



**uniting
church**
Canberra Region
Presbytery

Stories from Congregations in our Presbytery about the Missional Use of Property

VIEWPOINT

Special Edition; 2024

A magazine of the Canberra Region Presbytery of the Uniting Church in Australia.

Online copy at canberra.uca.org.au

Contents

Introduction from the Minister - Congregation Futures	3
O'CONNOR	5
BATEMANS BAY	7
YASS	10
QUEANBEYAN	12
TUGGERANONG	14
KIPPAX	16
ALPINE	18
Concluding remarks	21

Introduction from the Minister - Congregation Futures

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a joy to introduce these congregation stories to you.

The Presbytery Mission Plan is the inspiration for bringing these stories together. The Mission Plan is the result of a yearlong grass roots planning process across the Presbytery.

Throughout 2022 and into the start of 2023, representatives from congregations and their ministers gathered together over 5 days to discern the mission plan for across the Presbytery. We did this together.

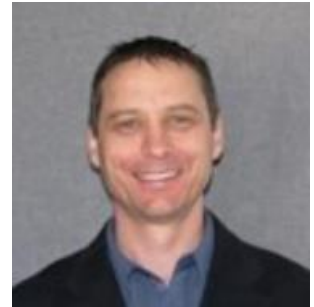
One of the commitments of the plan gives rise to telling these stories here. It is a commitment about using church property to resource God's mission – God's purposes. The stories are being told to encourage us to use our church property more in God's mission to grow connections with our local communities.

Some of the stories are about growing such connections through building relationships with those who rent our church properties, rather than just

having a landlord/tenant arrangement.

It makes sense to concentrate on building relationships with these people who rent our church properties. These are people who already know where we are, they already come through our doors in the course of the week, and we already have contact with them.

Our relationships with renters until now may probably be best characterised as transactional. By transactional I mean a landlord/tenant kind of arrangement in which community groups need a space to use, and in return we are happy to receive rent to help pay the property bills. It is not much more than a very helpful transaction. Their arrangement with the church is administrative. It may be organized by the church admin/office person or property manager, and involves hire agreements, keys and payments.



The following stories are about encouraging a shift from transactional to relational. They are stories from congregations about some of their experience in aiming to be more relational. Some of these stories might seem big and others small. Some may sound successful, others may be about lessons learned and trying again.

What is so important about becoming more relational with our renters? The bigger picture is that through rubbing shoulders

with our renters we will have a better chance of noticing the footprints of God already in their lives. Through building relationships we will see more of how the Spirit of God is already at work in them, and we will be better placed to respond.

May these stories encourage us all to use our church properties in relational ways with our local communities.

Rev Andrew Smith
Congregation Futures

O'CONNOR

Using property to represent the love of Christ to the whole community.

Although once a larger congregation, at present O'Connor Uniting has a membership of 12, most of whom are adults aged 60 years and above. Some young people are now attending.

In addition to the church building the congregation has stewardship of two residential properties, which are leased, and help to pay outgoing costs.

In 2008 the members decided to embark on a process of asset-based outreach.

With assistance from the Federal and ACT Governments, the congregation expended all their funds to upgrade the facilities and ensure their property was Workplace, Health, and Safety compliant, so that it could be available for community use.

It took great faith to invest all their finances in the new community focussed way.

When the property improvements were completed, the property's assets were advertised. Responses were received from some seventeen community groups and conversations began.

The running of the community organic garden on the two old tennis courts was outsourced to the Canberra Organic Growers Society and involves 15 families.

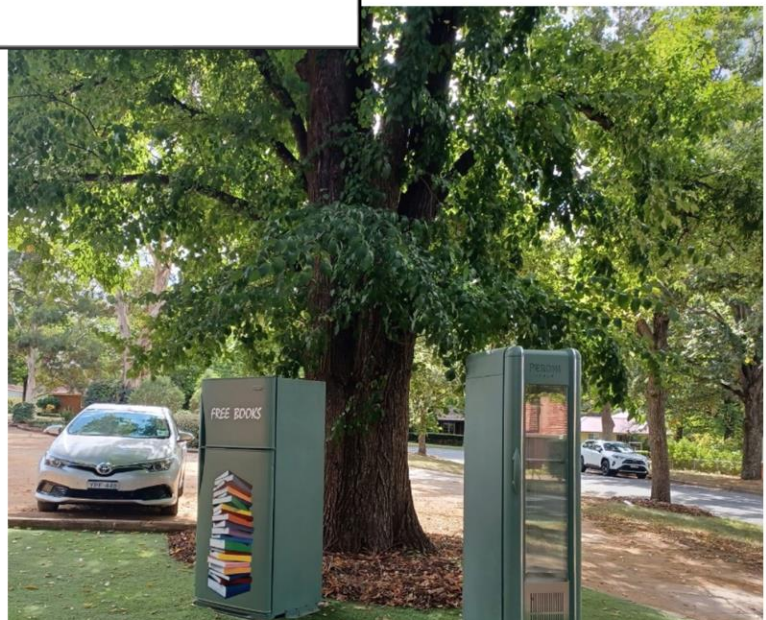
O'Connor now employs an administrative assistant for ten hours a week and has an excellent gardener which ensures the church and grounds look alive and welcoming.

The properties, though comparatively expensive to maintain, especially the church building, are well maintained on the basis that the properties reflect the health and the heart of the church which is waiting for God to lead them to the next thing He wants them to do.

O'Connor Uniting congregation believes that their property provides a base: "to represent the love of Christ to the whole community."



Community Garden O'Connor UC Open Day
April 2022



O'Connor Community book library and Pantry

BATEMANS BAY

From squash courts to a community-oriented church

How does a church make use of a former squash court facility? Trevor Kohlhagen explained that Bateman's Bay (the northern part of Eurobodalla parish) has handled this opportunity by re-arranging it as a worship area, office, meeting room, kitchen and lounge, while retaining two squash courts. The wide range of rooms available, together with a team of volunteers, enables provision of a diverse range of activities which service the community as well as members of the church. These activities are widely appreciated by the community and have created much respect and goodwill. Here is a summary of the activities.

- Commercial hire of the squash courts for competition and casual use (includes tourists on wet days). As a result of conversations with some squash court members, Trevor and others have been able to give personal support and facilitate financial support and this has led to appreciative feedback.
- There is also commercial hire of other rooms but with little interaction with hirers.
- Provision of facilities for local community groups, e.g. Sing Australia which has reciprocated by singing at a church service.
- A church-organised art group which is open to outsiders; it is helpful for retirees and for those who have early-stage dementia or are isolated.
- Pivot Point Outreach Centre operates on Monday and Friday to help people in need by supplying dry groceries, personal supplies and limited frozen food, and fuel (for travel to specialist appointments). Government support was cancelled by the Morrison government and the Centre now depends entirely on donations. The Centre provided showers and a washing machine and dryer for those sheltering from the 2019-20 fires. These services have continued to be available for the homeless.
- The church became an Overflow Refuge Centre for those who could not be accommodated in the Bateman's Bay Emergency Centre during the 2019-20

fires. Federal, State and Synod grants since then have enabled installation of air conditioning with filters, solar panels, a battery and a backup generator, emergency bedding, a disabled shower, a stair lift, and soon to be installed baby feeding area for future emergencies.

- The church offered use of its quiet, non-threatening environment to provide a drop-in centre for people with suicidal tendencies. There were insufficient qualified volunteers to keep this project going but the church's efforts created a lot of goodwill.
- The church holds a local talent concert which not only raises funds but demonstrates that the church is open and not judgmental.





Bateman's Bay stair lift



Bateman's Bay battery pack

YASS

Embraces line dancing as a vibrant community activity

Yass Parish has opened its doors to a local line dancing group, providing a unique space for social connection and exercise. Ruth, a member of Yass Parish and responsible for property bookings, shares the journey of how the line dancing group found a home within the church community.

- Yass Parish has a small but well-equipped hall that has recently become a hub for a line dancing group. In June, a group of enthusiastic ladies approached Ruth seeking to hire the hall for their line dancing activities. Embracing the idea, Ruth worked with the church council to extend a warm welcome to the group.
- Ruth emphasizes the social aspect of the line dancing group, highlighting its significance beyond exercise. Members, including those who are widowed or new to Yass, find solace in the sense of community the group provides. Ruth saw this as an excellent opportunity for the church to connect with their fellow community members, bridging gaps and fostering friendships.
- The line dancing group has flourished under the support of Yass Parish. Ruth, now an active member of the group, attests to its positive impact on her life and the lives of others. The weekly gatherings extend beyond dance, becoming a platform for members to share stories, celebrate birthdays, and provide emotional support to those in need. Sometimes the cuppa takes up an hour of their two-hour session!
- The growing relationships were evident when during the week Ruth encountered a fellow group member facing challenges in the midst of a recent move after her husband's passing. Ruth listened and offered support. A testimony of how building connections with hall users can lead to further opportunities for relationship with the local community.

- Looking ahead, Ruth aims to encourage more members of the congregation to join the line dancing group, recognizing its potential to create and strengthen community bonds and enrich the lives of participants.



Yass line dancers

QUEANBEYAN

Bargains and hospitality helping to bring the congregation closer to its local community

For over 30 years Queanbeyan UC has conducted a monthly jumble sale from a purpose-built shed at the back of the church grounds. In his mission plan “QuickStart” presentation to Presbytery, church council chair Ian Robinson talked about the jumble sale and the contribution it makes to the Queanbeyan community. He went on to describe a new initiative, linked to the jumble sale, through which the congregation hopes to draw even closer to the community it serves.

- The jumble sale is held on the 4th Saturday in the month, 9 to 12 noon. It is an event that facilitates the recycling of clothes and household goods, an outcome that is good for the planet. Prices are kept low and those in need given special consideration. The sale is run by a team of around a dozen very committed volunteers, some of whom are not members of the church, and normally raises around \$12,000 to \$15,000 each year. For more detail and a history of the event see <https://www.quc.org.au/support/jumble-sale>
- Ian told us that the jumble sale attracts a good crowd, drawn not only by the bargains to be got but also the opportunity it offers to meet and catch up with people. There is also the added draw of a free morning tea. For as part of the jumble sale the church operates a café where patrons can enjoy tea or coffee and home cooking. Little wonder then that the jumble sale is well-established in the local community calendar.
- In 2023 the church started something new, a ‘meet our neighbours’ initiative. As part of the jumble sale, once a quarter, there is now a free sausage sizzle or in the colder months soup kitchen. Jumble sale patrons are beneficiaries of course but the initiative is also directed at groups which use rooms at Queanbeyan UC during the week.

- Regular users of Queanbeyan UC premises include a Samoan congregation, dance and theatre groups and Uniting which conducts a seniors program there four times a week. Relations with these users are good while the rent they pay is an important source of income to Queanbeyan UC. Ian said, however, that there is little contact between users and members of the congregation and that the church would like to see that change. So, prior to a quarterly jumble sale, invitations are sent to these groups encouraging them to attend. An invitation is also sent to the childcare centre adjacent to the church. Ian says that the initiative is still building, but the hope is it will continue to grow and build connections with the church's local community including those who use the church's property.



Queanbeyan Jumble sale



Queanbeyan Jumble sale

TUGGERANONG

Missional use of property with planning and imagination

- Tuggeranong Uniting Church workshopped how they could best use their property for mission and then put it place with imagination. First up after the Covid epidemic to get the church noted they did a Floriade Re-imagined. Helped by a contribution from the ACT Government they planted masses of colourful tulips which drew compliments from the local community and, helped by the Rev Elizabeth Raine dressed up as a fairy, got publicity in the Canberra Times. This was followed by Christmas Re-imagined where a range of activities were put on to attract the public. The activities spread over the whole property and included a petting zoo with goats, ducks, hens and so on, a café, a BBQ, music, card making and craft. To give it the Christmas feel, the congregation dressed up as biblical characters from the Christmas story.
- In conjunction with See Change Tuggeranong they run a Springfest sustainable festival in which the whole property is covered with stalls for craft and clothes, etc on a sustainability re-use theme. Also, with See Change Tuggeranong they regularly run toy swap and clothes swap days and a repair café.
- Three days a month Tuggeranong Uniting Church runs a pop-up Op-Shop, Red Dove, focusing on pre-loved clothes. It is very well patronized by the community and provides an opportunity for contact with the members of the community. Helpers in the Op-Shop wear red tee-shirts with a quote from Micah on them and have done the Speaking Jesus course run by the UK Fresh Expressions.

- Tuggeranong Uniting Church is certainly one that catches the attention of the community, including by means of the large colourful mural on the outside of the building.



Tuggeranong Mural wall



Tuggeranong 'Do Justice'

KIPPAX

Church Centre a place to gather, find aid and grow

At the ZOOM presentation on using property for mission Stella Muspratt from Kippax Uniting Church tells how for over twenty-five years they have used their church centre buildings to provide a place for the community to gather, find aid and grow. The hub of activity there provides exciting opportunities for building relationships and mission.

- The Welcome Café put on by the Kippax Emergency Relief Team offers a free community breakfast every Thursday morning and twice a month a free community lunch. People can stay as long or as short as they wish. Without pressure there is the chance to talk and hear about the other activities at the centre.
- Recognising the importance of people knowing they do not need to be alone, Kippax uses its spaces to address isolation and loneliness in the community. There is the Annual Christmas Campaign providing Christmas food hampers and selected gifts. (500 people came through the doors in 2022 to receive these.) Kippax Uniting Church also puts on a Christmas in July Dinner and a Christmas Day Lunch. A number of regular groups, such as a weekly craft group, a monthly mandala & meditation group and an over 70s group also provide social inclusion opportunities.
- Kippax seeks to provide services and activities that are needed by the community. One of the longest running and always popular is the Holiday Happenings. It is run on two days each school holiday and enables young children to do craft, play listen and tinker. More recently, Kippax have started two community youth groups, one for primary school age children, the other for high schoolers which have attracted both church families and a significant number of families from the wider community.

- The Emergency Relief Pantry Emergency and Financial Aid (EMFA) program offers short term material and financial aid. Food donated is stored in the church centre. This service provides a gateway for the other activities and services offered.
- As Stella said Kippax Uniting Church is a safe place where no-one is judged and everyone is welcome.



Kippax Emergency Relief Pantry



Kippax Holiday Activities



ALPINE

(JINDABYNE) Uniting Church

It is over food that love is expressed, and hearts are opened

A banner at the Uniting Church in Jindabyne asks: “Why does the Op Shop provide a meal?” and responds: “Because it is over food that love is expressed, and hearts are opened.”

During the winter ski season each Monday 5.00 pm- 6.30 pm Alpine Uniting Church through its Soul Food Kitchen hosts around 150-200 people for Soup and Sweets.

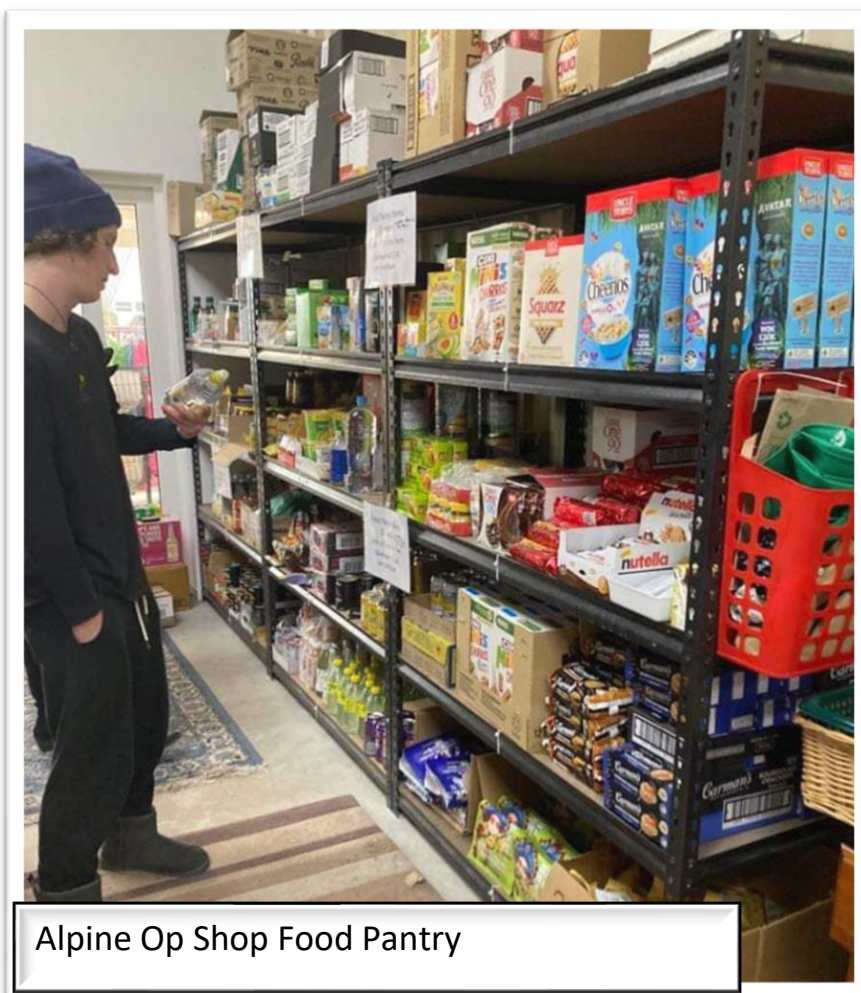
The Alpine congregation numbers approximately 12 - 15 regular

attendees. These locals are assisted on Mondays by local volunteers including school students, workers, and help from the Salvation Army in Cooma. Approximately 80 litres of soup is served each Monday. One tub of soup is prepared by the chef at the Seventh Day Adventist camp.



Alpine and Soul Food Kitchen hosts dinner

Snowy Mountains Country Fresh Produce, a wholesale fruit and vegetable warehouse, provides food fruit and vegetables that are nearing their use by date to create the soup and other food items; Woolworths provides various items from time to time; Ironpot Artisan Alpine Bakery provides some sourdough bread; other supporters from time to time are The Friendly Grocer and supermarkets in Perisher and Thredbo. Some goods are sold through the Op Shop Food Pantry, which obtains most of its goods from Foodbank NSW & ACT at a significantly reduced price. Most items are sold at around \$1.00 each. There are some 50-400 grocery transactions on a typical Winter Monday evening.



The Op Shop is operated by a range of volunteers who recognise that the shop operates on behalf of the church. Gross sales, of which the sale of clothing together with ski clothing and equipment and form a large part, are in excess of \$150,000 annually.

Donations are received based on: Is it clean? Does it work? Is it broken?

Would you buy it? Over the last few

months, we have been more rigorous in accepting donations with less than 1/3 being sent to waste. The rest our donated goods are able to be sold through the shop or sent to One Ten Enterprises who forward them to other countries.

The Alpine Uniting Church, Op Shop and Soul Food Kitchen work with other community groups and Christians in Jindabyne. There is a network of organisations that referrals are made to if additional assistance is required. Pro bono appointments can be made at the Op Shop with a legal firm, for initial legal advice. Alpine Uniting has also recently established Alpine Helping Hands which provides limited, short term, and confidential assistance to people of all ages who may be experiencing hardship.

A new initiative for this Winter is a QR code on our dining tables which links to the Alpine Uniting Church website where information about our environmental initiatives, and about other community organisations, is available.

During the Monday meals members of the Jindabyne Christian community are available to provide pastoral care to anyone in need, and once the meal has concluded we hold our weekly one-hour bible study which anyone can attend.

The relatively small membership of Alpine Uniting Church has established an organic process that brings with it many opportunities for contact with a range of locals, visitors, businesses, workers, and organisations, and has brought recognition of Christian ideals and practices in Jindabyne.

Concluding remarks

Rev Andrew Smith, Minister - Congregation *Futures*

To these stories let me add the story from one of the Bible passages that underpins the Presbytery mission plan. It is the account of Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts chapter 8. In that reading the Spirit sends Philip on a journey. When Philip comes across the Eunuch travelling home in his chariot, the Spirit prompts Philip to join him. Philip is invited into the chariot and it is there that he rubs shoulders with the Eunuch and notices some of the footprints of God already in his life. It is a very relational encounter that leads to the Eunuch asking to be baptized.

Who knows where rubbing shoulders and being relational like this might lead us in how we use our church properties. It may well lead us on a journey to being used by God to support renters and other property users in their spiritual journey. Together with them we may be able to discern and create new ways of being a community of faith that is fitting.

Please note, this is not about getting them to come to church worship on Sunday morning. That might be fitting for some. For others, new ways of being Christian community will be found. It starts with meeting them where they are at and seeing how we can be part of what God is doing in them. A bit like how God sent Philip to meet the Eunuch.

These congregation stories are about one of the steps along the way. It is a step right at the start of the journey. It is about building the ways we rub shoulders with our renters and other property users. It is being more than landlords and tenants. It is a shift from transactional to relational.

In closing, I invite you to pause to pray the affirmation in the mission plan ...

- ❖ Blessed are you God for you are always present, preparing the way and calling us into mission.
- ❖ Blessed are you God for you are doing new things in us and through us in unexpected, surprising, and amazing ways.
- ❖ Blessed are you God for you are calling us outward to be present and engaged in our communities.
- ❖ Blessed are you God for your faithfulness leads us to share and grow our faith, calling and forming new disciples.

If any of these stories have sparked your imagination about using your church property differently, please contact Rev Andrew Smith to see how Presbytery might encourage you further. ministerc@cruc.org.au 0437 011 338.

For further inspiration about using church property for mission, view the videos behind the above congregation stories –

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/jrqlava3x7zzjofyoea1t/Missional-Use-of-Property-240105.mp4?rlkey=6gtev47d7vpwgd9799q2dhri8&dl=0>