

Eastwood Uniting Church

Church Council

2020 Annual Report

A challenging year.....

## 2020 Church Council Report

Church Council Members in 2020 were:

Chairperson	Emma Jarvis
Secretary	Michelle Weatherburn
Treasurer	Janelle Dodd
Caring	Lesley Bradbury
Vision	John Brunton
Congregation Rep and COVID 19 safety officer	Chris Wakefield
Congregational Rep	Jason Masters
Chinese Worship Group	Edward Lin and Sylvia Chan (by invitation)
Congregation Chair	Linda Brunton
Minister	Nicholas Fried (May - September) Jan Reeves (supply minister February - May)
Chinese-speaking Community Resource Worker Tennyson Chan (staff member)	

Nine Council meetings were held throughout the year, on 30<sup>th</sup> January, 19<sup>th</sup> March, 13<sup>th</sup> May, 10<sup>th</sup> June, 16<sup>th</sup> July, 13<sup>th</sup> August, 17<sup>th</sup> September, 22<sup>nd</sup> October and 19<sup>th</sup> November. Summary notes on the issues discussed and decisions made at each meeting were distributed to the Congregation through the weekly notices and these should be taken in conjunction with this report. Meetings were held online from March due to the COVID19 pandemic restrictions.

Eastwood Christian Community Aid Board: EUC representative is Stephen Kemp.

Sydney Central Coast Presbytery (SCCP): EUC representatives are Rev Nicholas Fried (now retired), Jason Masters and Linda Brunton.

Information on Presbytery can be found on its website <http://sccpresbytery.org.au>

SCCP Tertiary Chaplaincy Reference Committee (previously Macquarie University Chaplaincy Committee) EUC representatives was Nicholas Fried (now retired).

### Congregational Meetings

Two Congregational meetings were held at the worship centre in 2020:

- 24<sup>th</sup> February - to receive 2019 Annual Reports from church groups and audited Financial Statements to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2019 and; to take action in relation to the notice of retirement of Rev Fried and commencement of the process to call a new minister to EUC.
- 13<sup>th</sup> December – to receive the report and recommendation of the Joint Nominating Committee to call a new Minister to EUC. Resolved to call Rev. Amelia Koh-Butler to be Minister of the word.

### EUC Staff and Administration

Minister of the Word: Rev Nicholas Fried (retired December)  
(Rev. Amelia Koh-Butler commenced March 2021).

Supply Ministers: Rev. Jan Reeves (February to May, due to sick leave of Rev Fried)  
Rev. Ian Pearson (from December to March 2021, due to retirement of Rev. Fried)

Church office administration: Michelle Loxton, Kerrie Springett (retired November)  
Chinese Speaking Community Resource Worker: Tennyson Chan

The office administration team experienced a difficult year, due to the COVID19 restrictions, additional safety requirements, closure of the church buildings and the absence for several months of Rev Fried due to illness, annual leave and retirement. The church office is the contact point for members, building users and any visitors. Kerrie Springett retired in November and we are thankful for the service she has provided to EUC in that role. Church Council is most grateful to Michelle Loxton for her outstanding service in continuing to keep the church office and administration services running since November in difficult circumstances.

As has been noted previously, Sundays are worship time for our administration team, so we continue to encourage people to make any enquiries relating to Church administration matters on weekdays when the office is open.

### COVID 19 Pandemic

The year 2020 at EUC was impacted by the need to respond to the COVID19 pandemic and to provide a safe church for staff, members, tenants and our community.

The Church needed to provide what services and facilities were possible in the circumstances, while responding to public health requirements, provide safety and maintain contact with members. As a result, the church premises were required to close for all users from March to 15<sup>th</sup> November and again in December 2020 and January 2021, during which time online services were provided via zoom, YouTube and WeChat. Hard copies of the 9.30am service were prepared and delivered with the weekly newsletter by the church admin team to members unable to access online. Thus the church buildings were closed over Easter and Christmas, which severely restricted these celebrations. The annual Service of Remembrance also had to be cancelled.

This situation was made more difficult with the absence of Rev Nicholas Fried for much of the year due to sick leave (full time October 2019 to May 2020, part time May to July), annual leave (October and November) and retirement (from December). The assistance of supply ministers Rev. Jan Reeves (February to May) and Rev Ian Pearson (from December) was invaluable, particularly as the need to close the church and convert to online worship was thrust upon ministers and office staff with little notice. The assistance of church members and others stepping in to prepare and lead services has been uplifting. Janine Joannou has been tireless, maintaining Sunday school activities and a regular weekly online social chat for members.

The uncertainty about the church's operation from week to week, responding to new unforeseen challenges, use of different technology, health measures and COVID19 safety plans, tenants' issues, financial issues and the absence of Rev. Fried, placed enormous pressure on our church administration team to maintain facilities and services, undertake research and implement safety measures as the main church contact point for members, tenants and the community.

At the beginning of the church closure in March, a zoom meeting licence was purchased through NSW Synod, which has enabled adaptation of some church activities to online.

This included Church Council meetings, bible studies, a new Friday night social chat, Sunday school, 8pm worship services and various church group meetings.

Due to the church closure, tenants were also not permitted to use the premises. The church buildings are usually used during the week by a wide range of community groups and activities. With the reopening of premises to limited activities, subject to government health and safety requirements, the church was and is still required to have a COVID19 safety plan. All groups using the church have been required to provide their own COVID19 Safety plan, consistent with the Church plan and NSW Health requirements. While some weekday activities recommenced later in 2020, the COVID restrictions limit the type of activities, the capacity and participant numbers, whilst requiring additional, costly cleaning measures.

Church Council member Chris Wakefield in the role of COVID19 safety officer has expertly guided the church and our user groups through the regulations and inspected activities to ensure compliance. Superfluous furniture was removed from the various church spaces and plastic chairs utilised for ease of regular cleaning after each individual use.

The Church Council wishes to express its sincere appreciation to our administration team Michelle and Kerrie for their efforts throughout 2020, often in very testing circumstances, particularly during the long absences of our Minister Rev. Fried. The Council is most appreciative of the assistance given by all those church members and others who have assisted with worship services, online group meetings, presentations and get togethers, and undertaken other tasks in the absence of our Minister during this time.

It continues to be very difficult to find volunteers to assist with many tasks, including with Sunday worship. We particularly thank our pianists and singers who performed when the Congregation was not been permitted to sing.

#### Retirement of Rev Nicholas Fried.

Early in 2020 Rev. Nicholas Fried formally advised of his proposed retirement at the end of November 2020. At the Church Council meeting in September, the last to be attended by Rev Fried before his retirement, Nicholas was formally thanked for his many years of service and guidance, providing direction for the Congregation and our mission and for the stimulating sermons and teaching we have received while he was the Minister at Eastwood. Rev. Fried expressed his appreciation of the support given to him by Church Council.

A Closure of Ministry Service and gift presentation for Rev. Nicholas Fried was held at EUC on Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> November at 9.30am. Despite COVID19 restrictions, the service was attended by EUC and presbytery members, friends from Nicholas's previous congregations and Nicholas's family, including his children Mathew and Rebecca, both of whom flew over from Europe and had to quarantine for 2 weeks beforehand.

#### Calling of Rev Amelia Koh-Butler

Despite the difficulties of living in a COVID19 restricted society during 2020, EUC was able to successfully navigate the process to call a new Minister, Rev Amelia Koh-Butler, who commenced in March 2021.

The Congregation meeting of 23<sup>rd</sup> February, considered the proposed retirement of Rev. Nicholas Reid on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2020 and a completed Congregation Background Information document was provided by EUC to Presbytery in February 2020. The Sydney Central Coast Presbytery (SCCP) then initiated a Life and Witness Consultation for EUC, the purpose of which is to strengthen the life and witness of the Congregation, to assess future ministerial and lay leadership needs, and to review the records of the Congregation.

The SCCP carried out the Life and Witness Consultation for EUC during the first half of 2020, following which a Congregation Placement Profile was finalised with Church Council. Nominations were sought from EUC members for the Joint Nominating Committee (JNC) and an online and hardcopy voting process of the congregation was undertaken (as to the church was unable to hold a congregation meeting due to COVID19 restrictions). Members of the JNC were: Rev Mark Hillis (Chair), Rev Tammy Hollands and Rev Graham Perry (as SCCP representatives) and from EUC, Emma Ewin, Phil Looby, Edward Lin, Janine Joannou, Catherine Leal and John Brunton.

During the second half of the year the JNC met and considered candidates for the Minister of the Word at EUC, resulting in the recommendation that was accepted by the Congregation in December. Due to COVID19 restrictions, much of the process to call a new Minister relied on digital technology, for which we are most grateful.

At the Congregation meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2020, the Congregation unanimously approved, by consensus, that Eastwood Uniting Church issue a call to the Rev. Dr. Amelia Koh-Butler. At this meeting Rev Dr. Amelia Koh-Butler indicated her intention to accept the call, which was formalised with Synod in late December.

Thankfully, our Congregation meeting in February to commence the process to call a new Minister was held just before the first COVID 19 closures in March and our Congregation meeting in December to Call our new Minister was held just before the Church buildings were again closed due to a new COVID19 outbreak in Sydney.

### EUC Worship

The following Sunday Worship Services were provided during 2020, at the church when permitted by COVID19 restrictions, or online, with the use of various digital technologies. Each of these services is very different in style and presentation and this variety allows people to worship in a way that best meets their needs.

8 am

This service is informal and has a regular attendance of people who take it in turn to lead worship each Sunday.

9.30 am

This is the worship service with the most attenders and includes Sunday school. It is generally led by the Minister or guest preachers as arranged. In 2020, due to COVID19 restrictions, we had to forgo the practice of the first Sunday of each month being 'something different', that allows alternative ways of worship to be explored and experienced.

2.00 pm

This is a Chinese language service. The EUC Chinese speaking community resource worker assists and guest preachers are engaged.

The 10.45am worship service, previously held on the first Sunday of the month as an alternative to the 9.30am 'something different' service was not held during 2020. In the past it has been attended by around 10 people and catered for those who prefer a more traditional style of music and worship.

### Communications

The website is the first reference point for information on the activities of the Church. The website provided access to online services and other Uniting Church services and resources during 2020. Maintaining the currency and relevance of the website is an important and ongoing challenge.

Weekly notices continued to be published and distributed. Our Contact magazine, (a forum for opinion and keeping the EUC community in touch) was not produced in 2020 due to the pressure of other administration tasks and the COVID19 response.

### Caring Umbrella Group

The Caring Umbrella Group provide support and pastoral care to the Congregation and maintained contact with members during the isolation of 2020. Thanks to Lesley Bradbury for convening the group. The Friday night online chat co-ordinated by Janine Joannou helped participants to stay connected to the church.

The planned Thanksgiving and Remembrance Service scheduled in December was regrettably cancelled at short notice due to a sudden COVID19 closure of the church.

### Children's Ministry

Children's ministry includes Sunday school activities and Special Religious Education (Scripture) in schools.

EUC currently provides Scripture at Eastwood Public School and Denistone East Public School. The number of children attending SRE in schools is decreasing.

SRE was not permitted in schools in 2020 until the last school term. Thanks to our volunteer teachers Maria Allerdice at Eastwood Public, and Julie Worsley at Denistone East. Thanks also to Maria for stepping in to take extra classes in the place of Rev. Fried.

Sunday School has for many years been co-ordinated by Janine Joannou. There are many challenges, including regular sporting and other children's organised activities scheduled on Sundays, engaging the interest of children in this digital age and the number and age range of children and their regularity of attendance (from 2 to 15 children per week with an age range from kindergarten to teenagers).

In 2020, most additional children's activities such as picnics had to be curtailed. During the church closures online Sunday school was held with primary children in the morning and youth in the afternoon. When the church reopened, the Sunday school had its own approved COVID19 safety plan and individual activity packs were provided for each child to use at the church. Online access to Sunday school at the church continues to be provided for those unable to attend in person.

Thanks to Janine and her team for their innovative efforts and enthusiasm for the development and spiritual growth of our young people. There is always a need for more

volunteers to share the load of leading activities in Sunday school or to assist with SRE. Family Ministry and youth support across our local community is the future of the church and as such, is an area that our Mission Plan aims to support.

### Continuing Christian Education

A number of educational activities were held online during the year including several bible studies series and film discussions. Visiting speakers were not possible. Thanks to Trevor Bird who was Convenor of the Continuing Christian Education Umbrella Group in 2020 and Christopher Cooper who has taken over in 2021.

An online Chinese language bible study was held on Saturdays through the 2pm leadership group.

Janine Joannou leads a women's discussion group on Wednesday mornings at the church, which has its own approved COVID19 safety plan.

Council supports the work of these groups as critical education and outreach activities.

### BBQ Outreach Group

Unfortunately our regular Sunday barbeques in Marsfield at Waterloo Park and in the Eastwood community in Eastwood Park have not been held in 2020 due to COVID19 restrictions. In the past the barbecues have been well attended by members of the wider community and Tennyson Chan and several people from the English conversation group have assisted with breaking down communication barriers.

These events require planning and teamwork from a committed team. New volunteers will be required to assist with their organisation in order for the BBQ Outreach to continue when it is safe to do so.

### Friendship with Gilgandra Uniting Church

Consistent with our Mission Plan, the Congregation has pursued a friendship with a rural congregation, being Gilgandra Uniting Church. EUC has continued to pray for the people of Gilgandra, however this contact has been limited in 2020 to email.

### Finance

Due to the COVID 19 pandemic restrictions, the 2020/2021 Budget was approved by Church Council only, as permitted by Presbytery. Accounts for year ended 30<sup>th</sup> June 2020 were approved by Church Council and the auditors report for 2019/2020 was received in October. The 6 monthly report to 30<sup>th</sup> December was received and noted by Church Council in January 2021.

The Federal Government Jobkeeper payments of approximately \$100,000 have supported payment of existing staff, and greatly assisted the continued church operation during 2020. Jobkeeper payments finished in March 2021. We are also very grateful to Lane Cove Uniting Church for a grant for 2019/2020, which enabled the continuation of the employment of our Chinese resource worker in 2020.

The church's financial position is stretched as we continue to fund costs out of our reserves. With the lack of rental payments for the use of church premises, additional cleaning costs due to COVID19 restrictions, the completion of the grant payment from Lane Cove Church and the decline of donations from church members, EUC finances will be in difficulty when framing a budget for the 2021/2022 financial year.

The future financial outlook for EUC is sobering and additional sources for funding will be required in future to implement our Mission Plan.

### Property

Property matters continued to take up a large amount of the office administration time, despite closure of the church for much of the year. This included organising and being present during major roof repairs at Lakeside Rd. due to storm damage, reorganising the various church halls and rooms to be consistent with COVID19 Safety Plans and requirements, routine maintenance and repairs and additional cleaning and security arrangements each week.

The National Broadband Network was connected to the Lakeside Rd property in 2020.

Regular working bees were held during the year to assist with the maintenance of the grounds. These have been carried out by a small group of dedicated workers to whom we are very thankful. Additional volunteers are always very welcome.

The Auld St manse was vacated by the Fried family in December. After maintenance and repairs, the house has been leased, through an estate agent, in February 2021. The funds from the lease will be used to pay the rent of an apartment for our new Minister.

The Vera Street manse continues to be let, with funds being used for church property expenses.

The first sale of the Denistone East Church and hall site in 2020 did not proceed due to the purchaser's lack of funds due to COVID19 circumstances. A second sale of the site for \$2.7M was finalised in March 2021. Members of the Property Committee have worked hard to maintain the site during the sale process.

### Eastwood Uniting Church Musical Society

Due to COVID19 restrictions EUC Musical Society has not been able to hold events of any kind in 2020. EUCMS continues to utilize storage space at the church.

### Other matters

Due to COVID19 restrictions, all community events in which EUC usually participates including the Granny Smith Festival and the Moon Festival were not held.

Linda Brunton

Congregation Chair.