



Presbytery Restructure Information Circular No. 1 for congregations, faith communities and ministers

Introduction and background

At the 15-17 November, 2018 Presbytery and Synod meeting, it was agreed that the existing structure of one Synod and one Presbytery would be modified to allow for more than one Presbytery. The one Synod, one Presbytery structure was implemented at the 5-7 November 2005, Synod when a decision was made to dissolve the Presbyteries of Adelaide North West, Eyre, Fleurieu, Frome, Mt Lofty, The Coorong and Wakefield and form the Presbytery of South Australia.

The 15-17 November, 2018 meeting further agreed that:

- A Missional Non-Geographical Presbytery (MNGP) will be created to operate from 1st July, 2019.
- Additional Presbytery(ies) would be formed.
- Congregations would be given an opportunity to nominate which Presbytery they wished to join.

There were two task groups created at the 2018 meeting, the MNGP Task Group and the Presbytery Restructure Task Group.

Both groups regularly meet and report their review processes to the Standing Committee. They are preparing a recommendation document for the Presbytery and Synod meeting to be held from 21 - 22 June, 2019.

The review process ensures that the existing Presbytery mission and ministry functions and activities are maintained and improvements are sought as the Presbytery restructure occurs. The Presbytery Restructure Task Group determined the following objective: “to determine what is the best way we can gain out of a move from to a multi-Presbytery structure”. The task group also understands the review needs to consider the implications of a multi-Presbytery structure on the eight existing South Australian mission networks.

Relevant history

Prior to 7 November, 2005, there were seven Presbyteries that were geographically based within the Synod of South Australia. When the South Australian Synod adopted a one Synod, one Presbytery structure, it also moved to create Mission Networks within the one Presbytery.

The Networks were an opportunity for congregations to establish intentional connections with groups of other congregations and therefore they had a relational role/function within the current one Presbytery structure. It was envisioned that synergies would exist between congregations around their missional and ministry objectives. The groupings of Networks that emerged were not necessarily geographically based.



The objective of networks was to ensure that congregational members were better equipped and supported in their missional and ministry life as a result of the networking. There are currently eight mission networks that exist and all South Australian congregations are required to be associated with a network. The number of congregations in each mission network varies widely. Any mission network costs are financed by a voluntary contribution by congregations which does not exceed 3% of the congregation's income.

Recent reviews

Since the move to a one Presbytery and multiple mission network structure on 7 November, 2015, there has been multiple reviews undertaken on the effectiveness of the structure.

At the 30 October – 1 November, 2008 Presbytery and Synod meeting, a review of the original 13 mission networks led to a reduction of the number of networks to 11. A further three mission networks have ceased operation since that date.

In 2017, a strategic review undertaken by the Pastoral Relations and Placements Committee and key Mission Network representatives concluded that a broader conversation was required about the “benefits and challenges of the one presbytery model and other models that may serve the Presbytery and Synod into the future.” There was no specific action taken as a result of the table group work undertaken at the 23 – 25 November, 2017 meeting due to the resignation of the CEO/General Secretary at that time.

National UCA context

In 1977, at the time of union, Presbyteries were conceived as an extremely critical Council within the Uniting Church structure. The four Councils of the Church include: Assembly, Synods, Presbyteries and Congregations.

The Constitution of the Uniting Church describes the very key role that Presbyteries play in the life of the Church. Paragraph 26 of the UCA Constitution reads:

“The Presbytery shall have such oversight as is necessary to the life and mission of the Church in the area committed to it; it shall stimulate and encourage the Congregations within the bounds, providing them with opportunities for counsel in the strengthening and assistance of one another and in their participation in wider aspects of the work of the Church”

Timelines

The MNGP will schedule its first meeting prior to 1 July, 2019. Every attempt will be made to create the remaining Presbytery structures by this date, however this will only occur if the Standing Committee feel the consultation process has reached a satisfactory conclusion. If the Standing Committee has not reached this conclusion prior to the 21-22 June, 2019 Presbytery and Synod meeting, the Uniting Church SA will operate with a two Presbytery structure, MNGP plus one other, on an interim basis.



Communication and consultation with congregations and mission networks

Synod staff contacted congregations on 20 December, 2018 via email asking for a non-binding indication of whether their congregation would expect to be a member of the MNGP or another Presbytery. The email can be found on the new link on the Presbytery and Synod restructure webpage <https://sa.uca.org.au/presbytery-and-synod/restructure>

Congregations were asked to respond to this email survey by 31 January 2019. If your congregation hasn't yet completed the survey, please do so at the link above.

The Standing Committee is committed to providing:

- regular updates on progress regarding the Presbytery restructure consultation using the above link as the main repository of this information.
- opportunities for feedback from congregations, faith communities and mission networks.

In obtaining feedback, a combination of face-to-face, survey and electronic communication is intended to be utilised. More details about the consultation processes that will be used for congregations and faith communities, ministers and Mission Networks will be provided in the coming weeks.

If there are any issues covered in this email that raise questions for you, please feel free to contact me at gensec@sa.uca.org.au or 08 8236 4232

Rev Rob Brown,
Interim General Secretary
11 February, 2019