

## WODEN VALLEY UNITING CHURCH 2023 MISSION PLAN

### **The communities in which we are situated**

There are three main (non-church) communities in which Woden Valley Uniting Church is situated.

#### ***(i) The organisations and individuals who use our church buildings.***

Many community and other organisations (about 15) use our premises on a regular basis each week and others less frequently while we have many one-off bookings. On a normal week around 300 people might enter our premises. Our relationship with most of these organisations is not much more than a friendly landlord: tenant relationship. With some it is much closer. There is clear potential to develop our relationship with the users of our premises, to our mutual interest.

#### ***(ii) Woden Valley, that part of the city in which our church is located.***

Our church buildings are located in Curtin, one of 12 suburbs in Woden. The current population of Woden is 36,000 projected to grow to 49,000 by 2041, a rate of growth in line with Canberra's population growth overall. Most of this population growth is expected to take place around the Town Centre in high rise developments. Average incomes, property values and levels of education attainment are all high by Canberra standards and even more so compared with the rest of Australia.

The major employment centres are at Phillip (near the Town Centre) or at Canberra Hospital. This concentration is expected to remain in future years though the now likely development of light rail from the City to Woden should spur commercial activity and population growth in Curtin.

Local shopping centres seem for the most part doing well, often centred on coffee shops. There is evidence of a strengthening of community feeling within suburbs, with residents' associations and land care groups emerging. This is less true in the Town Centre itself, while the Woden Community Council amongst others often points to decaying social infrastructure in and around the Town Centre. Begging not only at Woden but also at local shops has become more commonplace in recent years.

There are at least 18 churches in the Woden Valley plus other congregations which use their facilities. Of all of these churches/congregations, WVUC seems to be the most liberal or progressive.

An issue for WVUC is that we are located on the northern side of Woden and as a congregation have little connection with the Town Centre where population and jobs are concentrated.

#### ***(iii) People and organisations across the city who share our interest in progressive Christianity and/or social justice.***

Progressive Christianity, social justice and community service figured prominently in the life of the two former congregations. This has carried over into the new congregation and distinguishes it from many other churches in Canberra. There is therefore a potential to make alliances with and attract interest from individuals and organisations from across the city with similar interests. This would include members of our family or friends who may not be church-goers but, like us, wish to make the world a better place. Many in our congregation currently live outside the Woden Valley a feature of our congregation we think is likely to remain in future years.

### **Our story**

The Woden Valley Uniting Church commenced on 14 February 2021 when the two congregations of South Woden and St James joined together. Their mission is to be a welcoming, inclusive,

progressive and outward looking Christian community that nurtures spirituality and faith and encourages service.

St James originated as a Presbyterian congregation in 1964 and partnered with the Anglican Church of the Good Shepherd at Curtin for many years. It developed a keen interest in progressive theology and services to and links with the local community. South Woden had formed in 1967 as a 'church without walls' where the church is the people not the building. Members went out into the community to be the face and hands of God in the world with a strong emphasis on caring for each other and on social justice.

Because both congregations were now smaller and older than in earlier times in their history, in 2019 the two congregations decided to join together. Getting to know each other and then coping with the effects of COVID has taken some time. Currently this is what we are doing:

On Sundays, we have a worship service at 10.00 am at Curtin and by Zoom at Goodwin Monash and at people's homes. In the evening, there is a meditation group at 5.00 pm followed by Gathering@6, a simple service focussed on sharing and discussion at Curtin. Some of these meetings are in person but most are conducted by Zoom.

We share a minister, Rev Gary Holdsworth, with Weston Creek Uniting Church and have a large number of lay people willing and able to assist with worship and leadership. We have an office manager at Curtin whose main role is liaising with the many community groups who use our facilities.

There are a large number of small groups and activities including pastoral care, music, community volunteering, social justice, gardening, social activities and hospitality.

We own the church building at Curtin, a large block of land and a rented house in Curtin and another rented house in Pearce. Our budget for 2022/23 shows an expected income and expenditure of about \$200,000.

***The 2021 National Church Life Survey*** results for WVUC are at **Attachment A**. In summary they tell us that we are an older congregation (average age 74), mostly retired, born in Australia and well-educated. For the most part we have long attachments to the congregation to which we have a strong sense of belonging and which we believe is both inclusive and friendly. We are very regular attenders of the WVUC worship service which we seem to value quite highly, especially the music in our services. Most of us do not spend time in prayer/Bible reading etc daily or even for a few days in the week. For a large majority of us, our faith influences our daily decisions and actions.

As individuals we are very involved with community groups. Less pronounced, but still significant, is our involvement in church activities relating to the wider community - these are overwhelmingly of a community service and not of an evangelistic nature. Very few of us are at ease talking about our faith (with others who are not members of our family or of the congregation) and few invite friends and relatives to church services. What we most value about our church, and areas we consider priorities for our future, revolve around social justice and strengthening community. Fostering spiritual growth and church growth are lower priorities.

We are open to change and would support new initiatives in mission and ministry though we will take some persuading to be more involved in the work of our church. Almost all of us agree that we have a responsibility as Christians to protect the environment but few of us are very active in that cause. We respect our leadership though more as managers than as leaders who can chart and inspire us in a new direction, about which we are for the most part uncertain.

## **How we have conducted mission planning at WVUC**

We started thinking about mission even before we came together as a congregation in February 2021. Mission planning has continued ever since though it has been side-lined from time to time as the practical issues involved with establishing a new congregation have demanded most of our attention. Our planning was led by a mission planning group the membership of which was open and changed over the period. It also involved meetings of the congregation. These included several “asset based” congregation workshops led by our Ministers and smaller group activities led by a Presbytery Minister. Key outputs of this process have included:

### ***(i) The development of a statement of vision, mission and values for the new congregation.***

The vision of WVUC: a vibrant community of faith living out God’s love and acting for the common good to build a just and compassionate community.

The mission of WVUC: to be a welcoming, inclusive, progressive and outward looking Christian community that nurtures spirituality and faith and encourages service.

The full statement including values is at **Attachment B**.

### ***(ii) The identification of a list of potential mission projects which match the congregation’s values, interests and strengths and/or fill gaps in our current range of activities.***

The list of potential mission projects has had several iterations going back over more than two years and included some existing activities that warranted re-examination, some for which planning was already underway, and others which were new and required further research or investigation. Two significant milestones in the development of the list are recognised here:

- The Mission Working Group Report to the Joint Strategic Working Committee in September 2020 (**Attachment C**); and
- The Mission Planning Group’s report to the congregation in December 2021 which provided a list of 17 possible mission projects (**Attachment D**).

In preparing the final list we have taken into account the congregation’s statement of its vision, mission and values and the congregation’s CLS survey results. We also paid heed to the *5 Marks of Mission* and Synod’s *Future Directions for the People of God on the Way*. These are set down below.

# 5 Marks of Mission



## The proposed Future Directions for the People of God on the Way

The Future Directions reaffirm the Synod's direction-setting commitments to:

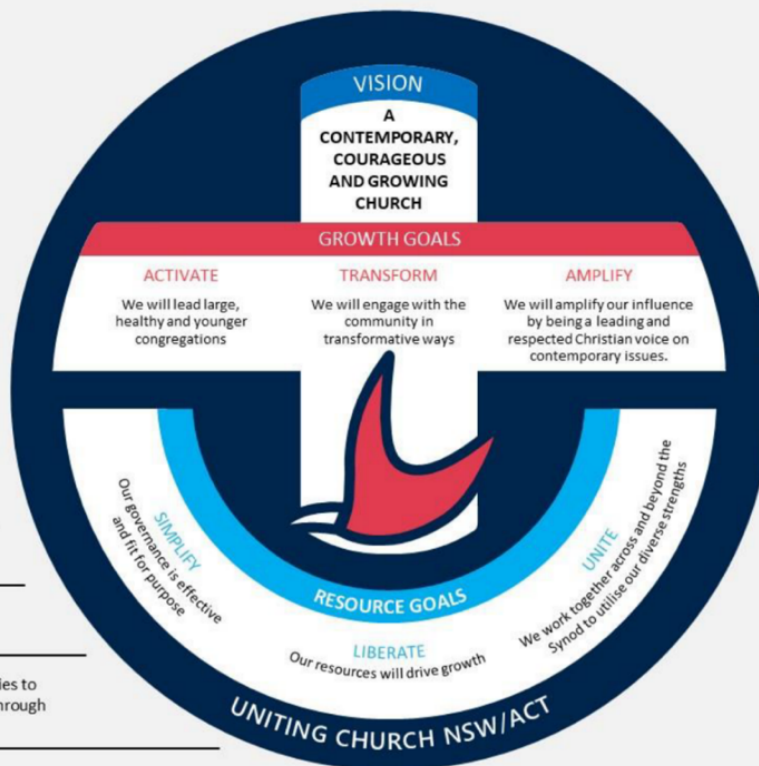
A commitment to rural and regional ministry

A commitment to ministry with people in the first third of their lives

A commitment to walking together with First Peoples and to the covenant with Congress

An ongoing and active commitment to the stewardship of the earth

An ongoing commitment to working with presbyteries to organise ourselves to promote growth within and through our congregations



Since the Mission Planning Group's report in Dec 2021, some new projects have commenced while for others planning has progressed. Some proposals have been abandoned while some new ones have appeared. In all 11 projects are included in our final mission plan. These are described below. First however we need to explain our overall rationale for selecting this final mix of mission projects.

## **Overarching Goals of our Mission Plan**

The establishment of a new congregation has given us an opportunity to bring more resources to bear on key tasks of church ministry, administration and mission planning to an extent that was not possible previously in either of the two former congregations. There is nonetheless an urgency about our situation. While our human, financial and property resources are considerable we remain a small ageing congregation. In our first two years as a new congregation, we have not been very successful in attracting new people to our services and activities. Our current income is insufficient to meet the cost of a full-time Minister though, at least currently, we do have capacity to spend more on staff or in other areas. There is also the option of funding investments from savings.

This plan, if followed through, can we believe turn around the situation.

We have identified as important to us the promotion of social justice and the provision of support to the community. Because we have the skills and property resources to back up our interests and values in these areas, we believe they should be priorities in our plan.

We recognise that we need to engage more effectively with the three communities in which we are situated. Social justice and community strengthening projects can help in this regard but so too can a more open hospitality and improved communication.

Evangelism is not a strong suit but we can strive to increase our understanding of the Gospel, strengthen our practice of prayer and meditation and deepen our faith. We can also aim to learn better to speak about these things when occasions arise. Recognising that the wider community is essentially a secular one we need to offer more activities which are accessible to people with little or no church background but which nonetheless witness to our faith.

Most of us care deeply about our environment but relatively few of us are active in doing very much about it. As individuals and as a congregation we need to do more.

## **Mission Plan Goals**

This plan contains 11 goals. For each goal we have provided a short description of the project plus an indication of its alignment with the Five Marks of Mission (**5MofM**) and the growth and resource goals of Future Directions (**FutDirect**). We have also included some goals for 2023 from our communications strategy.

### **1. Build affordable rental housing and supported housing for people with mental illness on the church's land (the Block) in Curtin.**

The congregation has been supporting MyHome (a community organisation which aims to provide supported housing to people with enduring mental illness) for the past 9 years with the offer of use of land (part of the block) and the active involvement of individual members of the congregation. This type of housing is much needed in the ACT. The ACT Government re-committed to fund the building of MyHome in Curtin in the 2020 ACT Parliamentary Agreement.

For the remainder of the block, the congregation has for some years been exploring options for developing affordable rental housing, also a much needed type of housing in Canberra. At the ACT Government's request, Woden Valley Uniting Church jointly funded (with MyHome and CHC a local community housing provider) in 2021 an Indicative Development Plan for the block, incorporating as separate developments affordable rental and supported housing.

In 2022, the church entered into discussions with Wesley Mission about the possible joint development of affordable rental housing and MyHome on the block. There are obvious advantages in joint design, construction and operation. Wesley Mission has much experience in both mental health and supported accommodation. Accordingly, with the support of MyHome and the church, Wesley agreed to explore the feasibility of an integrated development. Within the development we envisage some community space such as meeting rooms which would be available for use not just by MyHome and affordable rental residents but also by Woden Valley Uniting Church and the local community.

More recently Wesley has responded to the Build to Rent Investment Prospectus (with respect to affordable rental housing) issued by the Treasury and Economic Development Directorate of the ACT Government. Wesley has also submitted costings to the ACT Government for the MyHome element of the proposed development. We await the Government's response.

If the project proceeds, as we are increasingly confident it will, the church would be making a significant contribution to meeting the pressing housing needs of many Canberrans. It would also establish a much stronger Uniting Church presence in Woden giving the church the capacity to address not just the physical and mental needs of residents but also social and spiritual. There is the potential for Woden Valley Uniting Church, working with Wesley, and offering not just our land but also our human and financial resources, to help build new communities of faith that fit the local context.

**5MofM** – Tend, transform

**FutDirect** – Transform, liberate, unite

## 2. **Against the Wind.**

An initiative of members of WVUC and people concerned with justice, *Against the Wind* advocates for a fairer and kinder Australia, including on issues which have few champions and where government is resistant to change.

Against the Wind was launched in 2022. There have been several social gatherings, a regular newsletter is produced and a first public seminar was held in January 2023 on peace and Australian foreign and defence policy. Interest and support has come from people and organisations across Canberra.

**5MofM** – Transform

**FutDirect** – Transform, amplify, unite

## 3. **Supporting Asylum Seekers and Refugees**

Since 2015 the Pearce manse has been made available to a refugee family at no cost but with the church receiving some financial support from the ACT Government. We have recently moved to formalise our relationship with the family and to put it on a sustainable basis. With the support of a real estate agency (Homeground) specialising in not-for-profit property management, we have entered into a lease agreement with the family which clarifies tenant rights and responsibilities, including the payment of a modest rent.

We will continue to support asylum seekers and refugees including by way of attendance at rallies, signage and offering the use of our facilities to people visiting Canberra for the purpose of advocacy for refugees etc.

**5MofM** – Tend, transform

#### 4. Consolidation of quality video conferencing of our worship services.

During Covid, we invested in video conferencing technology and trained some interested members in its use. This has enabled us to present worship services at a professional standard via Zoom to members in their homes and to members and other residents at Goodwin Monash, a retirement village in the south of Canberra. We see this as an important ongoing area of mission. More people with video-conferencing and sound skills are, however, needed to continue with this service. We will focus on attracting younger people into the role with an offer of training and eventual responsibility for video or sound at a Sunday morning service. Young people are more likely to be interested in and comfortable with the technology while as a group they are currently absent from our church.

**5MofM** – Tell, transform

**FutDirect** – Activate, transform

#### 5. Improving our buildings and gardens to speak better about who we are.

We plan several areas of focus:

- Continuation of our efforts to improve the maintenance and appearance of our buildings (eg gutters, painting).
- Better maintained and new gardens. A reinvigorated garden group is making progress here with monthly working bees and has made connection with the local Curtin Shops Garden Group to be participate in Community Floriade.
- Improvement to the entry area and courtyard. Some progress has been made in the entry area to tell story about our two founding congregations. We need to do more to tell the story of the new congregation.
- A mural on the western wall facing onto the public walkway and path. Some thought has been given to the idea but as yet no agreement reached about the best way forward. We aim to resolve the issue in 2023.

**5MofM** – Tell,

**FutDirect** - Transform

#### 6. Small groups to foster deeper conversations in faith

We plan for the following in 2023:

- Monthly “Wine, Cheese and Theologian” evening. These have commenced.
- Participation in Tuggeranong UC weekly Zoom lectionary Bible studies. Several people from WVUC have attended.
- Workshops on matters of the faith, of a similar format to the “Why I am still a Christian?” workshop held in Nov 2021 Gary Holdsworth will lead another of these workshops in April. Prayer to be a subject of a later workshop.
- Weeknight discussion group on selected book/study guide. We plan for a series of discussions on “After Jesus before Christianity”.

**5MofM** – Tell, teach

**FutDirect** - Activate

#### 7. Christmas events

For many years, both former congregations presented an evening of Christmas carols in their local communities of Curtin and Pearce in cooperation with other churches and local organisations. These events were in the open air and attracted large numbers of people, many with no church connection. They were suspended in 2020 and 2021 due to COVID. Both former congregations also held an (indoor) Lessons and Carols service in the week or so before Christmas, which put more

focus on the contemporary meaning and significance of Christmas than is the case with traditional Lessons and Carols services We see the public celebration of Christmas as an important part of our mission. Accordingly we will

- Work with other churches and organisations to continue annually the “Pearce Carols under the Stars” and “Carols on the Block” in Curtin.
- Continue with “Lessons and Carols” on a Sunday evening before Christmas with a mind to inviting friends and family.

**5MofM** – Tell, teach

**FutDirect** - Unite

#### **8. Hospitality and community building.**

This is an important element of who we are. We plan several initiatives:

- Regular monthly Saturday film nights or shared meals in the main hall. This will provide a welcome social occasion and opportunities for community engagement and for fund-raising for community and social justice causes.
- Wine cheese and theologian (see above)
- Joint activities with the Sai community (see below).

**5MofM** – Tell, teach, tend.

**FutDirect** – Transform, unite.

#### **9. Providing ongoing support to the Little Pantry.**

Little Pantry is a service of Woden Community Service (WCS), working with several churches in Woden, providing emergency food relief. Members of the congregation already provide occasional donations. Following discussions with WCS we have decided to put our support on an ongoing basis by better organising giving by congregation members and by installing a donation box outside the church to encourage donations from members of the public. The Hughes Community Shed has agreed to build the box. We will need to arrange for regular collection and delivery of grocery items to WCS and to publicise this service around the local community.

**5MofM** – Tend

**FutDirect** – Unite

#### **10. Care for the Environment**

Two initiatives are planned:

- An audit our buildings for their carbon footprint and consideration of possible investments to reduce it.
- Ongoing efforts to foster greater awareness of and activism on environmental issues amongst our membership.

**5MofM** – Treasure

**FutDirect** – Transform. Also aligns with Synod commitment to the stewardship of the earth.

#### **11. Intra-denominational, ecumenical and interfaith activities.**

As a congregation of the Uniting Church we take these activities seriously. In particular we will:

- Work more closely with other UCA congregations especially on the south side of Canberra and encourage greater involvement by congregation members in Presbytery and Synod events.



- Work jointly with other Woden churches, including Good Shepherd and Holy Trinity, on activities such as Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and community carols; and with Good Shepherd on joint property interests.
- Participate in end-of-year and other events with the Sai Hindu group, a regular user of our premises.

**5MofM** – Tell, teach

**FutDirect** - Unite

**Communication Strategy.** Effective communication is critical to the success of our mission plan.

During 2023 we will:

- Issue a WVUC information brochure.
- Expand the coverage and better maintain our website, with communication to become a standing item for our council and executive meetings.
- Determine the type of notice board we will install on Carruthers Street.

**As endorsed unanimously at a congregational meeting 26 March 2023**