

UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA
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Ministry Alternatives

Very little has changed over 5 years except some models or examples have ceased to be working.

The NSW Rural Ministry Unit Committee, at its meeting on 22 April, 2004, identified 15 different models of ministry presently in existence in rural NSW within the Uniting Church. Some of the models below are well established, others are experimental and may hold potential for the future life of the church, in both rural areas and in other contexts. There is a CD with photos and a powerpoint interview summary with about 12 of the ministry models.

In my role as a rural consultant in NSW I have seen been exposed to and heard about more than these fifteen models and I have included them in this list for completeness.

1. Parish/ Priest/ Pastor Model

A Minister, Lay Pastor or Deacon pastoring a single congregation was once the norm, but is now becoming the exception.

This model has almost continued without change for 4 generations and despite the faithfulness and ministry of some extremely gifted and talented people both clergy and lay there has been in general a gradual decline of churches across Australia accelerating over the last 20 years. This form of ministry has developed a co-dependency between clergy and laity to maintain the existing system.

The reason for the decline in mainstream churches are complex, "undefined complex problems" or "Adaptive situations" as GR Rendle ('Leading Change in the Congregation') calls them. We must not fall into the trap of blaming. The old method of coming up with a single or simple solution to fix the perceived problem doesn't work. The old way of looking at simpler problems then finding a solution doesn't work when we are not even clear about what the problems are. The old ways of. 'If you can't find a solution then look for someone or something to blame' isn't helpful. We usually blame: The people (ministers), the programs (church music, the old way), or the policy (Elders councils, Synod, Assembly).

The fundamental problem is that the present way of looking at present problems is the "OLD WAY" which has, as a basic presupposition, the importance of maintaining the paid professional Minister and the institutional Christendom view of being and doing church.

The Parish Priest/Pastor model and style of ministry doesn't appear to work effectively nor address some of the issues of our post christendom society. For example: The changed society attitude is now almost anti institutional church, the majority of new generations of people have: a different learning background, a different attitude to authority, a different attitude to commitment, a different expectation of choice and rate of change.

Variations of Minister managed and lead ministries have been trialled and are in place in many areas around NSW. Congregations and Presbytery's are reverting back to variations of the old Parish model or circuit parish or introducing some change in structure or form with different levels of lay involvement.

Some of these variations are struggling, burning out ministers and generally continuing to manage a declining congregation. The different expectations of up to 5 generations in a

congregation and a changing rural society are causing these models to struggle. The systems that are not succeeding are trying to continue the old way with almost no change in ministry roles and structure. They fail because the underlying reason for Clustering is a Christendom dependency model which says we have to somehow maintain a paid professional Minister to do ministry for us. The models that are making some progress are increasing the options for networks or community groups and the role and ministry of congregations is being increased as well as the specialisation of the ministry agent. There is an empowering of lay leaders to assume ministry and a congregational vision for ministry.

Some example of these models are:

2. Multi centre, linked congregations

Where a number of congregations had become linked again as a parish, served by one ministry agent. Many have tried to retain this model as "linked congregations". Some retain a ministry agent or a retired minister. Examples are Orange and Finley - Jerilderie. Molong -Cudal Many of these except Orange have ceased to work

3. Part time ministry agent, supported by a congregation or number of congregations.

Where financial resources are now too meagre and it is not possible to expand the area served, a part time stipended person (Lay Ministry Assistant, Specified Ministry Agent, Community Minister, Retired minister) shares ministry with some form of lay ministry. Examples using lay ministry assistants are Manilla - Barraba and Tenterfield. Molong Cudal have moved to this model with a retired minister on call

4. Cluster of Congregations

The former parishes of Mudgee and Rylstone Kandos have joined together as the Cudgegong Cluster comprising 6 congregations. The intention was to provide 1.5 ministry agents and lay ministry The ministry agents work with local lay people taking some responsibility for ministry within each congregation This model has failed to work as originally planned. The Presbytery are trying a model with these congregations called a zone Some of the smaller worship centres have closed. Intentional training of lay people is now being tried.

5. Mission Area - a number of ministry agents working across several congregations

The best known example is Mid Lachlan Mission Area. Three Ministry Agents offer their specialist skills, traditional, new congregation, small rural across three former parishes (11 worship groups), resourcing the people to grow their discipleship so that they will conduct and run their own services. Forbes-Parkes-Condobolin- Eugowra (Lachlan Mission Area) All of these worship centres are still operative and trained lay leaders are part of every centre. The role of the ministry agents specialisation has changed from being geographical and theological to specialist. Traditional/contemporary/rural to Training, equipping/spiritual formation/ministry innovation. Number and giving have not increased but the spiritual depth and missional focus of all groups and centres have changed.significantly.

6. Chaplaincy

Examples are the newly appointed Synod Rural Chaplain, Rev Kel Hodge, Lithgow Gaol Chaplain, Rev Esther Smart, Kinross-Wolaroi School Chaplain, Rev Graeme Watkins. Chaplaincy plus congregational ministry.

The rural chaplaincy was increased to two agent based as Synod placements. These agents have been providing ecumenical community ministry in areas of the state where the church had ceased to have an intentional presence in the form of a congregation or ministry agent. For this to continue it will have to be seen by the Synod as strategic or missional ministry. It has had traction because of the severity of the drought and the perception of city congregations seeing someone they could directly support in mission.

7. Ecumenical Cooperation

A wide variety of arrangements are in place or planned. They are different according to whether they are; Cooperating, Hosting, Community or Union Church. Sharing property, alternating ministry agents, a common ministry agent ministering to each denominational tradition. Examples are Arian Park, Boggabri, Canowindra, Crescent Head, Trangie. Most of these have not worked. The UCA inclusiveness and acceptance of women and laity in ministry are the greatest barriers. Some in Vic are continuing.

8. Community Ministry

This concept uses a Deacon, specialist lay person, lay ministry assistant, Family Worker or a Youth Worker, employed by the congregation, to be in ministry with the community as well as with the congregation, for a percentage of their time. Examples are Kingscliff, Coonabarabran, Bonalbo- Casino The addition of the position of pastor and level 1-3 Lay positions has added another dimension to this option. More congregations are investigating this ministry as the congregation settle into managing worship and employing a special ministry person. Bathurst Family support PT Dubbo Young Adult Terrigal Community Nurse

9. Patrol Ministry

Cobar Minister is half time with the congregation and half time road based patrol. Synod Mission resource funds the patrol side of the ministry. Frontier services in the other states are combining congregational ministry and patrol. The Flying Padre out of Broken Hill spends a small proportion of time with isolated congregations, but the main focus is ministry with people of isolated stations and communities. The patrol and congregational percentage varies but this involves the congregation assuming some level of ministry for themselves. Frontier Services are taking over both these positions. They are sharing land patrol with Cobar/Nyngan. The Rural chaplains are operating in very similar ways to Frontier Services.

10. Intentional Interim ministry.

Synod/Presbytery appoint at a congregations request a specially trained minister to work at resolving issues and helping transitions to a new form of ministry. Usually short term 2 years. Transitional Ministry is being found an important short term bridging ministry to help congregations move from Minister reliant to become self reliant. Some very positive results in the mid North Coast have been achieved. Wauchope Bonnie Hills

11. Block ministry A ministry agent is invited for a one or two month period to carry on ministry or to provide specific ministry training while they are there. Works best in holiday resort places. Norfolk Island, Bay of Islands NZ Some congregations are considering this as a relief /respite ministry for the lay ministry team. Lockhart. Hillston Moree had an urban ministry relief for a period with some intentional training happening while the ministry placement was occupied.

In most of the above models there has been some new ways or changes in ways of providing ministry. The ministry agent does not do all of the ministry, Lay leaders are expected to assume some of the congregational ministry. Some are works in progress and still changing. Some are failing, some are showing signs of potential but the style and method depends on the spiritual maturity, the nature of the faith and openness of the congregation to change. The right mix of ministry agents personality, theological emphasis and style with the congregation's is critical. When a congregation are prayerfully seeking God's direction there is some growth, but if a congregation are only seeking a quick or simple fix and do not assume more of a ministry role it struggles to work.

CHANGED WAYS

"There is no gain without Pain"

"Growth and no change are incompatible."

" There will be conflict that challenges faith, assumptions and attitudes. Conflict is really only the meeting of two ideas"

" The wilderness comes before the promised land"

"We are returning to new testament church"

"Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others" 1 Peter 4:10

There are other groups of ministry models that have a deeper and more extensive understandings of the need for, and the expressions of, post-Christendom change models.

Some of these models include More extensive changes in structure and roles

These models are much more lay ministry oriented and are developing around the world, many believe we are entering a period when the "ministry is being returned to the Laity" where the ministry of every believer is developed, trained, enabled and allowed to do ministry.

'Congregations are moving from committee based, status quo organisations to Ministry Team based ministry, from leadership that is primarily concerned with task accomplishment to leadership that develops its people as well as pursues its vision.' E Stanley Ott

The Basis of Union of the UCA states 'every member is gifted' and 'there is no gift without its corresponding service' The Ministers of the word will 'exercise pastoral care so that all may be equipped for their particular ministries' p 13,14

There needs to be an understanding of the difference between lay led committees with a specific task and Lay Leadership Teams with a mission. See E Stanley Ott 'Transform your church with Ministry Teams' or David Uren 'Shared Ministry' A new/old way of being church

The SA, Vic and NSW experience illustrates the need for congregations and ministers to clearly understand the difference.

'We may enable laity to do jobs to maintain the church or we may enable spiritual people to exercise their spiritual gifts to do spiritual ministry. Only one of these will sustain the church.' Rev. Clive Cook "Ministry Matters" 2002.

Lay leadership and Lay Ministry Teams involve the congregation discerning and calling the people within the congregation who are demonstrating the gifts of the spirit or are obviously/commonly passionate about service in a particular ministry area *to do ministry*.

NB The ministry areas a congregation are/is? called to follow may not be the old congregational activities, some are dropped, some are added. The persons for Lay Ministry Team leadership are not nominated and placed on a ballot to fill existing committee based maintenance jobs.

Members of Lay Ministry Teams are prayerfully nominated/voted for in a secret ballot and considered "Called" if nominated/elected by a majority of 70% + of the congregation. They are often not necessarily members of the existing church councils and they have sometimes not even been members of the UCA, they may or may not be active participants in the congregation, but they are recognised as gifted members of the community (of faith)? The nominated/elected people/leaders are interviewed by a Presbytery representative or equivalent and recommended to the Presbytery to be recognised as members of the Lay Ministry Team and /or team leaders. This process has been developed by the Anglicans and Methodist in NZ. The SA and Vic synods. 'Developing Local Shared ministry in the Diocese of Auckland' David Uren Vic 'Shared Ministry'

The examples listed below are ministry systems that have been working in places for up to 15years. It encourages every member ministry. The majority are showing more openness and adjustment to community and culture changes, some are struggling. The examples that are working have some significant growth not always in numbers but in spiritual maturity and ministry vision and outreach into their community

12. Regional Centre Resourcing - One larger congregation resourcing ministry at other congregations.

Lismore and Tamworth South congregations have made some of their ministry resources available to smaller nearby congregations. Lachlan Mission Area is providing ministry with DVD's around Australia. Glebe Cafe church and Kippax are making available multimedia. Wagga, Dubbo are beginning to more intentionally exercise this form of ministry. Smaller congregations Peak Hill, Mid Lachlan Mission in conjunction with a number of other centres have their Project Reconnect ministry that is now across Australia.

13. Celtic Centre

This is a concept still in development that offers a centre for renewal and development. The congregation at Lithgow are wanting to provide hands on training for lay people to be in mission in the community. Come spend a week or some program time and then go back to your community and congregation. An idea and concept that never really got off the ground at Lithgow.

14. Regional Resource Ministry - Resourcing a number of lay ministry teams,

Central West presbytery employs a minister half time to resource 7 congregations who have no minister (or limited ministry). The Narromine congregation utilises the other half of the placement. Culcairn - Henty has a Resource Minister to build the Lay Ministry Teams. Both these positions are in transition to another level and variation. Coolamon Temora Ardlethan are in a regional Resource ministry placement This model is widely used in SA and WA The Resource Minister is the minister *to the teams* not the congregations acting as encourager, link to the wider church, coach, mentor and trainer.

15. Shared Ministry congregations

A cluster of congregations who are prepared to form lay ministry teams are under the supervision of a ministry agent appointed by the Presbytery. This resource minister provides oversight, guidance and is able to coach and empower local lay people in their team leadership roles in the congregation and community. This is the model adopted in Vic by up to 45 congregations. It is the same as the Regional resource minister model above. In the Anglican church in NZ such a person is called the Enabler

16. Presbytery Resource Ministry

New England North West and Mid North Coast Presbytery's have a Presbytery Mission resource person whose main task is resourcing the lay ministry of the presbytery. MacQuarie Darling Presbytery and others are now appointing such persons and the prospect appears to be a number of Presbytery specialist ministries may be the way of the future. This alternative that may overcome the cluster and zone issues about payment and ownership of time related to giving proportion. The Vic Synod have moved to a model of three Presbytery personnel per Presbytery.

17. Lay Ministry Team

Examples are Woolgoolga (Operating for 10 years), Urbenville/Woodenbong, Tamworth South (worship teams), Culcairn/ Henty.

This is the model used in SA WA and being started in QLD and NSW In most cases they also include a Resource minister or Presbytery Resource minister

This appears to be continuing to work with variations of success. The major problem is a succession of lay people in positions and burnout but this is because the burnout of clergy learnings have not been transposed across to the laity.

18. Using Information Technology

Project Reconnect (Mid Lachlan Mission Area) supplies a weekly DVD with music, children's story, message and discussion starters for small congregations to use through a DVD player and TV monitor. Some of the small congregations are planning organising leading and owning their service and ministry. Kippax Multi Media Project is developing similar resources for all congregations to use in worship. QLD Have developed a software package that enables live interactive mobile phone image connectivity of a number of centres to join in worship together. Cloncurry QLD services to x.. number of centres and stations

19. Faith Communities

A group of believers meet to worship God in a variety of styles, venues and do not wish to have formal structures and organizations. Warrumbungles, Glebe Cafe church / CFM group. Groups that have a special nature are forming faith communities Waterhole is a spiritual formation group that is across centres

20. Home group cells. Home church. Workplace church, Incarnational church (Church in the Community)

New congregations are starting off this way. Rouse Hill and some isolated rural churches are leaving their building and meeting in homesteads. Western division NSW. Lakeview have 34 home groups and plan to grow into 47 over the next few years. SA Hilltown congregation is made up of cell groups that divide when they get larger than 12, Forbes Anglicans meet in cell groups and meet together to worship on Sundays. It is an intentional policy for some large congregations overseas and in Australia to form home groups so that members can 'belong'. Forge ministry UCA/Baptist training centre is training leaders for this style of ministry. Manley Vale are helping individuals establish workplace groups (churches?) Some of the cells are meeting as a regional group but sometimes only monthly or quarterly as a common affiliation, geographical, linking to prevent fragmentation. This form of 'Church' is growing significantly and the challenge is to help relate institutional church to these groups. Uniting Care nursing homes, Men's Sheds, community gardens, play groups...

21. New Congregations

A group of people who would not feel comfortable with traditional church services or activities meet and have informal worship or gatherings. Glebe Cafe church. Mars Café Pub church, Pub chat

22. Lay Ministry Assistant or Lay Ministry Person

A member of the congregation is paid part time to be the responsible leader/contact for the congregation and undertaking specific ministries. In SA congregations with lay teams they have found the community need a contact person and appoint/fund such a contact. Peak Hill have appointed/funded a farmer as their pastoral leader, Tenterfield appointed a lay person to do ministry in the community.

The risk with this model is that the PAID person becomes de facto pastor and the members will drop back into the Christendom mindset that we are paying you to do ministry for us.

Questions for group discussion and ways to use the discussion presented about these models for ministry.

1. Does your congregation believe they are a Christian group of people called to be in ministry for God in their community?

What ways do see they have done this in the past?

How will they have to change the way they do ministry in the changing rural society?

2. Where is the majority of your congregation in the changing world and church change cycle?

Doesn't understand all the problems- in a state of anxiety, guilt or feelings of helplessness - In pain and in the wilderness - afraid to change or let go- Trusting and wanting to hang in there - Decision to leave or stick with it- willing to look for alternatives information, creative solutions -Searching for the new- willing to make a commitment to find a new way.

3. If you feel the majority of the congregation is in the afraid or earlier stage and you as leaders feel you are too. You are probably best to look through the models 1-11 and discuss which models you would like to explore more. Choose three

4. If you feel the majority of the congregation is in the afraid or earlier stage but some of you as leaders want to move on. You will need to ask Presbytery or the Boards to work with your congregation some more. Meanwhile you need to gain education and information about where you as leaders would like the congregation to understand about some of the alternative models. Examine the list 1-22 and choose 3 models to explore and find out more information.

5. If you feel your congregation and you as leaders are wanting to move on to explore new possibilities discuss the models 12-22 and choose three. Make some plans to find out more information.

6. Move into groups of like minded congregations to discuss how you can work together.

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