

Sydney Central Coast Presbytery



Life and Witness and Mission Study Consultation with Eastwood Uniting Church

April - June 2020

Consultation Team Members:

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Eastwood UC's Historical Context

Eastwood Uniting Church is the significant amalgamation of Congregations that at one time were reckoned to be among the largest of their respective denominations in NSW. However the formation of the Uniting Church in Australia inevitably begged the question of why two, by then declining, Uniting Churches were placed within several hundred metres of each other. The two Congregations amalgamated in the mid-90s, sold St Andrews, and used the proceeds to rebuild Lakeside Rd. The new facility was opened in 2009. In 2010 Denistone East Uniting Church, a daughter congregation to Lakeside Rd Methodist Church, re-amalgamated with Eastwood UC, moving into the new facility.

Eastwood UC's Missional Context

Eastwood and its surrounding suburbs have a strong Anglo-Celtic heritage. However, the Consultation Team heard, saw and discerned rapid changes in the ethnic diversity in the Eastwood, Epping and Ryde, geographical areas which have become a multicultural region, predominantly Asian. The Anglo culture is no longer dominant, as many Anglos in the Eastwood Congregation no longer live in Eastwood. Church attendance census data indicate that traditionally Eastwood has been the spiritual home for many Catholics. However, for the past quarter of a century the suburb has attracted increasing numbers of east Asian migrants. This is particularly clear in the Eastwood shopping precinct.

Multi-cultural and multi-ethnic Church Attendance

As far as church attendance is concerned, not long ago the most numerous non-Anglo ethnic group was Korean, especially in Eastwood. Now they are being replaced by many second and third generation non-Anglo groups who are a minority in the Congregation. Additionally, the second and third generation Asian cultures are English speaking. The NCLS statistics indicate that 36.5% identify as 'no religion'. These issues challenge the Congregation and the Presbytery as to which type of Church would best serve this region.

Living in and with a multicultural, Asian Context

According to the 2016 Census statistics; 38 percent of those who call Eastwood home were born in Australia, followed by 25.3% mainland China, 7.8% Korea, and 4.7% Hong Kong. However, 38.4% of respondents identify their Ancestry as being Chinese, 11.2% and 10.1% English and Australian and 8.2% as being Korean. These are significant cultural and communal characteristics that make up Eastwood and therefore affect how the Eastwood Congregation implements its worship, witness and service.

A goal and dream for the Congregation is to work toward an inter- and cross-cultural relationship within the church community and its work. At this stage Eastwood have four worshipping groups, one Chinese-speaking and three English-speaking, one of which tries to be multilingual. The decision making and committee bodies of the Congregation are also

mostly English speaking, but they have shown significant effort in integrating their intercultural relationships. There is still much work to be done within this space, to have representation of the multicultural church within the Congregation's leadership, and to provide spaces where alternative voices can be better heard.

Comments on Leadership

As Rev Nicholas Fried is retiring at the end of this year the future leadership of Eastwood UC requires detailed and urgent attention. The important questions are about leadership the Congregation will need into the next five to ten years, and what overall changes in the leadership need to occur to bring EUC closer to the multicultural vision its congregation affirms. As well, the Congregation of all ethnicities is mainly over 60 and there is a need to expand ministry to the younger generations without neglecting the needs of those who are ageing. There are also issues within the worshipping groups between those who prefer traditional versus more progressive theology; some of those but not all are aligned with cultural/ethnic differences. In the recent church survey shared worship and inclusive language in worship were two aspects favoured by many in the Congregation.

Nicholas' style of servant leadership has been universally applauded across the Congregation and staff at EUC. To achieve a more intercultural and intergenerational church community there is a need to meet with and listen regularly and intentionally to the different needs of the various groups. In this way respect and greater understanding can deepen and provide a stronger foundation for future directions.

From more than one person it was suggested that the most effective leadership structure would be a team consisting of an ordained minister and up to three part-time mission workers. To have someone working in the office – paid or voluntary – who speaks Chinese would be an asset. This model envisages one of the 3 mission workers concentrating on the Older Asians, the second addressing the 2nd and 3rd generations as a family, and the third growing the children and youth age groups. In any case it could be said that the team members will need to possess the skills of both a midwife and a palliative carer. As well, the Church Council would benefit from having a more multi-cultural membership.

Finding suitable people to fit these roles may not be easy but Eastwood UC has shown a willingness in the past to adapt to new circumstances and new cultural contexts so there is much hope that this will continue.

Finances

The Congregation is to be applauded on its financial management during its long history, but also during the externally hampered process of redeveloping and selling of the East Denistone properties, as well as being a leading congregation in developing a sinking fund for major repairs and building adequate reserves to absorb the unexpected challenges such as COVID19 on offerings. Its ability to fully cover ministry and staff costs from offerings is a goal that challenges many congregations.

With a smaller, though still substantial, expected sales proceeds in a low-income investment earning environment which has been further exacerbated by “pandemonomics”¹, the Congregation acknowledges that utilising capital is essential to further its mission objectives and restoring the sinking fund to its actuarially planned level. The Church council will need to prioritise the obtaining of Synod and Presbytery endorsement of the sales proceeds proposal as the Lane Cove grant towards the Chinese Congregation development and ministry ends in July 2020. The Review Team endorses the high priority of continuing the multiculturalism direction in the Eastwood region but with a greater emphasis on intercultural and intergenerational initiatives because of the locally changing ethnic diversity. The growth of young family activities is critical to replace the expected diminishing elderly members’ financial support.

The Review Team also sees that the current inhouse administration needs to be maintained. The review of the current level of property hall rentals is essential to correlate maintenance costs, potential GST implications and availability for changed Congregational activity.

The Kernel

Amongst many other considerations the Consultation Team sees several questions as being vital. In essence the pursuit of Eastwood’s Mission Planning poses the critical question, the **kernel**, for the life of the Uniting Church in Australia, namely, “**What type of church do we need to be in such a rapidly changing community context?**” In Eastwood’s case this one question generates three more:

1. Given the background described above, what shape should Eastwood’s Mission take? To be specific, what will the Congregation’s Chinese ministry look like in 3-5 years from now?
2. What shape should Eastwood’s leadership take to best facilitate its mission-shaped ministry? What will the mix of ordained, paid lay and volunteer lay ministry look like, year by year?
3. And how much money will Eastwood need to fund its mission (bearing in mind that much of this money will be used to pay its leaders), and from where will this money be obtained?

Conclusion: Eastwood can lead the way

By its unanimous support of the Mission Plan, Eastwood Uniting Church is convinced that the future of their Congregation lies in multi- and cross-cultural ministry to and with the swiftly growing numbers of East Asian immigrants. Through EUC’s relationship with Christian Community Aid Services, its long term ESL ministry, its relationship with several different kinds of multi-ethnic, multi-cultural congregations that use its facilities, and of course the experience gained from supporting its Chinese ministry, Eastwood UC now has a substantial body of experience in cross-cultural ministry to and with the Chinese community.

¹ Pandemic economics

Eastwood's Mission Plan mentions that it aspires to be a "regional" church but does not specifically define how they would be regional. Should it be a resource for the Congregations in the region, or should the congregations work more together or even become a multi-centred congregation to better benefit from shared resources? The Australian landscape is changing geographically, ethnically and culturally. The Church needs to adapt.

The time is ripe to build on the Eastwood Congregation's applauded mission initiatives to address the challenge of how the Uniting Church in Eastwood and its adjoining Congregations can achieve a new and effective multicultural, intercultural, intergenerational and Christian spiritual model of being a multicultural Church in Australia. This could be achieved in partnership with other congregations in the City of Ryde Zone together. The model would be augmented by the NSW ACT Synod working collaboratively with the Presbytery and the Congregations to achieve what Australia should be acknowledging generally, namely, Australia is a multicultural country but has a long way to becoming united as a multicultural community. Being multicultural is the start of the journey to becoming a united community with social cohesion and inclusion where each Australian is valued, yet able to maintain their individual ethnic culture in a diverse modern Australia.

Consultation Team

Jeremiah 29.11

June 2020

Areas of Affirmation:

1. Congratulate Eastwood Uniting Church for their faithful worship, witness and service during the period following the last Life & Witness Consultation.
2. Congratulate the Congregation for their detailed Strategic Mission Plan and their persistence in following it.
3. Note the Congregation's identification of multi-cultural and cross-cultural ministry and mission as key elements in that mission plan.

Areas for Consideration:

1. Suggest that the Congregation consider a key question: "What type of church do we need to be in such a rapidly changing community context?"
2. Note that the team has identified 3 key elements that need to be addressed by the Congregation and the Presbytery:
 - a. Multicultural mission and ministry
 - b. Appropriate Leadership
 - c. Adequate Finances

Recommendations:

For the Congregation

1. Review and update their Strategic Mission Plan Document. (Timeframe: 2021)
2. That they identify resources, personnel and mission opportunities that could be shared for better stewardship of resources within the Zone and in other parts of the Presbytery where multi-cultural ministry is emerging. (Timeframe: as able)

For the Presbytery:

According to Uniting Church in Australia Regulation 2.6.6 *“conduct a special consultation/mission study in order to recommend if the vacancy shall be filled”*; the Life and Witness Committee recommend that:

1. the vacancy at Eastwood Uniting Church be filled by a 1.0FTE Minister of the Word, as soon as possible. This recommendation has been endorsed by the SCCP Business Committee.
2. a JNC convenor be appointed by the Pastoral Relations Committee (PRC) at the next meeting of PRC.