

Wimala Presbytery Report

Wimala Presbytery's congregations are located across a broad region of South Australia, extending to the north, west and east. At the heart of our shared life is a commitment to gather as the community of Christ, connect with God and with one another, and go in the power of the Spirit to witness to God's love, nurture discipleship, and engage in acts of justice, peace, reconciliation and the renewal of creation.

In 2025 and into 2026, the theme of *Flourish* has shaped our common life. This theme has not simply been aspirational but has actively guided our conversations, discernment and decision-making across the Standing Committee and wider Presbytery structures.

1. Reflections of 2025 and 2026 (first half)

Over the past 18 months, Presbytery leaders and committees have gathered for annual retreats and planning days that have been marked by worship, deep conversation, shared meals and creative dreaming. These gatherings have continued to build on earlier work around communication, storytelling, education and support, while intentionally exploring what it means for our Presbytery to flourish.

These opportunities have strengthened relationships across the Presbytery and are beginning to bear fruit, as ideas move from conversation into action and new strategic horizons take shape.

At the same time, it has become increasingly clear that the needs of our congregations—particularly those that are lay-led—are growing significantly. While we continue to do our best to respond, we recognise that we cannot always meet every need. In response, we are intentionally developing practical tools, “health checks” and training opportunities to better resource congregations facing similar challenges.

Alongside this, we have recognised the need to review our Presbytery structures and staffing to ensure we are using our resources as effectively as possible. An internal review has been undertaken by Rev Dr Rob McFarlane, with recommendations helping to guide our future direction.

A significant area of focus has been the continuation of the Mission and Property Strategy (MAPS) work, with Malcolm Wilson employed (with Synod funding) to continue this important project. We are aware that this work brings a degree of tension for some congregations, as it asks difficult but necessary questions about mission vitality and the sustainability of property. We find ourselves in a changing era in the life of the church, and there is a need for honesty, openness and faithful discernment as we consider what is fit for purpose in the future. Malcolm's role is to help initiate and support these conversations, and he continues this work into 2026 with the full support of the Presbytery.

In 2025, we honoured our commitment to gather in regional areas by holding a Presbytery meeting in Moonta. This was a valued opportunity to connect across distance, and we remain committed to continuing rural gatherings into the future.

We also continue to work closely with the other South Australian presbyteries and Synod staff, meeting regularly to share resources, insights and support for the benefit of all congregations.

During this period, we gave thanks for the faithful service of our Treasurer, Peter Lane, as he concluded his role, and we welcomed Carolyn Hall as the incoming Treasurer.

2. Presbytery Gatherings

Wimala Presbytery continues to meet twice each year. One meeting (the AGM) focuses on governance and business, while the other provides space for reflection, learning and shared conversation.

2.1 2025 Presbytery Meetings

2.1.1 March 2025 Presbytery Meeting

The March gathering in Moonta brought together approximately 80 participants, including those attending in person, online and visitors. We were warmly welcomed by the Moonta Uniting Church congregation, whose hospitality made the day possible.

The gathering included a time of worship led by Rev Anne Phillips, Emelia Haskey, Cathryn Dinnie and Rev Leanne Davis, grounding the day in prayer and praise.

A highlight of the meeting was the Bible study led by Dr Toar Hutagalung, who explored the theme of forgiveness through Psalm 32, Exodus 32:7–14 and Luke 15:1–10. He introduced the “triad of forgiveness”:

- **Mediation**, reflecting on Moses’ intercession for the people and the role of Christ as mediator between God and humanity;
- **Welcoming**, highlighting the radical hospitality of Jesus in receiving sinners and the communal joy found in restoring the lost;
- **Confession**, emphasising repentance, the naming of sin (both individual and collective), and the call to transformation.

Chairperson Rev Dianne Holden encouraged the Presbytery with the theme “Choose Life,” reminding us that choosing the Lord is to choose life. This invitation called congregations to reflect on their own health—spiritually, culturally and structurally—and to consider where growth, renewal or even pruning may be needed.

The day included updates from across the life of the church:

- Safe Church initiatives, reframing safety as a calling rooted in love, belonging and care for all people;
- Uniting World’s global partnerships and opportunities for engagement in areas such as climate resilience, gender equality and advocacy;

- Frontier Services' ministry in remote Australia, highlighting both the challenges faced by rural communities and the importance of presence, compassion and practical support;
- Mission and Property discussions, encouraging congregations to reflect on mission plans, property sustainability and future vitality.

We also heard encouraging stories from across the Presbytery, including developments on the Yorke Peninsula, leadership formation, and a Korea immersion experience for young adults. Together, these stories reflected a shared sense of hope, calling and renewal.

2.1.2 October 2025 AGM

The October AGM at Campbelltown Uniting Church gathered over 70 participants for a day of worship, discernment and decision-making. Worship was led by the Campbelltown Band, and reflections on Joel 2:23–32 and Matthew 11:28–30 invited us to look forward with hope and to share the load of ministry together.

Key business included the approval of proposals, budget and reports, confirmation of meeting dates for 2026, and acknowledgement of leadership vacancies and transitions.

The meeting highlighted practical expressions of mission, including a community lunch initiative at Semaphore Uniting Church. This ministry, grounded in hospitality, simplicity and relationship, has grown from a small idea into a regular gathering that fosters connection and belonging. Its theological foundation—God's hospitality and Jesus' table fellowship—reminded us of the power of shared meals in building community.

We also heard updates on:

- Intergenerational ministry initiatives;
- The Uniting Foundation and opportunities for grant funding;
- Safeguarding and inclusion, particularly for people with disabilities, with a focus on accessibility, universal design and creating welcoming environments for all;
- Property stewardship, including safety requirements such as compliance measures and the introduction of defibrillators in church buildings.

Mission Activators from Mission Resourcing encouraged reflection on “core and edge” ministry—recognising the importance of both established congregational life and new, emerging expressions of church that reach beyond traditional boundaries.

The day reinforced a shared commitment to being communities that are safe, inclusive, mission-focused and open to where God is bringing new life.

2.2 2026 Presbytery Meeting

2.2.1 March 2026 Presbytery Meeting

The Wimala Presbytery met on 14 March 2026 at Nuriootpa Uniting Church for a full day of worship, reflection, decision-making, and shared storytelling across congregations. The meeting opened with a

welcome from Rev Amel Manyon and an Acknowledgement of Country offered by Craig Zubrinich, recognising the Ngadjuri, Peramangk and Kaurna Peoples.

Worship was led by Rev Leanne Davis, Rev Ann Phillips and Carolyn Hall. Moderator Rev Peter Morel offered a reflection on being fully seen and deeply loved by God, encouraging members to listen attentively, notice one another, and respond with compassion throughout the day. Poetry woven through the meeting provided space for reflection and creativity.

Presbytery adopted the standard meeting processes, Safe Church commitments, and approved the minutes from October 2025. Synod of South Australia nominations were affirmed by consensus, with Standing Committee authorised, in consultation with the Pastoral Relations Committee, to make further appointments if required to meet quota. Reports from Presbytery officers and committees were received and accepted.

Presbytery agreed in principle to extend voting membership to allow congregations without a current ministry agent to appoint an additional lay voting member. Standing Committee will prepare a formal rule and bring a final proposal to the October 2026 meeting.

Stories from across the Presbytery highlighted mission and renewal, including the 10-year milestone of the Nuriootpa Community Kitchen and updates from the Oodnadatta Remote Area Ministry, including the opening of a new facility and upcoming work party visits. Congregations shared Renew Grant projects focused on community connection, hospitality, creativity and faith exploration.

Renew Grant Projects

Congregations shared how Renew funding is supporting local mission initiatives:

- **Woodville** – *The Open Table*, faith conversations in a pub setting.
- **Spicer** – *Craft in the Park*, fostering community connection through creative activities.
- **Village Church Alberton** – Community dinners building relationships without expectation, plus an upcoming intergenerational event.
- **Prospect** – *From the Inside Out*, a collaborative community mural project.

Updates were shared regarding Young Adult connections, Uniting World's Lent reflections, and the availability of the L3 resource with Presbytery financial support.

The afternoon included facilitated small-group conversations contributing feedback to the Presbytery Review, with responses to be compiled for Rev Dr Robert McFarlane.

The meeting concluded with an extraordinary meeting tentatively planned for 13 June 2026 to receive the review findings.

3. Committees

3.1 Wimala Standing Committee

In 2025–26, the Standing Committee comprised Rev Dianne Holden (Chairperson), Amy Duke (Secretary), Peter Lane (Treasurer until late 2025), Carolyn Hall (Treasurer from late 2025), Bruce Ind, Rev Dr Peter Trudinger, Rev Leanne Davis, Rev Cyrus Kung and Richard Idzikowski, with Rev Rebecca Purling serving ex-officio as PRC Chairperson.

The Committee met monthly (in person and online as required) and continued to oversee the business of the Presbytery while progressing key strategic priorities. These have included:

- Developing congregational health checks;
- Resourcing congregations, particularly those that are lay-led;
- Creating leadership pathways;
- Supporting youth and young adult engagement;
- Encouraging church renewal and mission innovation.

The executive officers also met regularly with leaders from other presbyteries and Synod, strengthening collaboration and shared learning.

3.2 Pastoral Relations Committee

The Pastoral Relations Committee (PRC) continues to be led by Rev Rebecca Purling. PRC care for congregations, ministry agents and leaders across the Presbytery. Meeting monthly in various locations, the PRC shares in both the joys and challenges of ministry life.

The Committee reviews congregational and ministry profiles, supports placement processes, and provides pastoral care and oversight. With many congregations currently without paid ministry agents, the PRC has an increasing focus on supporting lay leadership teams, both formal and informal, as they sustain ministry in their contexts.

3.3 Property Team

The Property Team, led by Malcolm Wilson alongside John Arthur and Trevor Correll, continues to assist congregations with a wide range of property matters, including compliance, maintenance, development, leasing and sales.

Rising costs—particularly insurance for older and heritage buildings—are placing significant pressure on congregations. As a result, many are reviewing how their property supports their mission and considering changes where necessary.

Through the MAPS project, congregations are being supported to assess mission vitality alongside property considerations, including safety, compliance, suitability and strategic location. These conversations are helping congregations discern sustainable and faithful pathways forward.

Malcolm Wilson continues to work for the Presbytery in the MAPS role – a role we know to be very difficult at times, yet also has glimpses of hope and renewal come through in some unexpected ways in unexpected places.

4. Finance

Written by Treasurer, Carolyn Hall

Wimala Presbytery commenced 2025 with equity to the value of \$613,109.57, with an approved 2025 budget deficit of \$8,555.00.

The year began strongly and we were able to meet all our requirements and financial needs for 2025. A new treasurer was elected at the October 2025 Presbytery meeting.

We completed 2025 with a surplus of \$42,872.59 (higher than the deficit predicted) due to many Wimala Congregations coming forth with their Mission and Service payments and prudent spending. This gave us a total equity of \$655,982.16 to go into 2026. During the year we were able to satisfy several grant applications to support the ongoing missional work in the Presbytery.

We have budgeted for a deficit of \$4,505 for 2026. We are currently looking good for the 2026 and although we have budgeted for a deficit it would appear that we will again have a surplus.

5. Regional Coordinators

5.1 Metro and Outer West – Rev Paul Turley

Over the past year, Paul has visited widely across his region, sharing in worship, meeting with church councils and supporting ministry agents. His role includes engaging with broader questions of leadership and encouraging congregations as they navigate a changing landscape.

While some congregations continue to carry a sense of loss about what once was, there is a growing number engaging honestly with present realities and asking faithful, creative questions about what it means to be the church today. This includes exploring new forms of gathering, rethinking the role of buildings, and in some cases discerning how to conclude ministry well.

5.2 Outer East – Rev Leanne Davis

Leanne has continued to connect with congregations through visits, worship and conversation, offering support and encouragement. Through her involvement in the PRC, she has also helped facilitate conversations around church council roles and responsibilities.

Across the region, common questions are emerging around sustainability, growth and faithful presence in local communities. These conversations are ongoing and varied, but they reflect a shared desire to remain vibrant, responsive and grounded in God's call.

6. Future Strategic Directions

We continue to live and serve in a time of significant change. As we look ahead, we are seeking to respond faithfully and wisely, informed by the outcomes of our recent Presbytery review.

There are encouraging signs of renewal, with congregations stepping into new and sometimes unfamiliar spaces to connect with their communities and share the love of Christ. Small grants and initiatives flowing from the Renew Conference have helped spark creativity and fresh thinking around mission.

At the same time, we continue to journey with congregations facing difficult decisions around sustainability, property and closure. In these moments, we seek to offer care, grace and support, helping communities to honour their story and legacy.

To *flourish* is not simply to survive, but to grow, to bear fruit and, at times, to allow for pruning. It calls us to deepen our discipleship, strengthen our relationships, and remain open to the ongoing movement of God in our midst as we step into the future together.

Rev Dianne Holden

Chairperson Wimala Presbytery

29 April 2026



The Uniting Church in Australia
Synod of South Australia