

Identifying our Mission Priorities for Moving Forward - 2019

1. Introduction

As highlighted in *Morialta Vision* pieces over the past few issues, Morialta congregation needs to make decisions now that will determine the directions of our future life and mission together. We need to discern the mission priorities of all of us – as the congregation at Morialta working to build up the kingdom of God – to give us the firm foundation we need to make decisions on where best to use our resources of people, abilities and money in the immediate future.

'Big picture' questions

The questions we need to answer are big picture questions: What is it we are picturing for Morialta at the end of the next 5 years? Are we picturing the congregation as “pretty much the same as now” ... but shrunken, having dropped things off as we and the church building get older, and moving towards eventual closure? Or are we picturing making some strategically significant decisions now about where we discern God may be leading us, in our Morialta location and coming out of our Morialta way of being church? And then taking the actions that lead from those decisions? Taking some risks with unknown outcomes but true to our vision and values?

We need first to identify our current priorities for mission, so these can guide our decision making on a range of issues. Church Council has the role of leading the congregation in this process. Council met on retreat on Sunday 3 February to discern a process for identifying our mission priorities. We expect that this process will result in change – we recognise that wanting the church to grow and develop but being unwilling to change are incompatible positions!

Structure of the document

This document represents Council's work and takes into consideration an analysis of the 'New Year Resolutions' you provided in January. It begins with an "Our Values" statement for your consideration. This statement is designed to sit alongside Morialta's longer Vision Statement.

The next section is the Background for our decision making, from Council's perspective:

- strengths of our current situation; and
- issues of sustainability for our church

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Finally, we present for consideration two scenarios for the medium-term (5 years plus) at Morialta, which aim to assist Council in deciding what our mission priorities are, and are an effort to ensure that our mission focus remains viable and sustainable in the longer term. Each scenario will have a set of actions that will arise from it and there will be consequences from each scenario. These two scenarios will be presented at the 31 March Congregation Meeting along with a suggested process for the Congregation to discuss and decide:

- which scenario better describes what we want Morialta UCA to be known for over the next 3-5 years; and
- on what basis do you want Council to be making decisions?

2. Our Values

Morialta Uniting Church seeks to be an inclusive community that holds to the way of Jesus, expressed through love, service and hospitality. We offer, for all ages, learning opportunities, spiritual expression, action for justice, and social connection. We understand the Chapel St properties to be a community resource.

3. Background information from Church Council's perspective

3a. Strengths of our current situation

- We are currently an active church and community centre, with amazing people and gifted leadership.
- We are off the main road but in a location designated by our local Councils as part of the Magill Village concept.
- For many in the broader community, isolation and lack of belonging are major features of life, leading to issues with both physical and mental health. This is becoming an ever increasing problem. Morialta's vision and values point to the possibility of mission priorities that seek to address these needs.
- Demand for hire of our facilities and rooms in our newly completed Student Accommodation houses is strong, contributing to income and community but requiring support from us to administer and manage.
- Numbers attending worship at 9:30 are strong; interest from our multicultural members and friends seems consistent; people seem keen to maintain many of the activities currently in place when asked, or even if not asked (spontaneous affirmation).

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3b. Issues of sustainability

- Our congregation demographics are changing:
 - Our congregation continues to age; the proportion of members over 80 is rapidly increasing; there are few new members joining except those coming from closing churches;
 - Established members leave or travel extensively as needs and priorities change.
- As a result of our advancing age and potentially decreasing numbers, our energy for community interaction, social justice action and maintaining our programs is shrinking, activities are becoming more difficult and we are tiring.
- Vacant leadership positions remain empty and rosters are harder to fill, with duties coming around more frequently.
- Research and experience show us that, in the 21st century, many under 30 – youth, young adults and young families – are not interested or not available, due to other commitments, to participate in traditional church worship services¹. 'Recruiting more youth/young families' to our Sunday morning worship services is unlikely to happen any time soon. But we need an actively welcoming ambience for people of all ages across all our activities, including worship. How can we best achieve this?
- Our local-heritage-listed bluestone church building is also ageing, and the necessary repair work is expensive, requiring us both to access outside grants and spend our (limited) funds held in reserve. Will it be enough?
- Our current giving (about 67% of net income) is likely to reduce as numbers reduce and retirement incomes shrink, and fundraising (9% of net income) is becoming increasingly challenging and will likely decrease. Our capacity to support fundraising as we have in the past is changing. Already two Morialta fundraising events planned for last year were cancelled. There have been questions raised about our capacity to continue with the Mighty Market in its current format. As a result our income will most likely decrease while expenses are most likely to increase.
- Due to a most likely deteriorating financial situation,
 - Full-time ministry may not remain sustainable into the medium term. This also has implications for other paid staff, such as the office administrator, cleaner and playgroup coordinator.
 - Repairs and/or upgrades to our building may not be possible.
- The need to comply with UCA and government requirements (Council, Network, Synod, record-keeping, OH&S, safe church etc.) takes energy away from doing mission/living the way of Jesus. There are not enough willing folk with available capacity to do both streams without overload – but we need clear policies and processes to guard against individualistic decisions or actions.

¹ The description applies to the under-50s as well!

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4. Scenarios

In the December issue of the Morialta Vision, the Chairperson wrote:

Speaking of ‘what is to come’ ...! Council has expressed a strong sense that the time is now ripe for us to move forward more intentionally. Some of the ‘signs’ that featured in one of Bob’s recent sermons are appearing for us to ‘read’: encouraging ones, and those carrying some challenge. Bob is well into his second year of placement with us and we are benefitting from sustained ministry leadership!

She goes on to say:

Creative, open discussion is called for to read and respond to these signs, open always to the promptings of the Spirit. We can get these promptings from all sorts of places – reading, TV shows, prayer, chats with others ... We need to pass them on and test them in discussion with others in the Morialta community – especially members of Council!

Two scenarios have been developed, each with very different sets of mission priorities, to prompt a wide ranging discussion:

- One scenario aptly describes an inward looking, Sunday-focussed church, while the other more closely describes an outward looking, 7-day church;
- Some of you will identify with one or other of them;
- Perhaps you will agree with neither;
- More likely you will identify somewhere in between.
- A key point is that we need to embrace the implications of our desired scenario (what we will actually need to do), not just the outcome as described.

It is not intended by Council that at this time we accept one or the other as they stand. It is hoped, through discussion and discernment, that a scenario which inspires and energises the majority of the congregation will be developed.

In so doing, we must consider and decide:

- What is God calling us to?
- How to balance?
- How to streamline?
- How to prioritise?

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"Mission Priority Action Points" common across both scenarios

- We explicitly describe on our website our values and our ethos of inclusion, love and hospitality, including a welcome to those who have given up on literalist approaches and may be looking for something different; we incorporate the ethos actively in our worship and our community life.
- Current activities and programs are maintained for our ageing community as long as possible, including community building and fundraising activities and the additional mission focuses of the Student Accommodation Program, Beyond our Walls and Lunch on Chapel.
- These current activities and programs are discontinued progressively as finances, OH&S requirements, member capacity, and availability of willing leadership affect their sustainability (as determined by Council, directed by the outcomes of the current prioritising process).
- We recognise the need for a planned closure if and when we begin to reach the limits of our existing resources:
 - We begin planning now for moving to a new site that better suits our mission priorities and/or closing the church, gifting ourselves and remaining resources to another congregation or elsewhere;
 - We recognise that conversations will be required with the netball club and other stake holders as part of this process.

Activities that **may** lead from these priorities:

- We seek volunteers from outside our congregation to support our programs and activities:
 - Job descriptions need to be written for tasks we need help with;
 - These to be advertised through local council websites and Volunteering SA;
 - Tasks could include kitchen hands for LonCh (also consider partnering with small businesses), putting out/away chairs for events, support for AV activities, etc.
- Concerts remain as regular fundraisers; physical support for these and an ongoing market sought from external volunteers and/or folk from our community groups
- We spend on technical support and equipment to cater for:
 - Use for worship and concerts
 - Recording of services for us as we become shut-ins; wider distribution to rural and other small congregations (BoW)
 - Operator ageing; member vision and hearing loss, etc.;
- We reassess after 2 years:
 - Revise the mission priorities and goals and the strategies to reach them;
 - Reconsider the need to continue planning for vacating the site.

In addition to this – Scenario 1 OR Scenario 2?

Scenario 1.

A traditional worshipping church as first priority, with some community programs attached.

This could include "Mission Priority Action Points" such as:

- Maintain face-the-front worship, traditional furniture, listening in silence, with worship leaders and preachers in "performance" mode, using traditional language, style and concepts
- 'Mission' will mostly mean giving and fundraising for activities external to our community life – UnitingWorld, Christmas Bowl, Uniting Communities hampers, etc.
- Children, youth and young families, and un-churched newcomers are not seen as a priority that directs our decision-making;
- Intercultural activities, welcome/inclusion of strangers are not actively pursued.

Activities that **may** lead from these priorities:

- Prioritise spending towards repairs to the existing heritage church building, including stained-glass windows, bluestone frontage and the roof, and maintaining student houses and the manse
- Morialta playgroup and English Conversation Group close as required resources and leadership personnel are redirected to other programs and activities

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Scenario 2.

A Magill Village community centre hub, actively welcoming folk across cultures and age-groups and offering a range of programs and activities including worship.

This could include "Mission Priority Action Points" such as:

- For the current worship space, we prioritise an ambience friendly to children, youth and unchurched newcomers, with flexible seating alongside a lifelong-learning and active participation approach to worship;
- We are open to worshipping permanently in a different location (the hall or another site) when the cost of building repairs to the bluestone structure becomes prohibitive (as defined by Council/Property Team/Synod Building Review);
- Mission will be intimately connected with our life in community – socialising us and others to live more like Jesus here and beyond the Chapel St property.
- Mission involves belonging in small groups, welcoming strangers, lifelong learning, participating in justice making and service to others in or out of a church context.
- We prioritise small group life and learning, e.g. Lenten reflections, youth group learning about the Bible, and engagement with the students in our accommodation.
- We maintain, resource and advertise more explicitly our Gateways reading groups (Friday evenings and 'by day'), our 'Exploring Faith and Spirituality' section in the library, and our sets of books for small-group study by Borg and Crossan, etc.;
- We prioritise continuation/expansion of Beyond Our Walls program, using external volunteers as needed.

Activities that **may** lead from these priorities:

- Divert energy, including Bob's, from some current activities into this scenario
- More current members step up to participate in leadership (with training and support provided!)
- Aim for F/T office hours, maybe paid plus volunteer
- Playgroup maintained as a priority, resourced by an intercultural MUC volunteer team; prioritise spending on playgroup coordinator salary; relationship further developed with new Chapel St child-care centre
- English Conversation Group expanded
- 'Introduction to Christianity' group with intercultural focus established and resourced, initially for members of English Conversation Group. (Bob freed of other roles for this.)
- Be willing to consider/discuss reconfiguring for better usability the photo-copier room/ minister's office/ library room
- Connect all our activities (including external providers like Keep Fit and Square-dancing) by active cross-advertising (including the Netball community)

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Suggested process for the Congregation to discuss and decide between these two scenarios

- Document distributed with the papers for the 31 March Congregation Meeting or before
- Margaret presents the material at the 31 March meeting and facilitates discussion/answers questions
- Members invited to take the papers home for further reading/thinking/discussion/prayer
- Council members available for 'vestry conversations' with congregation members to discuss concerns or questions
- Extra meeting called for Sunday 2 June for further discussion/clarification
- A decision making process in the form of a rating scale for each scenario to begin at the 28 July Congregation Meeting