



Morialta Uniting Church Seating Steering Group

Report to Church Council on Tuesday 17 July 2018, and the meeting of the Congregation on 29 July 2018

Church Council asked Worship and Faith Education Mission Ministry Team (W&FEMMT) to appoint a Steering Group to investigate church seating and the concept of changing from pews to chairs. The Steering Group consists of Christine Garner, John Powers, Rhonda Amber, Bob Hutchinson, Bruce Ind and Jenny Swanbury.

I am presenting this interim report in place of Christine Garner who is Leader of the Group.

The Steering Group has met twice: 20th June and 2 July.

Members of the congregation were invited to respond in writing to the question of church seating. There was a variety of diverse opinion. Those who responded put a lot of thought into it. We want to thank those who participated.

As Leader of W&FEMMT I received and summarised the content of written responses. Out of this Christine, Bruce and I did a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats).

The following comes from the letters and SWOT analysis of the letters:

Positives in favour of chairs:

- *Chairs provide flexibility, adaptability, space is more useful, allows for a range of worship opportunities to be explored, especially re SP@CE concept and festivals such as Easter, Holy Week, and Christmas.*
- *Comfort (if chairs are chosen well)*
- *Walkers and wheelchairs more easily accommodated.*
- *2/3rd of those responding would consider chairs if certain criteria are met: stability, arms for chairs, allowance for books, papers, handbags etc.*
- *Ease of movement for Communion with centre aisle and side aisles along the walls.*
- *Allows for centre aisle for weddings and funerals.*
- *Being able to use space during the week not just 3 hours on Sundays.*
- *Informal*
- *Complements the significant expense of A/V equipment*
- *Modern churches or recently built churches have chairs as the default. Many churches with traditional buildings have changed to chairs [Church of the Trinity, Walkerville, Christ Church UC Wayville, Westbourne Park, Blackwood). Others like Pilgrim, Clayton Wesley, Newland, and Brougham Place have larger very traditional sanctuary areas and structure with central organs and pulpits and they are looking at ways to use their larger 19th century buildings)]*
- *Chairs are the norm for gatherings in public.*
- *Part of a future big picture plan (eg Reverse Cycle Air Conditioning in Church)*

Opportunities in having chairs:

- *As well as more useful space and allowing for different styles of worship, with chairs the space could be used as a gallery or auditorium for retreats, conferences, or concerts.*
- *Ability to move from worship to a congregational meeting or similar (eg recent Pastoral Care gathering or combined worship and conference space as in Synod gatherings)*
- *Allows for expansion of the Community Centre programme*
- *Revenue from letting out the space during the week*
- *In line with Duty of care/Workplace Health and Safety, a space can be quickly cleared if someone is taken ill, allowing for immediate access and for paramedics if needed.*
- *Opportunity to purchase chairs which are stable and can lock together for traction in enabling people to stand.*
- *Some of the cost for chairs could be offset by seeking support from members of the congregation*

**Our purpose is to be a dynamic and Christ-centred community
whose faith in Jesus is life giving**

<http://www.morialtauca.org.au/our-church/#vision-statement>

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- *Enables the congregation to explore further the movement of God's Spirit – (God is already out there in the wider community) in cooperating or connecting with that movement in expanding God's purpose. How can we be ready for new ventures? Will the opportunities pass us by?*

Weaknesses in changing to chairs:

- *Cost. This year we have major development of church property and a large question mark regarding the sale of our Rostrevor property as well as a very large deficit budget.*
- *Concerns re budget and priorities.*
- *Where to put books, handbags, water (need to investigate book racks under chairs in front)*
- *Who will move the chairs?*
- *Some chairs are too heavy*
- *Chairs would need arms*
- *Rows of chairs would need to be further apart for more room to manoeuvre*
- *Chairs could look untidy if not placed well*
- *Chairs have a shorter life span than pews*
- *Difficulties of cleaning between chairs*
- *Tripping over chair legs (keep this in mind when looking at chairs)*
- *Existing chairs are not suitable: too heavy, round backs (these purchased at time of amalgamation)*

FEARS/CONCERNS:

- *We need to understand the purpose of changing to chairs.*
- *Clutter of pews in the sheds*
- *Cheapest is not always best*
- *Groups hiring the facility have to have public liability insurance (Note: this already applies in the hall)*
- *Insubstantial research re chairs*
- *Not enough seating for large gatherings eg funerals (Note: we currently bring in chairs in the side transepts and foyer to the church)*
- *Responding to the pressure of consumer values to purchase chairs un-necessarily*
- *Loss of what is familiar, grief and loss*

Positives in retaining the pews:

- *Pews set the church apart as a different space – 'a setting apart' - a sanctuary*
- *Pews suit the era of the church*
- *Pews are solid and stable*
- *They accommodate books, papers, handbags, water etc*
- *Avoids the financial cost especially in the significant challenge of the current financial year.*
- *Comfort*
- *Pews have a longer life span than chairs*
- *Pews are easier to keep clean than fabric covered chairs*
- *A sick person can lie down on a pew. (Note there can be difficulties in this. See above)*

Weaknesses in retaining pews

- *Less flexibility in space and location for walkers and wheelchairs*
- *Pews are a turnoff for most of the younger generation (of post-boomers and millennials). Reinforces the perception that the church is out of touch*
- *The 19th century interior look of the church has already been changed with high pulpit and other church furniture such as communion rail and fleur-de-lys pew ends being removed.*
- *Pew cushions slip badly (Some think this could be fixed)*
- *Missed opportunities*

Opportunities (for existing pews if changing to chairs):

- *Revenue from sale of pews (8 or 9 long pews)*
- *Possibility of pews from the sides, which only have one solid end at present, could be reformed to make smaller pews which can then be sold.*
- *Wood from the seating of the pews can be used to make the dado (wall rails) and repair the skirting.*

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Our Steering Group's contribution is one part of a bigger vision for the future of the church. We understand Church Council has been thinking about this during the recent retreat. This is included in the big picture of the future of the congregation and buildings (and A/V equipment and perhaps later R/C air conditioning).

We are exploring costs of chairs, types and styles, weight and colour, extras eg arms, racks for books, and questions such as 'How many chairs would we need'. If changing to chairs then the question, what is the future for the pews?

We are asking questions of congregations who have changed to chairs: (Church of the Trinity, Walkerville, Westbourne Park, Blackwood):

1. Why did you change from pews to chairs?
2. What were the challenges?
3. Where did you get the chairs?
4. Are you satisfied with them?
5. Would you do it again?
6. Have the chairs met your expectations?
7. What did you do with the pews and how did you do it?
8. Did you get the right number of chairs or too many, too few?

We will collate the answers.

We are looking to get a floor plan/design for different configurations and layouts. We have a set of chairs in the church at the moment kindly loaned by Walkerville Uniting Church. We will have samples of varieties of chairs for the congregation to consider.

This venture will not be rushed. (We decided to put back the pews.) We want to listen and reflect and investigate well. For the congregation to be able to make an informed decision we will be doing a complete costing for a change from pews to chairs and we will then ask the question of financing such a move. The Church Council to include in the budget if the congregation decides to proceed.

Timing - We expect to bring a recommendation to the December Congregation Meeting for consideration.

J. Swanbury for C. Garner (Leader of Church Seating Steering Group)
29th July 2018