

Missional Mapping: Looking over the Fence [Nov 2022]

Let us look over the fence to see what other presbyteries they are doing in the way of clusters and regionalisation. Then we will look to what is happening within our own presbytery too. For this purpose cluster is 2-4 congregations a region is 5 or more congregations. This document will look at the strength and weakness of regional models across Vic-Tas Synod. Notably, some models have been around longer and we have more critical understandings of these models. Other models are more theoretical.

A) Inter-conciliar Regions:

Structure: Regions are set up with Regional Councils these councils were bound by a Memorandum of Understanding [MOU] that was approved by every church council across the region. This council has the ability to make decisions and determine the direction of the church across the Region. Decisions around worship rosters, joint education and training. Within the regions are congregation clusters.

Ministry Agents: Ministers are placed to regions and have responsibility for a cluster of congregations. Presbytery Ministers attend regional meetings, as needed.

Example: Presbytery of Western Victoria has set up regions about six years ago. Moved to guarantee ministry leadership across the presbytery. It divided the presbytery into 6 regions and given names based on the geographical location eg. North-West. Two regions were set up with Regional Councils, these councils were bound by a Memorandum of Understanding [MOU] that was approved by every church council across the region. A third region did the work over 2 years to set up the regional council MOU, and the final documents were not approved by the congregations, the council still gathers the ministry agents and chairpersons from congregations together for pastoral support and information sharing. A fourth region, although it had a reasonable number of congregations, it only had two ministry agents in the region and did not have enough momentum to meet. The presbytery appointed a lay pastor to help kick start the other regions to gather. Now congregation clusters intended to support a ministry placement, no longer viable for a future ministry placement. Six years on the council are starting to fall apart due to a lack of leadership, the number of ministry placements are continuing to drop. ESM requirements are so financially demanding congregations cannot afford what compliance demands.

Strength: The congregations across the region are bound by a MOU and meet regularly. It brings both lay and ordained together. The regional council have the power to make decisions on behalf of their region. Offers pastoral support to ministry agents and lay leaders. Information sharing and cross-fertilisation of ideas creating renewed energy.

Weakness: It needs a minimum number of ministry agents in the region to get it to work. The Council model is demanding and leadership is a precious resource in the church, leadership can be spread too thin. It adds another council in the church. The presbytery rearrange the way we offer ministry, but we fail to change worship. The region is not recognised by the regulations therefore property sale proceeds can not be held by the region.

B) Team Model:

Structure: They divided the presbytery into 3 Regions. These regions were further divided into church clusters/teams, which are given names of birds, to which ministry agents were appointed.

Ministry Agents: Ministry agents are appointed to presbytery. Presbytery Ministers appointed as team leader to each region. The Presbytery Minister gathers the ministry agents together for idea sharing, strategy, pastoral support, retreats, peer supervision and spirituality. The presbytery writes weekly liturgies to resource lay leaders available on website. Presbytery provides lay training eg. funerals.

Example: Presbytery of Gippsland (and Tasmania): Four years ago the presbytery of Gippsland started the Fig Tree project. This project sought to face the realities of the church decline and to 'give it one more go' at digging around the roots of the congregations and seeking to nurture them. eg. eLM staff have been brought in to provide team training to the presbytery.

Strengths: Biblical reflection has been built into the process for regions. Definite ministry teams are set up and meet regularly. Every congregation know who their delegated ministry agent is. Ministry is local and contextual.

Weakness: Is this model sustainable?

C) Strengths-Based model

Structure: They are not looking to set up councils that create another level of governance. Still exploring models.

Ministry Agents: They are focussing on ministry agents being placed into teams across regions. Each ministry agents is a specialist in a field that the whole regions can draw upon eg. Mission catalyst, Educator, Worship, Chaplain.

Example: Presbytery of Port Phillip East have been considering models to help them set up regions. Education and training offered at regional levels.

Strength: Allows minister to work to their strengths.

Weakness:

D) Post-Minister Church Model:

Structure: Congregations and clusters of congregations can no longer afford ministry. And few ministry agents that are willing to move to these remote locations. They are preparing for a church without Ministry agents.

Ministry Agents: Local lay presiders and lay leaders are the leadership of the church. Neighbouring minister or retired minister become the 'pastoral contact' to conduct funerals etc. The presbytery provide twice-monthly liturgies, with the sermon recorded, to resource lay leaders.

Example: Loddon-Mallee presbytery: Local leaders are raised up to support locally lead worship on Sunday. Congregations support each other in meeting safe church and ESM requirements.

Strength: The small congregation still have a presence in their community for now. Financially less demanding, not having to support a ministry agent.

Weakness: The loss of theological trained leaders. No long term viability.

E) Co-operative Model:

Structure: A co-ordinating council meets and is given powers by the congregations to act on their behalf. The co-ordinating council had 4 responsibilities: Vision, Ministry placement/reports, worshipping life, and joint financial matters - runs on petty cash. Beyond this is each congregations still has its church Council or congregation meeting as Church Council making the decisions that concern them locally. Notably, property issues are left with the congregations. Each congregation contributes a prescribed % to the Synod Central Stipends towards the ministry agents costs – each paying as they are able. Presbytery can pass the responsibility of faith communities back to the local region which has enough leadership to take responsibility for the faith community eg. property etc. The vision for the Small Churches is for an alive, sustainable, resilient, and connected group of churches sharing multiple ministry agents, to enhance worship, pastoral care, fellowship, discipleship, mission and outreach, in each of the participating congregations. (Long term vision: the congregations may hand congregational operations over to the co-ordinating council. Property sold within the region could be pooled for ongoing regional ministry.)

Ministry Agents: Ministry agents are appointed to a team in the region and work as resource ministers across the large area. Ministry agents attend to pastoral care that is crisis care and rites of passage eg. baptisms, wedding, funerals, hospital care, end of life, crisis of faith. Local elders/visitor do day to day pastoral care. Ministry agents may choose to visit each church council or attend the regional council. May need one congregation that becomes the Hub to many small congregations around it. Strong dependence on lay leaders too.

Example: Macedon Ranges Partnership; Horsham and District; Presbytery of North-East Small Church Network: The leadership work in the main areas: Vision, Ministry placement, worshipping life, and joint financial matters (PNE includes special interests). Regional worship services gathered the wider community together. Cross-fertilisation of ideas. We believe that we are indeed stronger together, more than the sum of our parts, and capable of building greater breadth and depth to our congregational life. Smaller congregation are sustainable and still have a presence in their local community. Model that can support innovation.

Strength: Ministry agents work to strengths across the region, sharing the load. Each congregation had representatives on the Co-ordinating Council. Innovative model.

Weakness: Another layer of governance requires more meetings.

F) One-Council Model:

Structure: Network of multiple congregations with one church Council. One church Council is formed across the regions. Shared working groups widen the pool of leadership. Monies and investments are pooled reaping better interest rates. One treasurer. Regional management of admin, property and finance.

Ministry Agents: Ministry Team leader and ministry specialists placed to regions. All ministers with pastoral and worship responsibilities in particular congregations. Team specialisations across the region, eg. Administration staff. Focus on faith formation and discipleship. Emphasis on new mission.

Example: Parishes formed around Union & Launceston Tasmania. New church Council candidates had to lobby across congregations to be voted. They chose a central Hub to worship in. They voted to rationalise buildings.

Strength: As a Uniting Church we have this skillset of mergers in our history and people. Lighter, simpler governance. Wider pool of leaders to draw upon. May be able to have funding to support youth ministry or pastoral carers.

Weakness: Minister may feel spread too far.

G) Campus Model:

Structure: Multiple congregations, with own church councils. Campus model. All the congregations work to their strengths, one do youth ministry, one do families ministry, a mission hub. This model works on the releasing of ministry agents to wider community support. The congregations are loosely confederated and given a voice at a steering group forum. Decision to participate is still made at a congregational level.

Ministry Agents: It is known that within the next 10 years every time a ministry agents turns over their will be a greater shift to regional ministry. The vision is that Ministry agents specialise with pastoral, worship, IT specialist, responsibilities in particular congregations. Ministry Team link congregations.

Example: Greater Geelong Steering Group, is observing: 10 Ministry agents, across 10 congregations with approximately 500 people, all within a 20 min radius of central Geelong, UCA is paying over \$1 million dollars of stipends. Everyone had worship starting between 9 -10am weekly most a traditional four hymn sandwich and all using TIS as the main hymnbook. Every ministry agent is spending up to 2 days a week on writing, organising and doing Sunday worship. This group is asking what if we released ministry what would it look like? Initial focus around ministry and mission. Annual Pentecost service has been help regionally for the past two years.

Strength: Greater co-operation across congregations. People work across congregational lines to work with people with common interests in areas they are passionate about. Better stewardship of resources. **Weakness:**

H) Traditional Resource Ministry

Structure: Three or more congregations pool their money to support one ministry agent across the cluster. Congregations remain independent of one another. No expectation on the ministry agents to bring the congregations closer together.

Ministry Agent: One minister would be rostered across the different congregations every Sunday morning. The ministry agent is working solo. Leading Holy Communion across the congregations.

Example: A cluster near you: One ministry agent working across three or more congregation was regarded a resource minister and reporting to multiple church council. Every congregation felt as though they did not receive their fair-share of the ministry agent that they were paying for. Resulted in high levels of burn out in ministry agents.

Strengths: Congregations who could not afford a ministry agent on their own could receive Sunday worship at least once a month.

Weakness: High levels of Ministry agent burnout.

I) Traditional Resource Ministry

Structure: One Church Council per congregation.

Ministry Agents: Each ministry agent acts as a sole agent working independently. Coping with decline on their own. Ministers might find refuge in these congregations as they can be independent.

Example: A congregation near you. This is the structure we think of as normal and right.

Strengths: We understand this model. Congregations keep complete control of their own decisions. The congregation can afford to maintain our own congregations.

Weakness: There is no motivation to look towards your neighbouring congregations who might be struggling. There may not be enough ministry agents in the future to sustain this model.

EXPLORING REGIONAL COLLABORATION: 3 Lenses



OUR PASSION

Vibrant, diverse, contextual mission and disciple-making churches. [Regenerating the Church 2022-2026]

VIBRANT: We encourage every congregation to seek to be sustainable within the next 10 years. This not seeking mere survival creating ministry placements that offer Pallative care to congregation who are dying, but rather sharing generously the abundant gifts of God. Smaller congregations who are brought together can be healthier and more vital.

DIVERSITY: Each region can be distinct and shaped by its local context, maintaining bio-diversity in the garden. Ministers are working from their strengths and using their God given gifts. One minister can choose worship liturgy. Another pastoral care. Another mission. Another building on-line communities. Another chooses education. Each resourcing a region according to their God given gifts.

DISCIPLESHIP MAKING: Is about everyone learning how to share their faith in Jesus Christ. It could be about seeking training as Church Council members to be formed within the ethos of the UCA to be better equipped for the ministry we are elected too. Or it could be minister undertaking team building and team supervision.

COLLABORATION: These regions will not need to form councils to add another layer of governance. There could be regional gatherings of leadership who collaborate on ministry and mission. Together we plot out how to thrive in the winds of change?

Regional Goals: Communication, Co-ordination, Co-operation and Collaboration

Communication: Let's talk

- Getting to know each other
- Building trust
- Sharing hopes and challenges
- Mutual encouragement
- Growing a shared identity

Co-ordination: Let's plan

- Leaders connecting
- Shared planning of activities
- Running combined programs
- Seeing gaps and opportunities
- Sharing in community life.

Co-operation: Let's do

- Shared administration
- Shared worship
- Combining roles or tasks
- Shared leadership

Collaboration: Let's share

- Leader's dreaming
- Developing common goals
- Pooling some resources

- Shared vision and strategy

What are regional placements?

Regional placements are...

- Placements to a region and not just to a cluster of churches
- Presbytery placements **or** placements by agreement with a group of churches
- Placements to a team ministry within region
- Ministry Agents have pastoral ties to particular congregations within the region
- Ministry Agents will have specialist, complementary roles within the team and region
- Ministry Agents will have ministry roles that go beyond any particular congregation
- Ministry Agents will have some degree of emphasis on equipping lay leaders for ministry and mission

Why move to regional placements?

To frame this in positive terms, regional placements might be considered if

- participation in God's mission by existing congregations is a clear focus
- team ministry brings greater richness to ministry and mission
- congregational strengths and differences bring greater richness to ministry & mission
- sharing and pooling of resources allows for greater freedom to enhance and explore ministry and mission regionally
- a regional focus allows for broader partnerships with other agencies etc.
- congregations are willing to 'let go' and embrace a different future
- congregations are willing to be more intentional about missional making-disciples

To put it conversely, regional ministry and mission will be ineffective if

- the focus is solely on the existing congregations
- there is not a healthy team ministry
- congregations are unwilling to share gifts and resources
- congregations are unwilling to be changed
- there is not a refreshed focus on regenerating the church
- there is not a significant focus on doing new things beyond existing congregations

Regional Questions:

1. ***What are the best aspects of these models that you value? (p.1-4)***
2. Our Uniting Church needs to adapt quickly in the next few years. If it is true that, one ministry agent congregational placements are becoming less viable. In the models above ministry agents are appointed to clusters, regions or presbytery. ***Discuss the positives for your congregations if ministry agents are placed to clusters? to regions? or presbytery? (p.5-7)***