole congregation, we asked each other what are we passionate about, what are we interested in, what is our sense of call – the goal was to connect up those of like minds and shared passions.

Not everyone was part of the process and some opted in for some part but not all. Given the whole process took 3 months it did feel like pulling teeth at times!!

Before and after

Before the discernment process I'd been trying to place a label on the church – 'what kind of church are we': local, neighbourhood, regional etc. I had observed that over the last 20 years the church had made a range of decisions that related to being a Regional Church (a Callahan term) but when pressed people didn't want to get into labels and didn't want to claim such a title.

The discernment process however allowed us to move beyond such questions, we were now asking people what they were passionate about, (a bit of Bandy thinking). Many people have responded to this opportunity to name their passions for the church. Others first needed to see the kinds of things others were naming before 'getting it'. The challenge for us now is to become a church that helps name passions rather than use labels. We need to focus on how we enable people rather than categorise them.

Results so far...

So far we've named over 20 areas of passion/interest. Some have not gone much farther but many have. As I write this article, groups have or are forming around passions associated with: Homelessness, Community Gardens, Men's Support/Shed, Pastoral Care, Prayer, Messy Church, Music Ministry, Creative Arts, Children, etc. (these will be laid beside our many existing ministries). Each emerging group is simply starting a journey and seeing where it leads. And with such momentum others (not all) who have not so far connected with the process have been coming on board - they are seeing a place for themselves.

Something that has also emerged is the need for each group to name its own vision. Naming together what they are actually passionate about and where they want to head together. While such visions obviously need to sit within the broad parameters of the congregation's vision, visioning together as an interest group builds a strong sense of unity and shared purpose. It helps the group to stay focused. It is also useful for letting the rest of the congregation know what they are about and is an essential tool for the Church Council as it seeks to enable, encourage and guide.

The governance structures are important

There is no perfect church structure but some approaches will be more helpful than others! The structure of the church and the make-up of its leadership are very important. For people to live-out their passions the governance of the church needs to be willing to take some risks, seek to be enablers, and willing to walk a journey. Bandy says leaders should never say no! Rather they should ask 'how will we achieve that?' and be willing to help think through the possibilities. Enabling starts in the mind of the leadership!! In my mind visionary leaders need to be optimistic, realistic, and good thinkers!! And you know what happens when there is no vision!!!!

My hunch is that adapting Bandy for our own context may be helpful. Instead of a structure that seeks to predetermine different ministry areas, we need a structure that seeks to support and enable whatever ministry areas arise from the peoples' passions. Instead of having specific pre-designated task groups, we have many interest groups (that may come and go) with a light governance structure underpinning and helping anchor what is happening. The governance structures need to connect the interest groups with the vision of the church, giving encouragement and guidance. The structure needs to help work out what the next step is rather than saying 'prove it will all work right now or it's a no go!!'

Bandy talks about a governance structure that is based on Vision, with appropriate supports for the interest groups, including mentoring, leadership development and admin. All of which can fit neatly within the UCA regulations.

The dangers....

The danger of having numerous interest groups, of at least 2 or 3 people in size (most are larger) is that we could spread ourselves too thinly. However, if we hold to a fundamental rule (a regional church rule) that no one is to be involved in everything, and that people are involved in what is energising for them (named passions), then burn out is a lesser risk. The other danger is that it takes some time to transition from one model to another. It is understandable for people to get impatient and wonder what the heck is going on. The transition is not simple and it takes time and patience.

Built on a base of Prayer, Hospitality and Justice

Finally I will add another dimension that anchors what we do into being a faith community. Here I borrow from Diana Butler Bass. In Butler Bass's work with mainline churches across the US and here in Australia, she found congregations that have been able to stop church decline are commonly underpinned by 3 activities that get 'back to basics': Prayer, Hospitality and Justice.

These three areas are the filter by which we need to view our ministry areas (interest groups). No matter what the interest/shared passion e.g. worship, youth, community garden, etc. the question is the same: where and how does prayer, hospitality and justice fit in? All these can be creatively interpreted and applied but they must be present! They create a base from which we, and everyone touched by the interest groups, experience faith, hope and love across everything we do.

In conclusion

Turning our Vision into reality isn't just happening by itself. It is asking a lot of the people of this congregation, its leadership and its desire to grow into the future. It is reliant on: healthy relationships; enough people to make a difference (though this may only be 2 passionate people to begin); a willingness to name and see God in our passions; and a belief that we can make a difference.

And as always, our prayer, hope and vision: **The Whole of Creation Reconciled and Renewed.**

TURNING OUR VISION INTO REALITY – Pittwater Uniting Church

Alan Robinson

It was in 1995 that we asked ourselves the question, "What do we want our church to be like in the year 2000?" The anticipation of the year 2000 provided us with an opportunity to dream. I had been in placement for less than a year and had primary responsibility for the

Mona Vale Uniting pastorate with a colleague at Narrabeen and a colleague at Avalon. We shared some responsibilities across the Parish and met weekly.

“Turning vision into reality,” in this context, is about unified leadership and management, dealing with the past, recognising the necessity for change, communicating the vision, forward planning and the leader’s length of tenure.

Leadership and management are vital and both make unique contributions. Leadership is setting a new direction or casting a vision for a group to follow. Leadership keeps the group on course toward the preferred future that’s been agreed upon and gathers, motivates and inspires followers. Management directs people and resources according to principles or values that have already been established. Management therefore enables the resources necessary to accomplish the leadership’s vision.

Space does not allow a detailed narrative of what unfolded as the question was addressed. The journey from vision to reality, begun in 1995, took seven years. Mona Vale and Narrabeen came together after the sale of the Narrabeen site. Avalon opted not to join. On the first of December 2002 the President of the Assembly the Rev Dr James Haire opened the new complex on a large bushland site in Warriewood.

Steps in the journey

- Being free for God’s future requires death to the past. Conversion and baptism are evidence for that. It applies also to our pilgrim journey as the people of God. When attendances are shrinking, income dropping, and congregations are getting older we are tempted to go into survival mode. Seeking to save our life we lose it. Losing our life for the sake of the kingdom is how we find it. Reluctance to let go of the past reduces our capacity to dream and stops the risky step toward the future. Honour the the symbols of the past but ensure they don’t inhibit the capacity to move forward. Each of the three congregational locations on Pittwater peninsula spent time recalling their past, examining their present and visioning their future. They, in turn, shared this with the other two congregations. This process took almost one year. It was a vital preliminary to receiving God’s vision.
- There was a growing sense of urgency. The idea of the year 2000 contributed to that. Thinking only as far as next Sunday diverts us from the long term problem of property maintenance, changing neighbourhood landscape and surrounding demographics. While the Mona Vale church building was built during the time of current members it was small. The Narrabeen building was weatherboard, old and in need of replacement. High-rise apartments were shooting up on both sides and land values were escalating. Asking, “What do we want our church to be like in the year 2000?” meant facing an uncomfortable reality.
- Unified leadership was crucial. If the leadership, clergy and lay, are not unified and committed to the vision, what can we expect of members? This is where leadership and management, as defined above, both play an important role. A “vision committee” was elected and entrusted with ongoing decision making. My colleague Peter Davis helped lead us in the preparation of a “Philosophy of Ministry” statement. This focused on our goals, beliefs and values. This was a foundational document that we could continue to return to as decisions were made. We were also blessed with some gifted lay leaders committed to the vision. As we launched forward in faith several people joined the church with engineering and project management skills. They made an invaluable contribution. The Parish administrator role also changed and Richard Stewart became Business Manager and the financial management was in very skilful hands from that point. Peter Davis and I worked together in complementary roles for more than 10 years.

- There were many delays in the process. The beautiful new site was purchased with the sale proceeds from Narrabeen. Pittwater Local Government Council delayed a decision for a year and then sent us to the land and environment court with legal costs to be incurred. Sustaining the vision over a long period and in the midst of change is a demanding leadership task. Some begin to doubt that it is God's will and others decide they always wanted to stay in "Egypt." In looking back we were thankful that this extended period saw the value of the Mona Vale church site increase substantially! The delays also provided breathing space to learn more. In September 1998 I took study leave under supervision from UTC and spent a couple of weeks in Queensland learning all I could from Uniting Church congregations that had merged and/or moved or had more than 250 attendees. I conducted interviews with church leaders at Glebe Road in Ipswich, Logan, Mount Gravatt, Redcliffe, Robina, and Chermside Kedron. On my return I took time each Sunday to show pictures and tell their story. We noted the lessons they had learnt. To move from vision to reality we don't have the time or the capacity to reinvent the wheel.
- That the building is the church is a temptation a congregation faces at such a time. "Build it and they will come" is a seductive lie. The buildings are only the clothes. What matters is the health of the body they clothe and equip for God's mission. During the "wilderness wanderings and delays" we intentionally focussed on what the ministries would be on the new site. A consultation with Caroline Kitto in February 2000 was important for this. A respite centre and a large sporting complex became priorities. This meant budgeting ahead for future staffing to ensure these would be well resourced. Several members put together a computer generated "walk through video" which helped people picture the planned buildings and the ministries they would offer. A newsletter was devoted to updating the congregation and several videos produced. Monitoring what the congregation was thinking and feeling was also important. In mid July 2002 a survey of members was conducted. A number of fears were identified.
 - "What if we build this worship space for 500 people and we don't fill it?"
 - "What if we don't see the growth we are anticipating and therefore don't get the income to maintain it?"
 - "How do we know this is God's will?"
 - "What if this leads to pride in our success and we take our eyes off Jesus?"
 - "What if there is a change in key leadership positions and we can't follow through with the plans?"

The reality is that the fear never goes away for leaders and members. It can and needs to be well managed. Identifying those fears meant as leaders we could address them while appropriately dealing with our own.

In July 2002 the Church Council approved the mission and ministry program for the first 12 months on the new site.

- Make every win a cause for celebration no matter how small. The Sunday of the congregations first meeting together for worship, the announcement of the Pittwater Council approvals, the day the Land and Environment Court requirements were met, the first Easter service at Sunrise sitting on the rocks among the trees before any work had begun...and the joy of processing from the Mona Vale property to the new premises on Sunday morning 20th October 2002. The vision had become a reality.
- This euphoria can be short lived and the adrenaline levels soon drop. I have observed that, understandably, many leaders feel their work is done and it's time to move on. Exhaustion plays a big part in that. It is my experience that the toughest work is still to come. No matter how careful the planning the reality can never be completely anticipated. There is much to do to settle into a new environment. This

includes managing new and complex technology in sound and projection, security, accommodating people and groups successfully. For instance, there was some upset that the crèche area did not allow visibility to the worship space. It will take at least a year to bed most of these things down. I was in placement for a further seven years following the move. A total of sixteen years.

99% of the membership made the transition to the new site. This consists of a large worship auditorium for 400+, offices, a large basement area set up essentially as a coffee lounge. A sports centre initially accommodating a futsal program for the local community and now running a fitness program under the church's direction. In addition there is a pre-school and two manses. All of this sits on a three and half hectare site set in bush land.

It has been 5 years since I left Pittwater and moved to a new placement in Queensland and it has been important for me, in turn, to let go of the past so that I can be embraced by God's future for me. I will, however, always be grateful for the privilege of experiencing ministry with an extraordinary church in one of the great adventures of my life.

Alan Robinson

For further reading:

Leading Change, John P. Kotter (Harvard Business School Press)

Transitioning – Leading your Church through Change, Dan Southerland (Zondervan)

Change and the Church, Peter Corney (Aquila Press)

Transitions: Making Sense Of Life's Changes, 2nd Edition, William Bridges, (Da Capo Press)

A SURVIVAL GUIDE FOR LEADERS OF CHANGE

- 1) Belong to a prayer group.
- 2) Have an experienced Mentor from outside the situation.
- 3) Watch your attitudes. Love those you lead.
- 4) You must lead. Be proactive. Avoid being reactive.
- 5) Be authoritative but not authoritarian.
- 6) Be enthusiastic but within limits.
- 7) Expect resistance.
- 8) Give people time to catch up with you.
- 9) Spend time with key leaders and opinion makers. Share your vision and passion with them.
- 10) Manage the conflict. Approach those resisting. Don't avoid them. Listen. Don't take dissent personally. Develop feedback procedures.
- 11) Keep communication going at all levels.
- 12) Involve as many as possible in the process. Use all the gifts available.
- 13) Maintain prayer life. Exodus 33: 7-11. Keep your eye on the pillar of fire.

Turning our vision into reality- what have we learned

Christine Bayliss Kelly, Parramatta Nepean Presbytery Resource Officer
(in consultation with many others).

Over the centuries the church has sought to bring together people into community. In some places worship has been at the centre. In other places it was the friendship and camaraderie offered around an event or a particular task. And for many it has been the desire to discover God, to serve God and each other. In all of these things we have named them 'Church'. However in the last 20-30 years this has become increasingly difficult. Church is no longer the sole gathering of people occurring on a Sunday. There are many other options for people. Sport, social activities and the sheer busyness of life have propelled church into a place where it feels as though we are 'hanging on' by the fingertips before falling into oblivion- or until the last person goes and that becomes another community closed, another church where the lights have been turned off, another fingertip 'hanging on' lost.

Yet daring and creative projects have begun, have lived, have connected with people and finished. Now they are memories, or challenges to what we could have done better. 'If only' is a term of regret. 'Failure' is a term of defeat. Yet each place, each ministry has achieved something we should celebrate as well as provide opportunities to learn from. God has been at work in each one of them and this we celebrate

The Parramatta Nepean Presbytery has had a number of projects we can learn from. Here are some of them.

Three stories

Northwest Uniting Church at Rouse Hill had some very creative people from the very beginning of its journey over 10 years ago. Rev John Thornton (originally Lay Pastor) and Kath Willems (Lay Ministry Worker - Musician/Children and Family) worked very hard but also creatively. There were Melbourne Cup days, Women's days, Movie nights, Anzac day services, High Teas, Men's pub chat, Ginger bread house making nights and a raft of other events which took place in the community. Running a café as a gathering place in a historic house at Rouse Hill with the amazing faithfulness of Veronica Thornton was a creative way of making contact (and they served good food and drink). So much creativity in connecting with people.

There was a strong kids' club 'Go MAD' (Go make a difference) which connected a large number of children into the church through a broad range of activities. The connection through Scripture in the school was very strong and it was not unusual to see the kids in their bright orange caps on an outing somewhere. Many times I saw the reaction when people saw 'Pastor John' or Kath - there was great appreciation and clearly a strong connection with them both. Relationships that were built between the leaders and the people enabled a community of faith to be grown. Those who had no faith came to faith and others rediscovered their faith.

There were challenges. How to develop a new community of faith which is contextual, authentic, real and grounded in the gospel was achieved. But the challenge of how to grow that community of faith into a self-sustaining model was not so easy. How to manage to bridge the experience of people in 'managing a church' which is needed but to not allow it to stifle the creative vision for the new way of being church remained a challenge. How to build enough capacity to deal with transition was tough. There is a good opportunity to reflect on

old wine in old wineskins and new wine in new wineskins. And the challenge of property was continual.

Yet the worship, as creative and engaging as it was, was not enough to draw more people into the 'church' part to become stronger. All of the relationships gathered people but not necessarily for 'church' as we know it. The attractiveness factor was there but how can that compete with the many demands and many other options people who were asset rich but time poor face. People were overcommitted in too many things- too much to then become committed to church. Many people worked long and hard and were very faithful but bit by bit it began to fade. Many factors came into play but at the heart society had changed and the transition from having charismatic leaders to the next stage of ministry was not achieved. Now in the factory unit outfitted to be a church there is a church play group and a play group for kids with disabilities. On Sundays a UCA congregation gathers whilst their own building is being completed after a fire and a church plant from some people associated with the UCA. There are enquires from groups within and beyond the UCA to use the current church facility. The men still meet at pub-chat from time to time. The women still meet occasionally. There is still a group of people who feel strongly called to live and minister in the area but no sustainable leadership. There is the possibility the building might be used for some co-operative ministry with the church plant, the local Baptist church and UCA agencies to provide a range of services. There is still hope for some new form of being church in the area- we are yet to discover what it might be.

In **Narellan**, a southern suburb of Sydney near Campbelltown, where new housing estates were popping up everywhere a different yet similar story occurred. A charismatic leader went in to the community, worked really hard using a range of ways of connecting people including working with the housing developers with welcome packs etc. Eventually a vision for a large sports centre where people could gather and connect with each other was realised. There was a café- a gathering point. There was and still are the sports. The minister became not only the chaplain but also the manager. And there was, for a time, a committed group of people who gathered for worship, friendship and fellowship. There were also a range of events which invited people to come and connect with the church. Every one of these was a great way of connecting but they did not result in the sustainable growth of the community of faith.

The transition to a new minister did work for a time but in the end it was too much and no matter how hard anyone worked, the project was finished.

In Western Sydney a church plant called **Peteli** was established. For a considerable time the Tongan group worshipped in an old church building at Plumpton. Although the small building seemed to be falling down it was kept relatively safe. Outside was a large tent where many gatherings were held. There was a Tongan minister and the congregation grew. Demountable buildings were added on site for the youth activities. And worship was engaging and mostly bi-lingual.

But the vision was more than just a Tongan congregation in the traditional ways. It was to establish a congregation where the young people were strongly connected with each other and to the Uniting Church- not just the church they inherited from their parents. At times this was very challenging but many people held to encouraging their young people. All sorts of events were held within the church and the wider Tongan community. Many feasts were held, pigs cooked, meals offered and the hospitality to others was greatly appreciated.

The dream was to have a place where many people could gather and with the presbytery the hope was that it could be a true multicultural and cross-cultural church. But the challenges of buying land, discovering asbestos on that land and the journey for it to be remediated took its toll. The fear of the unknown was hard and cracks in relationships also took their toll. Conflict increased and relationships were stretched and although there was reconciliation between many of the people it was not easy.

The congregation is now small but in demountable buildings on the land they had purchased. The future is very challenging- if not even grim. It is unknown whether the people, so small in number, can weather the storm. And the minister will need to leave for it is not sustainable.

In these three stories there a sense where the vision was not achieved. The desire to build a new congregation- in whatever form- began but faltered. It was not because the leaders didn't work hard. It was not because of a lack of vision. In each one there was an incredible amount of financial resources poured into them over a long period of time. But the vision was only partly fulfilled.

Learning

It seems that it is easy to host events and make contact with people and to even build ongoing relationships with people. With the right gifted leaders community connections can be established well and communication and respect can be earned.

What is not so easy is how we move sustainably from the old paradigm of church into the new way of being church. The Grace community in **Goulburn** has been going for a couple of years and here are now over 90 people involved in the different forms of being church. It is unlikely to become financially sustainable yet it still needs ministry leadership.

So there is evidence that we have creative ways of connecting with people. There is evidence we can grow a small or even large community of faith who gather together for a variety of reasons. But there is also evidence we need to discover a different way of funding our creative new ways of being church.

Not just in church plants but also within new forms of being church in our congregations. Not all leaders can do both creative and engaging ministry with the more traditional ways many of us have been trained for and which is the more common experience in the UCA. Most of us can step into a well-established community but few of us can build a community from scratch or even come in at the time of transition to helpfully carry people through that part of the journey when it is all too easy to disengage. We have not always been good at building capacity.

We have also learnt that we need to be very careful in the leadership. It is vital to have the charismatic and engaging leaders but we also need those people who are gifted in building community, discipling, administration and the other spiritual gifts. It cannot be one or two people going to build a church it really needs to be a team who are in it for the long haul. But they need to have a clear vision and understand exactly how they fit together as part of the team as they work towards that vision. Some of the team might be paid ministry but the remainder of the team needs to be those wonderful committed lay leaders who are called into such a role.

And we need to plan for, build capacity and work towards transition. Antagonism towards or frustration with the church who provides the resources and support, encouragement and oversight does not enhance any movement forward. Conflict between vision and implementation of that vision does not assist the growth of the movement. The needs of accountability must be there but not at the cost of the ministry. There is a fine line to be walked in finding encouraging and helpful oversight of such projects without stifling the creative possibilities. And managing the diverse number of people involved requires excellent management skills to allow conflict to be transformative rather than self-destructive.

So what can we learn? Much. Jesus' own journey was one fraught with conflict and people unable to make the journey because of competing agendas. Moses led the people out of slavery but in the wilderness there was grumbling and complaining and conflict. Paul wrote letters to the growing churches about a range of things including conflict and disagreement about the vision. And nowhere has the journey of building a church been easy. So maybe we need to get back to our prayer. Maybe we need to be alert for the opportunities God gives us. Maybe we need to be trained to work together and to communicate and be better able to share our faith in word and deed. Maybe God is building God's church and we just got stuck in a different way of church. Maybe we could focus more on discipleship wherever we get a group of people together- and perhaps find some more creative ways of funding ministry. Maybe we need to strengthen our capacity building of people as well as communities.

To quote a number of people over the years 'a failure is only a failure if you don't learn from it'. None of these ministries have been failures- they have been costly and they have not achieved the fullness of their vision but they have also reached countless people in ways we are not yet aware. The kingdom of God is being built- and God's Spirit is at work.

Recommended books:

For practitioners: George Hunter, *The Apostolic Congregation* (available from MediaCom)
For those wanting to read Australian, and some other, scholars: Christopher C. Walker (ed), *Witness the Glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ: papers in honour of Dean Drayton* (available from MediaCom)
For those interested in theology: Simon Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology*
For recreational reading: Marilyn Robinson, *Gilead* (a novel)

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