



Governance Theological *Basis*

Our Presbytery Vision and Mission

The Presbytery vision is about nurturing the creative and strategic development of a 'Christ-centred presence' in Western Sydney. The primary focus of Parramatta-Nepean Presbytery (PNP) is to nurture the growth of the Body of Christ. This will predominantly be through our congregational life and including the nurturing of new expressions of church – fresh expressions, church plants, renewed congregations and a mixed economy church.

The strategy of the Presbytery is to share in the ministry of Christ as the one who builds and rebuilds the church. We, his people, are co-workers in that ministry of creating communities of worship, witness and service in his name. Nurturing and resourcing leadership, current and evolving, resourcing and implementing strategies for mission, developing sustainable ministry and a fuller utilisation of our resources for God's mission, are the essential elements of PNP work. This work is inspired by Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, and is, principally led by staff members and key leaders and includes everyone across the life of our congregations and organisations.

In essence, we want to be well organised, responsible, mission/ministry focussed (ie outward focussing), Gospel inspired and led, with simpler and effective structures. We want to nurture a culture that is relational, missional, collaborative and grounded in Christ. We hold to the words of the Basis of Union of the UCA, especially:

"The Church's call is to serve that end: to be a fellowship of reconciliation, a body within which the diverse gifts of its members are used for the building up of the whole, an instrument through which Christ may work and bear witness to himself."

Governance: The Vision and Priorities of the UCA Basis of Union, Constitution and Regulations

The Basis of Union (par 3) affirms that the 'faith and unity of the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church are built upon the one Lord Jesus Christ.' The Church preaches Christ crucified and risen and confesses him as Lord. In this is a powerful theological and political affirmation, we are submitting ourselves and our churches to the way of Christ, not that of 'Caesar' or the ways of power, might, or wisdom from our world.

This same paragraph invites us to submit in humility and faith and engage in the mission of God, which is the reconciliation of all things back into God. We are a Pilgrim People on the way, never arriving at the Promised Land, but fed and nurtured by Christ on Word and Sacraments and the Gift of the Spirit to lead us.

Paragraph 4 acknowledges that we live and endure through the changes in history because 'Christ comes, addresses and deals with people in and through the news of his completed work.' Christ reaches out through human witness and the power of the Holy Spirit to awaken faith and invite people into the fellowship of his sufferings, to be disciples of the crucified Lord, and Christ constitutes and renews the Church!

The Basis of Union recognises the witness that comes to us through the Bible and of the ministry of those whose gifts and work is to faithfully discern, interpret, preach, and teach the people of God from the Biblical witness and the continuing tradition of God's people. There are ministries that feed and nurture the Body of Christ, and others that build up, support, witness and serve in the world and everyone has a place to belong and a part to play in the inclusive community of God!

There is deep recognition that, as Christ's people submitting to Christ, we are called to a different way of being together, discerning the way forward and working together in the service of God's Mission. Discernment and decision-making in the Church include everyone, the whole Body. The processes invite all voices to be heard and wisdom to be discerned prayerfully by the gathered people. This can be slower and less efficient than corporate structures or those employed in other sectors of the world, but we are not business, NGO's, community organisations, we are the church. We may have similarities with and learn from other sectors, but we are the Body of Christ.

In the Church, power is understood and used differently. Power is held gently and shared, not abused or used 'over' others. Whilst there are leaders in the church, their roles and call are never to dominate, dictate or make unilateral decisions – discernment and decisions belong to the whole community.

The Basis of Union envisages a church where there is:

1. Recognition that Christ is the Head of the Church, rules, feeds, nurtures and guides the Church and we submit to the Lordship of Christ, not that of any other entity, person and power. We are built upon the one Lord Jesus Christ! Christ rules and renews the church – the principle of openness and flexibility allows us to apply regulations judiciously for the time we are in. We don't just change structures – it is a theological statement of intent to listen to Christ in renewal and change. Theological imprimatur for change – the theological basis for change. Therefore, secular ideas around change must be governed by the theological principles.
2. United/Uniting in diversity (eg John 17, Ephesians 4, 1 Corinthians 12-13, Galatians 3:28-29...). The Basis of Union invites the church to respond to Christ's prayer that 'they be one, as you and I are one.' There is recognition that in uniting three denominations there is great diversity of experience, style and form, faith, theology... but our call, as Christ's people is to be one and bring this diversity into our common life for the building up of the whole and for witness and service in the world. In this, our unity is not for our own sake or to make us feel good about who we are. We are united as one, in Christ, so that the world may see and experience the Good News. Our unity is for the sake of the Gospel lived and proclaimed, that our witness to the world may be seen in how we live.
3. Relationship and Reconciliation – We proclaim the Triune God, three in one, where the three are held in the infinite love of the relational community. We proclaim that God is revealed and known in our own loving relationships, love of God and of our neighbours, grounded in the self-giving love of God that was perfectly revealed in Jesus (eg (Philippians 2)).

God's Mission in the world is the reconciliation of all things (2 Corinthians 5:19) and we are called into this mission and ministry as God's people – a Fellowship of reconciliation. Therefore, nurturing relationship and engaging in the practice of reconciliation when relationships break down is of paramount importance and a priority for the Church.

4. Government, Shared Power and Decision-making: Power, in the Uniting Church, is shared and diffused across the four councils of the church, each with their own responsibilities and authority. Within those councils, the process of decision-making is clearly to hear all voices and discern together God's call upon our common life. Each of the inter-related councils of UCA (Church Council/Congregation; Presbytery; Synod; Assembly) has its own tasks and responsibilities in relation both to the church and world. Christ may speak through any of its councils and the task of each council is to wait upon God's Word and obey God's will in matters allotted to its oversight. There will be mutual respect and relationship between the councils.

Theological and Biblical interpretation holds a valued place in helping each of the councils to hear God's call and discern together. The structures and committees within each of our Councils are to be fully accountable and responsible to the council. The actions of staff, committees and other structures is to help the council participate fully in the Mission of God.. The life, vision and mission of each council is grounded in God's will and each is to fulfil all the requirements of compliance to Church polity and Government law.

5. Inclusive Community where all are Called and Sent into Ministry. We serve each other and share life and faith with the world, through witness and service. The gifts of the whole people of God are to be used in building up the whole for ministry and service. Gifts and ministries – every member is engaged to confess Christ crucified and be his faithful servant. All are equal, but not the same. All are welcome and we respect each other where we are, whilst holding to the high call of Christ to be his Body in the world.

6. Recognition we are a Pilgrim People, on the way to the Promised Land. We have no continuing city but seek one to come. Against the natural desire and tendency of all of us to ground ourselves in a safe, secure and certain structure and belief system, we are called to be Pilgrim People on the Way... We are called by Christ into the journey of faith and mission, growing on the foundations of the past, but never clinging to the past, always open to a changing world and the message of hope Christ has for this world. We are continually being transformed in our own being, and as Christ's Body. As such, our structures and processes must remain open to discernment of God's will together, and to serve in the way of Christ, the way of love, grace and justice. In all our work we must be open and responsible to each other and guided by Christ who leads and sustains us.

We are fed on the way through word and sacraments, that nourish our being and sustain us as the community of God's people.

7. Leaders lead with humility, faith and openness. The Church needs those who are called to lead, but they lead through humble service, not overt power that is exercised 'over' other people. Leaders lead with wisdom, seeking prayerfully, to follow the example of Jesus and enter into the fellowship of his sufferings. Servant leadership that lets go of power and control, trusting in the Spirit to guide, strengthen and inspire, welcomes and serves the least in the way of Jesus. All are welcomed and lifted up into the fullness of being God's beloved children.

The task of leadership in the church is offered in humility and prayerfully, being open to the inspiration of the Spirit to nurture and discern vision for the pilgrim people on our way. Such discernment and development of vision, by the leaders, is offered to and for the people of God, who in their gathered councils, will prayerfully receive, listen and engage in deep discernment together and frame the way forward in the Spirit's guidance and power.




What do we want from our Governance structures?

The seven priorities, above, are key characteristics we want to embrace in the organisation, decision-making, operations and life of our Presbytery. We are, primarily, the Body of Christ and we must hold this as central to all we do and how we do it. We must recognise and own the diversity of our lives, experiences, understandings, traditions and hold our deep unity in Christ. Therefore, relationship is at the heart of everything we do because God is love, revealed in the relational community of the Trinity, and we share the reconciling mission of God in the world. Relationship and reconciliation are the essence of our life and mission in the Spirit. As an inclusive community where all the gifts and wisdom of the whole people are valued, we want to discern God's call on our common life together, at all levels of our church. This discernment seeks to hear all voices, believing that sometimes the 'lone voice' may be the prophetic voice calling us back to the 'way.' We will prioritise relationship and common discernment over efficiency and other values of the wider culture in which we live. Our 'bottom line' is love and relationship in Christ. What might this mean in each of the councils in which we participate? What does it mean to patiently wait for discernment together – especially in cultures that demand instant gratification, efficiency and success? How will we measure 'success' or effectiveness in God's mission? What role will the gift of theological reflection play in our committees, councils and common discernment? How will we engage in theological reflection, taking time to listen and engage with God's Word to us?

In the life of our Presbytery and its congregations, we will seek to disperse and share power, modelling our life on the humility of Christ. The expression of power in our life will be shared power that lifts up the weak and lost, recognises the giftedness and ministries of one another, and the wisdom we each bring. Power will be used to build up, not push down or abuse. In all things we will seek the courageous way of non-violence, to love one another in the way of Christ. We will be an inclusive Presbytery, nurturing inclusive communities of love and justice across Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains. Our common life and ministry will be to build up one another and our communities of faith, to serve God's mission in the world, to be people of reconciliation, healing and life in a world that worships violence, where power is used against others, and where there is conflict and fighting. We will hold our structures, belief systems and current forms gently, recognising we are pilgrims on the way, with the Spirit leading us. What will it mean for us to be and to nurture servant leaders who lead with wisdom, love and integrity, to serve the church and the world in the way of Christ? How is power expressed in our congregations and councils and what power do we need to loosen our grip on? What will it look like to build up and share power in a common community rather than a culture where power becomes entrenched in the few? Can we recognise how violence is used within our lives, through words, thoughts and actions: imposed belief systems, silence before injustice, exclusion?

We recognise that the Regulations of UCA and the structures of PNP have been developed in particular times of history and our current moment has a Presbytery Staff Team with a full time Chairperson, who is also has the role of developing and leading mission strategy. Much of the work of the presbytery is conducted through staff activity and other leadership. That includes proactive and strategic initiatives, pastoral and leadership oversight and development, Intercultural ministry, support and development, and the administrative functions of property, finance, IT/Communications and general administration to nurture sustainable and mission-oriented ministry. What does this mean for how we are organising our life across the Presbytery and its committees?

There are obvious changes to the overall functioning of the committees of PNP from being responsible to do the work (implement their decisions through the committee) to predominantly overseeing staff functions, ensuring decisions are implemented and being an accountability body for staff (and other leaders) to report to. The committees can also provide a 'brains trust' function for staff/leaders to test ideas and develop strategy.



In essence, more time can be spent on reviewing the broader picture of PNP and developing proactive strategies to develop mission and leadership across PNP. Do we have intentional theological reflection within our committees and the Council of our Presbytery, to build our life more deeply upon the way of Christ revealed through Scripture and Christian tradition? How do we balance staff work and initiative with the responsibility of each committee and its effective oversight and work?

The roles and responsibilities of the staff need to be clear for the committees to which they report and out of which, their work flows. The responsibilities of the committees need to be clear and embrace the responsibilities of staff, providing accountability and brains trust roles. Both the work of the committees, and the Council of Presbytery, must be grounded in the vision, theology and guidance of the Basis of Union, and in the theological reflection of those gifted to help the church remain faithful to Christ's call.


This role of ensuring that staff and all leadership use their authority responsibly in implementing Presbytery decisions and ministry, is vital. Peer review and mutual responsibility is a strong characteristic in the culture of UCA and an important function of our governance. Our committees provide important review of the responsibilities and functions for our staff and leadership. It is vital that the committees are clear about the Way of Christ, as expressed through Presbytery Vision, strategies and decisions, and that their work, and that of the staff, is clearly in line with the Basis of Union, the wisdom of theological reflection and Presbytery directions. How will we achieve this? What will we need to ensure we are clear about Christ's call, have clarity around the Basis of Union and that the vision and life of our congregations and Presbytery is aligned with this call of Christ?

Another cultural strength of UCA is to be open and transparent in its decisions and for decisions and their implementation to be clearly reported and responsible. Transparency is a vital component of how our committees work. There will be situations, decisions and work that must be treated carefully and remain confidential, but 'confidentiality' must never mask secrecy and hide our decisions!

Equally, there are various conflicts of interest, with staff being part of the committee structure, proposing ideas, engaging in decision-making discussions and processes, and the implementation of decisions. Conflicts of interest need to be managed well and with reasonable attention to what level of engagement (or not) a particular person has in any discussion or decision process. Where staff report directly to a committee and their work both feeds directly into and flows from that committee, care needs to be taken around specific conflicts. The particular staff person may be part of that committee, speak into it, bring proposals and speak in discussion but should not vote in the actual decision. How will we nurture appropriate humility and sharing of power across the Presbytery? How will we balance responsible leadership and initiative, with shared power, communal discernment and ensuring our integrity of being Christ's Church?

The committees are also the vehicles for assisting staff to prioritise their work and may direct staff member's attention to particular tasks required from the decisions.

In order to ensure that the Governance requirements – sustaining the Presbytery, fulfilling the requirements of church polity and state law, along with the priority of enhancing the mission and ministry life of our congregations and faith communities in accordance with the Presbytery Vision and Strategy – we are proposing a deeper engagement with the vision and priorities of our Basis of Union, embedded theological voice(s) to ensure we continue to draw upon the Word of Christ and are faithful to the UCA vision, and clear structures and processes that are open and responsible.



Life on the Way, as we have discussed, demands some element of organising, but we are in a constant process to organise, dis-organise and re-organise (order, dis-order, re-order) as Christ leads and guides us. This is the dying-rising life of Christ, constantly renewed and moving us forward, transforming us as we live and serve in the changing context of our world. As such, an updated and focussed structure is presented. This renewed structure is dependent upon a culture of relationship, accountability, collaboration, and following the way of Christ in word, thought and deed. It seeks to hold staff roles and PNP mission/ministry implementation through staff and particular leadership, within the governance structure so as to simplify process, structures and avoid overlaps of work and responsibility. This should release more people for the broader mission and ministry of God across Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains.