

# Regional Partnership: Riverina Presbytery Newsletter

June 2024



*The Regional Partnership is the Committee charged with oversight and responsibilities of the Riverina. We meet monthly and this Newsletter is a summary of the meeting held on **12 June 2024**.*

*At each Regional Partnership meeting we begin our conversation with discussion around theology, the Church and then in prayer together. The Regional Partnership, as part of the practice of Saltbush, grounds our work and conversation within our faith rather than our faith within our work.*

## Regional Partnership Chairperson's Report

Greetings from the Regional Partnership Committee.

The bite of winter is well and truly with us, but the days are gradually lengthening and soon the warmth will again be too hot, and we will again long for winter. I know there is a gift in valuing the present moment. Paul said, 'I have learned in whatsoever state I am in therewith to be content' *Philippians 4:11*, but I question when to be content and when to strive for something different. If we are content with our church as it is, then the wealthy enjoy a range of things the poorer parts of the church can't have. The challenge is learning to be content even as we seek justice in how our church shares resources.

We have held 2 out of 4 discernment summits. In the first one, the Presbyteries all agreed to form a Presbytery Resource Fund which will finance ministry resources in each presbytery. The second summit agreed that the focus of each Presbytery should be to encourage, support and equip each congregation, faith community and parish mission.

The third summit will focus on what positions each Presbytery needs and what form our 12 Presbyteries might take. Do we stay as 12 or reconfigure in some way. The challenge of being content vs change looms large. If we stay in our familiar/comfortable bounds, how can we be all the church needs of us in the coming years?

Your prayers are warmly welcome.

## Conversation with Wagga Wesley Congregation

Wagga Wesley was our guest congregation this month. It was a joy to welcome Lyn Butler, Sharene Fechner and Kathy Ludwig. Lyn shared a PowerPoint presentation that covered what it is like to live in Wagga and how they serve the local community, what is going well and what they are excited about.

Key points include:

- The change in demographics with people coming from overseas and without necessarily being able to speak English. Wesley celebrated this diversity at Pentecost, enabling different cultural groups to hear their own language in worship.
- Wagga Wesley have advocated for and welcomed Pacific Australia Labour Mobility scheme (PALM) workers from PNG. Lyn spoke to some of the issues they face and how the congregation assists. This is a growing ministry in rural areas and Wesley is offering very fine ministry in this area.

- Difficulties include finding ways to engage with the opportunities for growth and outreach; the effects of an ageing congregation; how to support young members when the volunteer base is dwindling; providing transport for old and young; and providing music in worship.
- Wagga Wesley's plans for the future involve addressing financial challenges; exploring ways of being able to call a minister, to help build the congregations leadership base and their understanding of governance.
- They hope to develop a greater use of technology, a stable leadership team, and provide industrial chaplaincy to PALM workers including collaboration with Synod Mission PALM consultant and achieve financial security. In 10 years' time Wesley expects to be more multicultural, a potentially smaller but younger congregation, and the building utilised by more community groups.
- I thanked them for the presentation and commented that when I had been to Wagga Wesley recently had been struck by the ageing part of the church but also the effort that is going into working with the PALM workers and the care that is shown. The Synod PALM worker is still waiting for the Visa to come through. This can take from 56 days to 3-months.
- Geoff added that a conversation is happening this weekend with Alimoni around potential in this space.
- The Regional Partnership are encouraged at the work Wesley are doing and look forward to providing some assistance with compliance and governance obligations, and other areas.

Please add Wagga Wesley to your prayers.

### Riverina Griffith Uniting Church Profile

Griffith Congregation is experiencing significant change. Sione and Ako Nosa, with their two daughters are relocating to Sydney. Sione and Ako have been an enormous gift to the church and we wish them every blessing in their new adventure.

This has led to Griffith thinking whether it could continue as a congregation. After a series of meetings, a young contingent have stepped forward and are picking up the reins.

Parramatta Nepean Presbytery have generously agreed that Rev Liva Tukutama will be seconded for 50% of this time for six months. Liva will spend two weeks every month with Griffith, helping them rebuild the congregation and form a leadership team, in readiness for a Minister.

Geoff has led this process extremely well and we are thrilled to approve the profile for Griffith. We now wait to see what happens next.

### Draft Riverina Mission Plan

Riverina Mission plan is close to being finalised ready for your feedback. Geoff and the Riverina team have heard your concerns and seek to offer support for different approaches. The plan recognises that each congregation is unique and need to be able to respond to their local communities. It is a practical document that recognises the need to move forward. None of us can expect that doing the same thing is ever going to produce a different outcome.

The document will come to your congregation for final comment before coming back to Regional Partnership next month for endorsement. Please ask to see it and engage. It will help us all.

### Saltbush Regional Minister - Riverina: Draft Position Description and Profile

Rev. Geoff Wellington has indicated he will retire at the end of this year. This was always the plan, and there is no doubt Geoff has been a gift to the Riverina.

We have a position description and profile to replace his role and have the green light to progress this with ACOMP.

Geoff commented that he felt Riverina is in a good place and must have someone on the ground, regardless of what happens with the Regional Partnership review.

### Regional Partnership Review

Scott Guyatt, convenor of the review team, has met with many people and read hundreds of pages of documents. June is the month for conversation, with July being the month of analysis. The report should be complete by the end of July. I have been greatly encouraged at his understanding and approachability.

### Riverina Revised Congregation Stewardship Levy

Congregations will receive their individual Stewardship Levy in due course. Please see attached summary and information on the method used to establish congregational contributions to the Riverina Stewardship Levy.

There has been no increase, and the Synod Seeds of Growth is given straight back to supporting the Congregations missional projects.

### Update Casual Preaching Matrix Update

This has been a complex matter forced by the Governments insistence that lay preacher benefits are paid via One Touch Payroll. In this environment there are so many different scenarios that are confusing.

A frequently asked questions documents has also been developed to support the Casual Preaching Matrix.

The Casual Preaching Matrix and FAQs sheet are available on the Synod website via these links:

[Casual Preaching Payments - Matrix](#)

[Casual Preaching Payments - FAQs](#)

## Good News Stories

### Big Beanie Judging

The Big Beanie judging has taken place, in Henty at our local art gallery and it was a wonderful evening.

Our night opened with punch, wine and nibbles and saw a happy gathering abuzz with amazement at the variety of beanies in all colours, shapes and sizes.

Lots of Guylian sea shell chocolates and blue first prize ribbons were given to the winners. Our youngest knitter was a 9-year old boy, our oldest crocheter a 96 year old lady who decorated many beanies with flowers, shells, boats, lighthouses and fish, and in between an 87 year old male who knitted 50 beanies though his friend did the baskets and picked up several stitches.



The judge, from Albury who won the 2023 Beanie Festival in Alice Springs had a wonderful time choosing and trying beanies on her friend's head. Troy Hanckel, a former chaplain at the Seafarers spoke about the Mission, and Sea Shanty music played in the background. The total is now 1005 beanies!!

It is a bit like the mustard seed story... from little things, big things grow.

*Jenny Whitlock, Culcairn Henty UCA*





### The Moderator Visit to Griffith

On the weekend of 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> June, we welcomed the NSW/ACT Moderator, Rev Faaimata Havea Hiliau returning to her hometown of Griffith.

The Moderator was born in Tonga but spent her school years in Griffith. She candidate for the Ministry of Youth Worker from Griffith to study at UTC.

On Saturday evening there was a welcoming dinner in the church hall. The Griffith Mayor, Doug Curran and his wife Darrelea attended. (Darrelea and The Moderator attended Griffith High School together). Andy Marela was MC for the night and kept things moving.

The evening began with Rev. Geoff Wellington introducing guests, welcoming everyone and making an Acknowledgement of Country the Fijian worship group performed a traditional kava Welcoming Ceremony for the Guests of Honour.

The Moderator led devotions for the evening with a special emphasis on encouraging the young people and the emerging leaders.

For ALL but especially the children - How to Pray Using Your Hand as a mirror.

Thumb: - pray for those around you,

Pointer:-pray for those who guide you,

Tallman: - pray for leaders,

Ring: - pray for the weak, Pinkie: - pray for yourself.



The Moderator spent time encouraging the emerging young leaders of the various cultural groups and to work together.

After a sumptuous feast of traditional foods, there was entertainment from each cultural group.

Anglo – poetry reading, and the Tongan Youth Group performed traditional dances in costume.

Pukapuka/Cook Island men did a haka and were then joined by the ladies singing various songs.

The Fijian group sang and were joined by the whole congregation to sing Farewell song Ise Isa in Fijian.

The following morning The Moderator together with Rev. Geoff Wellington, Saltbush Regional Minister led worship. A highlight was the baptism by The Moderator of two great nephews Stiveni and Robson Fungalei.

As usual unaccompanied singing by the various groups was a moving part of the service with different verses of the hymns sung in each cultural language. The sermon was based on the parables of The Sower and The Mustard Seed. A sheet of red cardboard was transformed by folding into a building then into a plane then by tearing pieces off into a cross.

Morning tea/lunch followed with a formal farewell conducted by the Fijian male leaders.





### Welcome Lara Carson to the Riverina Region as our Administration Officer.

The Riverina welcomes Lara Carson, currently undertaking induction and learning the ropes both at the Presbytery Office at 10 Tanda Place, Glenfield Park in Wagga and at NSW/ACT Synod Mission Services.

Lara will become our primary contact for all congregations in the Riverina. While there will be much, Lara has yet to learn, she will know where to find answers. She will be working closely with our Regional Saltbush Minister Rev Geoff Wellington, with Paul Creek regarding Property matters and with George Thomas in the Finance area and with Synod Mission Services.

Lara can be contacted by email at [office.rp@nswact.uca.org.au](mailto:office.rp@nswact.uca.org.au) or by telephone on 0494 045 733. The Presbytery postal address is now 10 Tanda Place, Glenfield Park 2650.

Lara is keen to get to know people across the Riverina who are making the Uniting Church a vibrant Christian community and how best to support you in our organisational matters

Please make Laura welcome.



If you have any particular needs or any good news stories to share, I would love to hear from you, please send to: [regionalpartnership@nswact.uca.org.au](mailto:regionalpartnership@nswact.uca.org.au)

Blessings to you all.

**Bron**

Rev. Bronwyn Murphy  
Associate Secretary for the Synod of NSW and ACT  
On behalf of Regional Partnerships Committee

## **RIVERINA PRESBYTERY – CONGREGATIONAL STEWARDSHIP LEVY**

### **SUMMARY**

Regional Partnership agreed to the recommendation below to establish a Congregational Stewardship Levy across the Riverina: -

**To provide a transparent and equitable method for establishing Congregational contributions to the Riverina Stewardship Levy, which is used for Synod Seeds of Growth Congregational grant program and to support the delivery of Riverina Region Services, for 2024-2025 a rate of 9.2% of adjusted Congregational income will be adopted. The adjusted income will comprise the Gross income less income received for the Wider Work of the Church as shown on the most recent available Annual Financial Return (AFR).**

### **PREAMBLE**

Riverina has maintained an unchanged levy rate for each Congregation based on historical levels for in excess of 5 years. The basis for the setting of the level for each congregation no longer can be considered equitable. A review of methodology in other Presbyteries was undertaken and a possible process was presented at Saltbush gathering at Ganmain and circulated to Riverina congregations in following weeks. Responses from congregations was solicited.

### **MATTER FOR CONSIDERATION**

That the Riverina Levy for each congregation be determined through an objective process that reflects income in the previous Annual Financial Return (AFR).

### **REMARKS**

Principles presented at the Ganmain Saltbush Gathering were:

- Any changes for 2024-2025 would, in total, gather no more from congregations than the levies in 2023-2024;
- That the income figure used be from the 2022-2023 AFR for each congregation and comprise TI (Total Income) less T3 (Work for the Wider Church).
- The Levy would be a single Stewardship Levy which would include both Seeds of Growth contribution and funding for Presbytery operations.

### **FINANCIAL ANALYSIS**

The gathering of financial information has been delayed due to late submission of a number of AFR with several still outstanding. Where this is the case calculations have been made using the most recent AFR. Due to the formation of Wagga Wesley and Wagga Pilgrim Congregations part way through 2022-2023 the AFR data is not helpful so data drawing on the past 12 months has been utilised for these two congregations.

Using the income data disclosed using this process, together with the total raise by levy in 2023-2024, the percentage rate required to maintain that level of contribution has been established. We have set the goal for 2024-2025 a little below the total for 2023-24. This requires a contribution rate of 9.2%.

When applied to congregations this results in some increases and some decreases for individual congregations. For some this is modest while others show a movement as much as \$2K. In equity, this would indicate that over recent years some congregations have shouldered a proportionally higher portion of the financial burden while others have benefited from this. This is not to suggest that balancing the congregational budget is easy, it is a challenge for both Congregations and Presbytery. Historically Presbytery operations and staffing were fully funded by congregations but in recent years Presbytery has been operating on a deficit budget due to a reluctance to place further demands on Congregations. While current reserves enable this situation, it will inevitably necessitate change in some way.

## **CONGREGATIONAL FEEDBACK**

While not all Congregations responded to the proposal, there were replies from a significant number. The responses varied but can be summarised as follows:

- The proposal seems fair;
- Without knowledge of the rate applicable we cannot discuss the proposal;
- We think Bequests/windfall income should be excluded as well as the Work of the Wider Church;
- Shrinking Congregations combined with rising Insurance premiums leaves nothing for the congregation;
- Income from special events and appeals for community projects should be excluded.
- Should Manse Rental be gross or net income in the calculation;

## **EVALUATION**

The concerns expressed in the feedback are understandable. Where an AFR shows a rise in gross income that is a “one off” this would only be reflected in the levy for the following year so the effect would be temporary. Treasurers will be able to record any special fundraising for external activities as Work of Wider Church in I3 in the AFR. Any system will need to avoid excessive complexity to maintain transparency and efficient and effective administration. If significant exclusions were added to the process, it would become more burdensome in administration while, any reduction in the income used as the basis for calculation would necessitate an increase in the percentage rate to generate the same level of overall support to the Presbytery.

It was agreed that:

1. That the Riverina Presbytery calculate the 2024-2025 levy based on 9.2% of the TI (Income) – (minus) I3 (wider church) from 2022-2023 AFR, or similar date when necessary.
2. That a review be conducted in the fourth quarter on 2024-2025 year to identify issues or opportunities to refine this process.
3. That the Riverina contribution to Seeds of Growth (that all returns to Congregational activity through grants) be reduced from \$40K pa to \$30Kpa.