

Synod '24



Wimala Presbytery

Wimala Presbytery's congregations are located within the South Australian borders to the north, west and east of South Australia. Central to Wimala Presbytery's ministry is to **Gather** as the community of Christ, to **Connect** with God and with each other, and to **Go** in the power of the Spirit to be witnesses to God's love, foster discipleship, and engage in acts of outreach and works for justice, peace, reconciliation and the renewal of creation.

This past year has been one of change as we are transitioning into a chapter within the life of our Presbytery. We have shared thanks for the foundational work which Pastor Trevor Phillips established as the Wimala Presbytery founding Chairperson. And we welcomed in Rev Dianne Holden as she has begun the work of embracing change, creative thinking and renewal of mission within our congregations.

1. Reflections of 2023 and 2024 (first half)

Within the year of 2023 the Presbytery thanked and farewelled our secretary Carol Lang. We welcomed a new secretary, Amy Duke. It was a year of learning and adjusting to change as Trevor Phillips, began his preparation as the outgoing chair. This year of learning also gave us insights through the Digital Media Consultant role which provided understandings of the digital needs within our presbytery.

The first Presbytery Meeting of the year of 2024 welcomed Rev Dianne Holden into the chairperson role. This established a season of listening and developing a deeper understanding of the environment and needs within the Presbytery. With the focus across the Synod on property and mission, this chapter of renewal within Wimala has been met with encouragement from our congregations and a willingness to communicate congregational concerns, hopes and dreams to see the Glory of God shine in our communities.

We have dedicated much time of 2024 to "learning together". We held a planning day for our Standing Committee and PRC, have held online meetings to hear from our congregations, conducted church council training, held a grant funding online information session and begun developing partnerships in the effort to provide more learning, resources and strategic support to our Presbytery.

2. Presbytery Gatherings

Wimala Presbytery continues to hold two meetings in the year. One of these meetings is the AGM and contains much of our business, with the meeting earlier in the year providing time for reflection, opportunity for learning and hearty discussion. Below are the summaries of our meetings.

2.1 2023 Presbytery Meetings

2.1.1 April 2023 Presbytery Meeting

Our meeting was held with 75 attendees at the Broadview Uniting Church. We were led in worship by Rev Ruthmary Bond and encouraging word about Doubting Thomas. Our new digital media consultant, Rev Geoff Hurst, address our Presbytery and introduced his role.

Pastor Simon Story spoke about the importance of having an adventurous culture in our churches. We were encouraged to consider building an adventurous culture as a crucial first step as we launch into these uncharted territory of discovery. Jo Palmer spoke about *The Voice to Parliament* and encouraged us to make sure that we are well informed in the lead up to the referendum. We heard updates from our regional coordinators and chairperson, finishing up the day with table groups providing feedback for Act 2 and concluding with the business of the meeting, voting in a new secretary, Amy Duke.

2.1.2 October 2023 AGM

The October AGM was held with 52 presbytery members in attendance at the Enfield Uniting Church. We were welcomed in worship with Rev Amel Manyon, receiving a word of encouragement to stand firm in our faith in Christ. We received updates from Wendy Prior on the important work of our chaplains. Rev Dr Paul Goh then provided us with information about the implementation of a three-year Synod Action Plan for 'Becoming a CALD and Intercultural Church: 2023-2025'. The Synod General Secretary, Rev Philip Gardner addressed our Presbytery Meeting with two focus items, Property and Mission and the Review of the Mission Development Board.

We celebrated the Ordination of Leanne Davis and accepted the proposal of Rev Dianne Holden as incoming chair as of the first meeting in 2024. Rev Linda Driver provided us with a comprehensive update on the Act 2 work and encouragement to find out more! The remaining reports etc were passed.

We held the Wimala Great Debate which provided some rousing discussion and debate. Theme: ***That the Uniting Church in South Australia should abandon Sunday morning worship services.*** The afternoon was concluded with discussion in our region groups.

2.2 2024 Presbytery Meeting

2.2.1 April 2024 Presbytery Meeting

The Presbytery Meeting was held with 66 members in attendance and began with worship and welcome from Pastor Simon Story. We celebrated the induction of Rev Dianne Holden as our chairperson and thanked Trevor Phillips for his dedication to the establishment of the Presbytery. After the formal proceedings, we heard from Dianne as she shared of her calling to the Chairperson role and her hopes as we discover opportunities and new ideas together.

Following on, we enjoyed updates from the Moderator, Rev Peter Morel about his work thus far. We also hear from Rev Ruthmary Bond and Rev Rebecca Purling from their Wimala Youth events and Dr Rosemary Dewerse updating us on the opportunities within the Uniting College. Our regional

coordinators shared a word of encouragement and Rev Geoff Tiller providing us insights into the work of the Ecumenical Relations Committee. We finished up the day hearing from Leesa Story as the chair of the Uniting Foundation Grant Committee who encouraged us to get organised for the upcoming grants. As the day drew to a close we broke up into discussion groups providing feedback for the next chapter of the Presbytery.

3. Committees

3.1 Wimala Standing Committee

In 2023/24, the Standing Committee comprised Trevor Phillips (Chairperson until May 2024), Carol Lang (Secretary until May 2023), Rev Dianne Holden (Chairperson from May 2024), Amy Duke (Secretary from May 2023), Peter Lane (Treasurer), Bruce Ind, Rev Dr Peter Trudinger, Rev Dianne Holden, Rev June Ladner (until November 2023), Dr Joanna Palmer, Rev Leanne Davis and Richard Idzikowski (from November 2023). We also welcomed Rev Rebecca Purling as the Chairperson of the Wimala Pastoral Relations Committee as an ex-officio member from November 2023.

The Standing Committee meetings were held in person (and online when required), at Enfield Uniting Church on a monthly basis.

The executive officers of the Presbytery continued to meet regularly with officers from the Presbytery of Southern South Australia (POSSA), Generate Presbytery, and Synod Leaders to share updates, concerns, resources and ideas.

A strategic planning meeting was held in 2024 for members of the Presbytery Standing Committee and Pastoral Relations Committees. This meeting allowed us to reflect on the feedback received from our Presbytery Meeting, contribute ideas and considering future strategic goals. Some of the key ideas in our strategic planning and visioning discussions included:

- Share stories well
- Work with other groups to deliver speciality services
- Walk in the journey together
- Improve communication
- Resourcing congregations
- Church council training
- Empowerment of lay preachers
- Hold rural meetings
- Midyear satellite gatherings - connecting across the Presbytery
- Communicate the direction of the Presbytery more

3.2 Pastoral Relations Committee

The PRC meets each month to discuss and reflect on the life and ministry of our congregations. We review congregational profiles and the profiles of ministry agents. The PRC keeps in touch with our Pastors and Ministers in active service and hosts a gathering of retired ministers.

Over the past year the PRC have held a council training session, retired ministers lunch, supported numerous youth days and held countless ordinations and inductions across the Presbytery. We are thankful for the time and efforts that our PRC members commit to this work and support of the Presbytery.

3.3 Property Team

The Property Team is comprised of Malcolm Wilson (Convenor), John Arthur and Trevor Correll. As a team they have assisted congregations with property matters ranging from helping congregations work through building compliance issues and organising repairs to site development proposals and the leasing and sale of properties and utilisation of sale proceeds. Congregations with properties listed on the Synod Property Risk Management register continue to receive support from the Wimala Presbytery Property Team and Synod to address these matters.

The cost of insurance is a major draw on the available funds of many congregations, particularly those with historic, aging and heritage listed buildings and this diminishes the finances and energies available for missional activities. Several congregations are reviewing their mission foci and how existing buildings and property can, rather than erode capacity for effective mission, enhance mission. This, in some circumstances, may require disposal of property and/or significant upgrading of remaining facilities utilising both congregation funds and external grant opportunities.

Many congregations are reviewing their missional viability and determine what property / facilities are required to effectively deliver mission to their communities, A few examples of this activity include:

- Woodville UC exploring missional possibilities for a church located in a “medical precinct” through better utilisation of vacant land.
- Port Adelaide UC is actively exploring ways in which their mission can be enhanced and the financial costs of maintaining an aging building reduced. Unfortunately, in both of these situations, local government requirements for off street car parking are a major obstacle to creative utilisation of property.
- Brougham Place UC continues to work through significant building structural integrity issues.
- Berri and Barmera congregations are reviewing their mission and assessing property needs. The possibility of a “regional” ministry model is being explored.

There have been conversations with Synod Property representatives in all of these situations.

A number of congregations have undertaken property maintenance, compliance and improvement projects.

Conversations have continued with Clayton Wesley UC about options for developing the Clayton Wesley Church site at Beulah Park in order to provide funds for the restoration of the historic buildings, to promote financial self-sufficiency for the congregation and to enable the Spire Community to provide greater support to the community.

The Synod Strategy and Planning (Mission and Property) Working Group report was presented at the June 2023 Synod meeting. An outcome of this presentation was that Presbyteries were requested to work with their congregations to further this work and complete and/or update the Missional Viability Questionnaire. The report indicates that a significant percentage of congregations are struggling to have effective and viable mission. Wimala Presbytery has appointed Trevor Phillips as the Property Officer and established a Property and Mission Action Committee to assist with the task of assisting congregations to identify missional opportunities. Strategic locations and future viability of congregations also needs to be addressed.

Malcolm Wilson

Property Team Convenor

4. Finance

Wimala Presbytery commenced 2023 with equity to the value of \$582,669.81, with an approved 2023 budget returning an operating surplus of \$27,837. Limited funds will be available to be used for mission and resourcing programs to be established by the Wimala Presbytery to address the needs and aspirations of its member congregations and faith communities.

The year began strongly and we were able to meet all our requirements and financial needs for 2023 within the budget set. It was a year of financial consolidation and support of Congregations through the use of two Regional Pastoral Coordinators. Wimala also engaged a consultant in data management who visited many congregations to ascertain and support IT in the churches with their needs.

We completed 2023 with a surplus of \$60,430 (higher than predicted) due to many Wimala congregations coming forth with their Mission and Service payments. This gave us a total equity of \$588,198 to go into 2024. During the year we were able to satisfy several grant applications from congregations which supported their Mission and Service into their communities.

Standing Committee was able to endorse the investment of \$25,000 into a UC Invest, fixed term account, for congregational emergencies which gives then latitude for SC in the future to support congregations in financial need.

Support for a person to progress the work of the Synod Strategy and Planning Mission and Property became a priority this year which was taken by SC to have a Project Officer in the role for a specific period in the initial stages: six months. This has begun and is moving along well now.

It is therefore hoped, that Wimala is in a better place to move forward with new initiatives as finances are well managed over time to be of great service to our Congregations and Mission of the Church.

5. Regional Coordinators

5.1 Metro and Outer West – Rev Paul Turley

During the last twelve months, Paul has chaired seven Joint Nominating Committees and preached at or visited 25 of our congregations. He has participated in the gathering of Western Regions Ministry Agents and met regularly with the ministry agents in the northeastern suburbs, seeking ways for congregations to be more engaged with and support each other.

Paul chaired and now serves as deputy chair of the Yorke Peninsula Regional Mission Council, which has begun implementing its Mission Minister model. Because of illness, it has been a slow beginning for the YPRMC's plans and hopes for the new model. However, the YPRMC has been pleased to welcome Pastor Brenton Smith to the role of Mission Minister, joining with Pastor Andrew Chambers and Rev. Sandy Webb.

Paul has also participated in the Community Connections Network. This slowly evolving network of ministry agents and others seeks to support individuals and congregations in implementing community-centred approaches to congregational life. The Network is discovering more and more congregations that are beginning to think about themselves not as organisations whose purpose is to attract members but as communities that seek to be of service in and connected to their local neighbourhoods and communities.

Paul has worked with congregations to explore partnerships with others to offer parts of their property for the development of social housing.

Paul has also been a member of the MediaCom Education Inc. Board of Management. During this year, as MediaCom winds up as a separate entity, the Board has been engaged in securing the future of two significant congregational, lectionary-based worship and learning resources written by Australians, *Liturgy, Learning and (purposeful) Life* and *Words for Worship*.

5.2 Outer East – Rev Leanne Davis

Since my last report to the Presbytery earlier this year, I have continued to visit with congregations, and it has been my delight to share in Sunday services, as well as the conversations over cups of tea (and sometimes lunch) after the services. This helps me get to know people, congregations and communities, and getting to know you, we can work together to discern how the Presbytery (and the wider church) can best help.

As you know, many of our congregations in the Presbytery are being led by Lay Ministry Teams, and one of my priorities continues to be to understand how we (as Presbytery) can best support these teams. Each congregation is different and requires different support in different areas of ministry. One area is ensuring that each congregation has suitably trained lay people who are authorised to preside over Holy Communion for their local communities. As part of the Pastoral Relations Committee, we are continuing to develop our training and processes around this.

We have also been developing some other training opportunities for congregational leaders.

Paul Schmelzkopf and I have prepared some introductory training for church council members and

have delivered one session of this. There are more sessions being planned. The contents continue to be refined and developed as feedback is received from participants.

Across the Presbytery, conversations relating to the Synod Strategic Property project have begun. Congregations are being invited to have conversations about their church community, particularly in relation to their properties. Continuing to care for these faithful people is a high priority as potential hard questions are asked, and difficult decisions might need to be made. Our priority in these conversations is to find hope, and to help all our congregations flourish.

6. Congregations

6.1 Future Strategic Directions

It is easy to concede that the congregations of the Presbytery face a myriad of changes and challenges as we consider the Synod Strategy and Property Working Group Project, escalating insurance premiums, a lack of ministry agents to fill positions or for congregations to have enough finances to pay for a ministry agent in the first place. The theme constantly emerges how do we survive this time and continue to worship and serve as God intends.

While the needs are immense and varied, we return to our initial mandate as a Presbytery – to care for the congregations and ministry agents within our bounds.

Considering this, what would it mean for our Presbytery to FLOURISH?

To FLOURISH as disciples; followers of Jesus in our own spiritual growth and development.

To FLOURISH as congregations, not only in our internal worship and machinations, but also as we look beyond our walls with a missional focus and share the good news of Jesus to our communities.

To FLOURISH as ministry agents; to be well in ourselves, to lead fruitfully and to engage in locating and mentoring emerging leaders in our midst.

To FLOURISH is to thrive, not just survive. It is to grow. It is to bear fruit. It also means some pruning might need to occur – we will need to have difficult conversations in some aspects of our Presbytery life to ascertain what might need letting go of.

This theme of FLOURISH will underpin our strategic planning into the new year; looking for signs of new growth and renewal and how to best support and educate each other in this to better go into the world as disciples of Jesus and share the good news.

Rev Dianne Holden

Amy Duke

Secretary, Wimala Presbytery

4 September 2024



The Uniting Church in Australia
Synod of South Australia