

# Missional Mapping: Intercultural Gardens

The Presbytery of PPW as a Community Garden:

*What happens in the garden during Winter?*



Winter is a time of pruning.

Winter is a time for turning over the soil and enriching the soil.



Winter is a time for weeding.

Winter is a time for planning the future garden.



# 'Winter Gardens' an Intercultural Reflection

Mission Strategy and Education [MSE] Committee explored the ideas of 'winter' meaning different things to people of different cultures. Take the time to think about your own perspectives and which cultural experience of 'winter' resonates with you.

Western understandings of winter are driven by the northern hemisphere experience of winter. For example, frosts turn to snow, gloom grey skies, animals hibernate, people are driven indoors, warm fires become the heart of the house, going outside is a thing to be avoided. Gardens are a non-event because they are covered under a foot of snow. Theologically we reflect on the 'winter' as being a time of hardship, isolated, loss, death and time to stop and think. In our congregations our most elderly members might be telling you that it is too cold for them to come out for worship, they may even be restricted mostly to the house relying on adult children to drive them to shops etc. Our experience of COVID also drives us indoors into self-isolation and safety. Congregations struggle to function 'normally' with less numbers. Our fears are that people may never return to church.

In comparison Australian experience is that there is snow in the mountains but nowhere near where I live, icy winds blast, frosts come more as we head towards spring, waterbirds have migrated to the other side of the world, however most other animals can still be seen moving about. Gardens are sun traps and draw us out to the sodden lawn underfoot, but there is work to do (See page 1). In our congregations our people migrate north for the winter, in smaller congregations this could be half of the congregation.

At Synod 2022 Alison Overeem led our worship for the beginning of NAIDOC week and she quotes Dr. Mirium Rose Ungunmerr Baumann AM Christian, artists, activist, teacher and Senior Australian of the year award winner experience on waiting:

*"Our Aboriginal culture has taught us to be still and to wait. We do not try to hurry things up. We let them follow their natural course - like the seasons. We watch the moon in each of its phases. We wait for the rain to fill our rivers and water the thirsty earth... When twilight comes, we prepare for the night. At dawn we rise with the sun. We watch the bush foods and wait for them to ripen before we gather them. We wait for our young people as they grow, stage by stage, through their initiation ceremonies. When a relation dies, we wait a long time with the sorrow. We own our grief and allow it to heal slowly. We wait for the right time for our ceremonies and our meetings. The right people must be present. Everything must be done in the proper way. Careful preparations must be made. We don't mind waiting, because we want things to be done with care. Sometimes many hours will be spent on painting the body before an important ceremony. We don't like to hurry. There is nothing more important than what we are attending to. There is nothing more urgent that we must hurry away for. We wait on God, too. His time is the right time. We wait for him to make his Word clear to us. We don't worry. We know that in time and in the spirit of dadirri (that deep listening and quiet stillness) his way will be clear. We are River people. We cannot hurry the river. We have to move with its current and understand its ways."<sup>1</sup>*

In what ways do our congregations 'wait'? We wait for God. We wait for the younger generations to return to the church. We wait to grieve the loss of members of our congregations. We wait for spiritual revival and church renewal. We wait in hope for spring.

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Mirium Rose Ungunmerr Bauman "Dadirri: Inner Deep Listening and Quiet Still Awareness" [Document31 \(dadirri.org.au\)](https://www.dadirri.org.au)

The experience of winter on a tropical Polynesian Island is different again. Here the plants are green all year around. Winter is the dry season, there is plenty of sunshine and clear skies and the humidity levels are lower. The water is still warm enough to swim and the seas are generally rougher. In Samoa, each villager has his or her own *fa'atoaga* Samoan garden providing the family with staple foods such as sugar cane, bananas, taro, tapioca, sweet potato, cocoa, and breadfruit. Traditionally, each person was also responsible for working at the village garden plot. The challenge to our congregations is how are we working in our village or our community garden? Do we know our neighbouring UCA congregations? Do we ever work on shared projects together? Our presbytery reflection, since the Samoan minister's Network approached presbytery standing committee, we have been doing some thinking outside the box for the many mid-sized Samoan speaking communities. With the right enrichment of the soil these communities would flourish. How do we help the Samoan communities to connect their many plots? Are their other cultural groups that need similar cross-fertilisation?

Winter in Vietnam isn't freezing cold, but some northern mountainous places do experience some snowfall. The rest of the country remains warm and dry compared to the weather Vietnam has the rest of the year. The weather is good for hiking with lush green forests and the beautiful winter bloom of buckwheat flowers. They are even able to harvest in winter. Some congregations thrive during winter, running bible studies or offering places to gather with friends.

'Winter' is important, however we experience it, culturally and as a church. In Australia it is time to strategically plan for the next season. Firstly, we prune the dead wood off trees to make room younger branches, cut shrubs back and then prune our fruit trees to get ready for the next season. An unpruned fruit tree may be overladen with heavy fruit can split the tree down the middle and die, and we feel the loss of the fruitful tree. Pruning is difficult task. It takes knowledge and experience to prune well. Sometimes we get stuck because we worry that we will over prune. And it is always possible to trial something one year, and something new the next until you get fruitful crops for your local context.

Secondly, we weed out the garden beds. We turn over the nutrient depleted soils adding compost and manure. If we fail to fertilise then any future veggies planted may fail to produce fruit for lack of nutrients. Thirdly, we begin to strike seeds in a greenhouse. If we do not do this preparation, we may miss the early spring crops. As gardeners, all that we do in winter prepares for what is yet to be! Planning new beds that have yet to be built, enriching soil for plants yet to be sown, striking seeds that have potential. As Christians, we prepare the ground for the kingdom of God to grow. We prepare our hearts to receive the stranger. We hope and prepare for the church of the future...

**Which 'Winter' story above resonates with you?**

**If winter is a time for planning for the future...  
what is our Winter strategy?**

**What do we need to do now to prepare for what's next?**

**What more could we be doing in the community garden?**