



*It was time for the monsoon rains to begin and a very old man was digging holes in his garden.
“What are you doing?” his neighbour asked.
“Planting mango trees,” was the reply.
“Do you expect to eat mangoes from those trees?”
“No, I won’t live long enough for that. But others will. It occurred to me the other day that all my life I have enjoyed mangoes planted by other people. This is my way of showing them my gratitude.”*



At each of its meetings, the Church Council spends time in reflection and prayer. The story above was part of the reflection offered at the October 27 2015 meeting. Following this reflection, the meeting received a report on the process of property redevelopment, which had been slowly proceeding through several councils of the church during the course of that year (congregation, presbytery and synod). The Church Council did so in the spirit of how to express gratitude to those who have gone before us – for the site and its buildings which we presently enjoy – and for what might be inherited by those who come after us.

That process has continued from that time, and this is an update...

We have been actively thinking and talking about ‘planning for a sustainable future’ and a ‘feasibility study’ since at least the Annual General meeting on March 22, 2015. We were reminded that the congregation is undergoing significant change, along with the widespread and deep-seated changes that surround us in a globalised world and multicultural western society. We were also reminded that by 2018 we will not have enough funds to continue our present mission without substantial changes (losses) to that ministry and mission. As a congregation, we endorsed mission goals which encompassed:

- **nurturing discipleship for mission**
- **sharing God's love (locally, for the world, and in fresh words and deeds)**
- **building partnerships**

Over that last year, the somewhat despondent note on finances has been countered by a very real enthusiasm for finding new ways to live and serve as God’s people. However, our current site and buildings may not provide the best fit for meeting our needs as we move into a different future, and seek to ‘be church’ to new generations.

At the same time, our buildings are quite sparsely scattered on just over 0.9ha (2.25 acres) of land, and it is poor stewardship not to make best use of that asset which has been inherited by us from the hard work and foresight of previous generations.

In November 2015, we distributed an update informing you of the Church Council’s decision to proceed with a “Feasibility Study and Business Case”, having secured the support of the wider Uniting Church at Synod and Presbytery levels. We have undertaken to keep you informed of this work, and we are now pleased to provide this update. You might be wondering whether something could have been provided earlier in the year, but there has been a deliberate scheduling of communication so as not to confuse the recent focus on stewardship with the ‘feasibility study’ work.

Who is guiding the process?

As reported in November, a ‘Project Control Group’ (PCG) with representatives from Synod, Presbytery and Croydon Uniting are currently hard at work. The representatives appointed by Church Council continue to be Rohan Pryor, Paul Chandler, Charles Popple and Kerry Shearer. The PCG has been meeting fortnightly since January, and the Croydon reps have been extremely active in work and discussions in between those meetings.

What is the timeline?

Because of the detailed work done by the Church Council and the Croydon PCG reps before the formal meetings commenced, we are ahead of the previously-anticipated schedule. We had anticipated that the PCG process would run from January until June. It is now extremely likely that there will be a report available to the congregation by the end of April, with the opportunity for decision-making in early May.

How much is it costing?

When we last wrote, a cost of up to \$70,000 was expected. There has been some extremely good news in the intervening months. Firstly, it was decided to adopt a staged approach, with an initial step to develop a higher level 'Business Case', before proceeding to the more detailed analysis. This approach has reduced the funding commitment to \$20,000, with further detailed investigations and expenditure contingent on the outcome of this phase. Secondly, we have been successful in securing a loan from the Presbytery of Yarra Yarra. Croydon Uniting is not bearing the cost of the 'Business Case' directly.

What will the 'Business Case' report look like?

Even in its reduced scope, the 'Business Case' will be a comprehensive document. It will address our mission goals and financial position to develop a plan for our property and buildings. It will provide a broad concept for the future, with allowance for detailed engineering, other specialised reports, and architectural drawings at a later stage. Central to it is a small number of options (we expect probably 6) for the future of the physical buildings and a medium-term financial plan. A preferred option will be identified by the PCG, and a decision for how to proceed will be made in May.

What do these options look like?

An example is probably the best way to describe it.

Here is the **hypothetical case of another Uniting Church** who wanted:

- An improved worship space, with more flexible seating that can be used sometimes for worship and sometimes for other activities
- A new meeting area
- Regular money for an outreach mission worker

The possibilities they were given looked like:

1. Do nothing, which would mean old buildings and no money for outreach worker
2. Sell some of their land, and have money to improve the worship space
3. Sell some of their land, and have money to pay for the outreach worker for 3 years
4. Sell a big piece of their land, and have money to build a new meeting area and improve the worship space (but no money for the outreach worker)
5. Re-develop a big piece of the land, by building houses; then rent the houses, and from the rental income pay for the new meeting area, update the worship space and pay for the mission worker for at least 7 years

They had only these 5 options: no detailed building plans. The PCG recommendation was for the fifth.

Once they made their choice, they could then start 'a big project' to develop their buildings and mission.

Is anything about the options for Croydon currently known?

The consultants are still hard at work on this (and will be until the end of April), and at each meeting of the PCG slightly different combinations are talked about in general terms. It would be unfair to the process to say anything with absolute certainty, but the following are emerging as key features:

- The entry to the church (i.e. narthex) will be made much more open and inviting incorporating a café style area and kitchen
- There will be a better street 'presence', with more activity visible from the street
- An outdoor space will be included
- There will be spaces for children and young people, meetings and storage
- There will be more toilets
- Parking requirements will be comprehensively analysed and accommodated
- The brick hall will be demolished
- The wooden hall will be moved or demolished
- The land above/behind/of the brick hall will be sold and/or developed to provide ongoing income and pay for building improvements
- The manse in Croydon Road will be sold
- The Memorial Garden will remain in its present location

So, we will be making a decision in May?

That is the current intention. We need to be sensitive to some anxiety that may be felt, and the desire for information and explanation. On the other hand, a protracted process will be counter-productive. We are hopeful that the options presented will be relatively straightforward and in line with the dot points above.

What is the approval process?

Beyond approval at a local level, there is a sequence of approvals by Presbytery and Synod Committees. It is reasonable to think that a final approval might be given by early August, and that detailed planning, technical reports and architectural plans would be commissioned thereafter.

How long until we see any evidence 'on the ground'?

As identified previously, the whole process may take between 3 and 5 years. There is unlikely to be any change to the church buildings as we know them until 2017.

What about our relationship with partners and hirers?

The Church Council Executive has continued conversations with both the Chin Christian Church, Melbourne (CCCM) and the Croydon Parish Players (CPP), outlining the process. They have been very productive, happy meetings where these stake-holders in our buildings have also looked positively to a new future on a revised site configuration.

As the PCG, are you excited?

Yes, definitely. Some of the discussions we have had amongst ourselves, and also those with CPP, CCCM and Synod have been some of the most up-lifting and energising conversations we have had about 'church' in recent times. It is time-consuming work, but there is a genuine sense of discerning God's purpose in creative ways.

Croydon Uniting Church will have a bright and sustainable future for our children and young people to engage with and cherish.

Our congregation will be better represented in the structure of our building. Our building will be like we are: worshipful, open, flexible, friendly and hospitable.

Will you continue to keep us informed?

Yes. The PCG and Church Council will keep the congregation informed. Be aware, though, that the next communication that you receive will probably be an outline of 'the options' in readiness for decision-making in May.

Who can I talk to?

You can talk with any Church Councillor or the Croydon Uniting representatives on the PCG: Rohan Pryor, Paul Chandler, Charles Popple and Kerry Shearer.

**Save the dates of:
both Sunday, May 1 and
Sunday, May 8 for
presentation by the PCG
and consideration by the
congregation of the
preferred option.**

Further notice and information will be provided when it comes to hand.

Note that the Annual General Meeting of the congregation will be held on April 17. So the congregation will meet formally on several dates in quick succession. The intention is to transact the 'ordinary' business on April 17, whereas the other dates will be special meetings focussed on the feasibility study and business case.

We ask for your continued prayers and support for the Church Council and the Project Control Group as this important work continues.

In Christ's service,

The Croydon Uniting Church
Project Control Group
*Rohan Pryor, Paul Chandler,
Kerry Shearer and Charles Popple*

