

Gordon Uniting Church

Annual Report

**Year ended
December 2017**



Ministry Report

'The Spirit blows where it will' Annual Report to Gordon AGM, 2017

'The Spirit blows where it chooses; you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes.' (Jn 3:8)

'The churches are an enormous letdown; they want to remain in the dark ages.' (Amanda Vanstone, *Counterpoint*, Radio National, 27.11.'17)

Today, ministry is practised and lived out in a world framed by these two statements. It's not a world the church welcomes and, subsequently, it's not easy to navigate a pathway through it.

This week, as I write my report, I have: been in frequent contact with the Grand Mufti's office facilitating the release of a joint statement between the UCA and the Mufti re the recent outrage in Egypt; in touch with Rev Bill Crews re an interfaith event with the Hindu community next year; preparing, with Nicola, the order of service and message for the Combined Carols with Ravenswood on Sunday night; staying home one day so the manse oven might be repaired; attended a Village meeting to progress our theme of God conversations (how will we speak of God passionately, intelligently, and confidently when everything has changed?). I also participated in the final Tuesday night group with our Jewish friend, Angie Moore, who has led us in the practice of mindfulness, and on it goes...

Ministry at Gordon is varied, interesting, challenging, rewarding and not infrequently demanding. (There have been unexpected challenges this year that have made my life a little more taxing; an injury to my neck, ongoing issues in my extended family re the care of my mother.)

In my work, I continue to be committed to the preparation of worship (at Gordon, in the Village, at nursing homes), attending Messy Church, writing my blog, leading the Thursday Bible study gp and the Friday Current Affairs gp, offering pastoral care (and often to those on the fringe of our church community), avid reading of books of theology and biblical studies, preparing commentaries for *With Love to the World*, connecting with lay leaders here at Gordon, resourcing and leading the Tuesday night group with Nicola, contributing to the life and development of the Village, meeting with colleagues for support and inspiration, attending lots of meetings (not my favourite activity!), meeting with the Ravenswood principal, Anne Johnstone, tutoring and mentoring students at the theological college, and convening the Assembly Other Faiths Working Gp, including developing interfaith relationships. This year, I was also invited to join the Synod Committee on Counselling.

What's at the heart of all this? Within and underneath these activities, I see my job as discerning the world of Spirit ('the Spirit blows where it will...') Although we grieve it, the Spirit is not as identified with the institution of the church as it was in days past. Therefore, I am on the lookout for good news to encourage our church community, and individuals within it, as we move forward together with courage. As well, my job is to discern and create *spaciousness*, of thought, feeling and spirit, a place of respect, a place where symbols emerge (the rubbish dump at Easter time...), and where new life can grow. (Angie Moore recently used the word 'spaciousness' to describe one of the benefits of mindfulness.)

For the sake of the future of our church, I believe we need to extend this *spaciousness* in at least two ways; firstly, dwell more in scriptural stories, especially in their 'otherness,' and allow them to inform our communal life; secondly, build our spiritual life, and expressly bypass questions such as, 'Was that good or bad?' and substitute, 'How did that affect me/us?' (All of us evaluate life so rapidly and continuously that we don't recognise how efficiently this approach places us outside the transforming world of Spirit.)

My thanks, as ever, go to the reliable and hardworking team of lay leaders in our church, who are a pleasure to work with and who make the ministry of this community so much richer and more far-reaching than any one individual could.

- Rev Michael Barnes, 30.11.'17

The Church Council

Been Busy!

Council has completed a number of significant conversations including:

- Receiving reports and encouraging the work of the community centre and Uniting City and Country
- Approving the employment of an additional Playgroup worker to support Nicola
- Working with the property group to review and encourage their planning. They have a number of initiatives that will continue to improve our facilities (and in particular reduce operating expense). We should thank a number of people, particularly Lyn who is often found negotiating on our behalf
- Receiving reports from the finance group. It continues to remain vigilant over our money! We should especially thank Darryl Maytom and Marie Rowe, who really keep us together!
- Supporting the replacement of the organ (we were very excited by the result)
- Establishing a music fund, formed from various donations. This will be used for music generally, but specifically organ student development and organ recitals
- Agreeing to establish a new ministry on Tuesday nights. This has piloted this year, and we should thank Michael and Nicola who have driven this initiative
- Forming a new five-year agreement with Ravenswood, meeting regularly with the new principal
- Growing our partnership with SCUC, encouraging them through the more difficult times that have marked this year for them.

Our congregation has continued this year with three staff, Michael, Nicola and Julie. Each of these people have contributed their energies, skills and experience to progressing our ministry, across Australia, NSW and in the North Shore of Sydney, right down to Gordon!

Future Certainty

We live in a changing community with one of the highest levels of “no religion” in the country, increasing middle density housing and a greater diversity of languages spoken at home.

One option for us is to reassert our traditional church identity and repeat religious dogma across the air-waves secure in the knowledge that we are right. This is a strategy that many of our peers are using and they will have some success. However, they are addressing the minority and this minority is getting smaller.

We need to be different in our community. We need to talk about things the community wants to talk about. The community has spent the last six months talking about same-sex marriage and euthanasia. Even if we disagree, we should be able to engage in conversation. How do we model respectful conversation, engaging different points of view? Over the last three years the Uniting Church has been involved in respectful conversations about marriage and same-gender relationships in culturally appropriate ways. A report from these conversations and other consultations will be brought to the 15th UCA Assembly in July 2018 with appropriate recommendations.

The Village

We have continued to encourage the development of the village. The team is looking to answer the question: How does the church re-enter the community conversation in a new and meaningful way? What does it mean for our community and our congregations? How can we express God differently?

Thanks

I want to recognise the Gordon people and their ongoing initiative. We are people to be proud of. I am constantly challenged by the congregation to do different, other and more things.

Enjoy!

Lloyd Robinson Chair of Church Council

Family Worker and Ministry Coordinator Report 2017



This year seems to have gone more quickly than ever before and I find it hard to believe as I write this I'm organising Playgroup Christmas Parties. **Playgroup** numbers have been up and down all year but on average 15 families represented each day. We certainly are the United Nations and I have even learnt a couple of Mandarin words with an accent that

causes laughter. However, having a go is appreciated.

There have been many helpers this year from within the Playgroup and from our church community and I greatly appreciate all the help I get. I especially thank those who at short notice helped when my father died.

As in past years, each week we have crafts and activities based loosely around a theme. We have singing, dancing and story time during the last half hour. I introduced some new action songs this year which have been well received. Although the session officially ends at 11.30 many parents and grandparents like to remain so they can continue to chat with friends while their children play. It is lovely to think they feel comfortable being in this place.

Playgroup income has been approximately \$6800 this year. Expenses for fruit, paints and craft materials approximately \$700.



Messy Church proves numbers are not always important. At times the small numbers can be disheartening but then I see a group of committed families growing a community together. In 2017 Messy church has been every month although the school holiday events have taken a different format. A highlight was in July when families from Playgroup and Messy Church joined together to toast marshmallows on the bonfire. Where possible we have tried to follow the themes of the church calendar. Some of our themes have been "Still the soul"; UCA 40th birthday and "Casting nets of welcome". Once again the support of the church community has been greatly appreciated.

The **community centre rentals** have been growing both in number and in diversity. I am excited by our developing relationship with Uniting to provide support for various groups in our community through the use of our venue at an affordable cost. This year an Autism Awareness workshop run by Ability Links was highly successful. They had between 60-80 participants. Earlier in the year we had a Uniting *Recovery*, Mental Health Family and Carer Program using our facilities to offer education, training and individual support services to families and carers of people with mental illness. In 2018 Parramatta Mission will be using

our facilities for workshops titled “Eight Stages of Healing, for Family and Carers or someone with a mental illness”. In addition, we will be hiring out the red room on Tuesday afternoons for Special Olympics, a global sporting community for people with an intellectual disability. What a wonderful way to use our facilities, helping those on the margins.

Other new tenants are a Tai Chi class for retirees on Mondays and Tuesdays; Kumon classes on Wednesday and Saturdays. We still have our regulars, Flute classes, Singing, Marian Street Youth Theatre, Itty Bitty Dance, Taekwondo, AA and Toastmasters. The income from rentals constitutes 48% of our revenue. People often comment on the warmth and vibe of our community centre; Phil Gilmour, Co-ordinator Aged Services Kuringai Council sent this message-

“You really do have a great set up there & your centre is so community focussed! Congratulations on all you do. Ku-ring-gai is the better for it.”

Our photo posters supplied by John Buchanan; Michael’s blogs, our posters; our people all allow visitors the opportunity to see who we are, an open and welcoming community.

Another lovely **Good News Story from 2017**

Rev Sunil from SCUC approached us asking if it was possible to have an international conference using the whole property. The dates landed on a Friday and a Messy church weekend. After some thought we said they could have it, we'd work out the logistics.

When the organiser came to see me to check out the facilities her very first words were to thank us for our generosity and hospitality. No one else would consider vacating their premises for us. My response, we are in partnership with SCUC and that is how partners behave towards one another. It shouldn't be one sided. She went away feeling very much welcomed. She thinks this place is perfect. She and a few others now pray regularly in our church at 5am. Good News!

Nicola Robinson



Treasurer Report – November 2017

The financial year 2016/17 was a successful one for the congregation. The highlights include:

- The surplus for the year was \$244
- Income was reduced by \$12,000 due almost in total to the insurance income received in the 2015/16 year, although another item that impacted the reduced revenue include a drop in the contribution from SCUC.
- Of some concern were the reduced offerings from the congregation, which were \$14,000 lower than the year 2015/16.
- Expenses were well controlled and were reduced by \$5,500.
- In the balance sheet we retained our reserves at \$55,200. This includes the General Reserve at \$30,000 and the Buildings FF&E Reserve at \$25,200.
- In particular it was pleasing that the major repairs to the roof were paid from general funds allowing us to retain the Buildings FF&E Reserve at \$25,200.
- The total loans (Manse) were reduced from \$216,000 to \$188,000, saving approximately \$1,400 per annum in interest.
- This was partly offset by the cash balance in the operating accounts being reduced by \$29,500 to \$44,953.

Overall the financial situation is reasonably sound.

It is important that the congregation should note:

- It is unlikely that the debt can be reduced further without some other income becoming available.
- The reduction in collections from the congregation are likely to decline in future years unless we take some steps to reverse the trend.

The church continues to support various appeals both within the church (e.g. the new organ) and the wider activities of Synod (e.g. Living is Giving).

It is very pleasing to see that our property income continues to increase. In the 2016/17 year this source of income constituted 48% of our total revenue. Without this source of income the overall financial position of the church would be facing serious problems.

In addition to the property income there are some other income sources that are very important to the church and its viability e.g.

- Trading Table \$2,000
- Playgroup \$7,300
- Coffee Sales \$1,400

A new five -year agreement has recently been approved for the use of our church building as the Ravenswood Chapel. It is an important part of the property income and is approximately 20% of the total.

The accounts for this year have been audited, (by David Porter) and a copy of his certificate is attached to this report.

The Finance Committee continues to play a very important role in the management of the finances of the church. Apart from the usual supervision of the finances, the committee has been active in the areas such as reviewing our insurances.

I would like to place on record my thanks for the work of Marie Rowe who is “rock” on which my work totally depends. She has given freely of her time and without her, we would be in serious trouble.

Darryl Maytom, Treasurer.



Uniting City & Country

Recently the Steering Committee held a review/planning day led by Robyn Brown, the Chairperson of the Uniting Regional Council for Sydney and Central Coast. Robyn is a member of the Committee.

We agreed that our Vision had not changed. This remains:

"To initiate and resource the early stages of sustainable, long-term and mutually beneficial three-way partnerships between Uniting Church congregations, Uniting Church schools and remote communities in NSW."

Our achievements over the past 18 months have included the development or preparation of

- Risk management document
- Good ideas document for congregations
- Brochure; Website
<http://www.ucc.org.au>
- Check list to assist congregations in determining their involvement in long term engagement.

Julie Greig continues to be employed one day per week on average as a result of the Uniting grant. We have received several donations as a result of her speaking with country congregations and have also received generous donations from Turramurra UC from the proceeds of their flea market.

Activities have included:

- Identifying several country schools & congregations for partnerships
- Involvement in the Bourke Distance Education camp
- Mini Schools camps
- Schools super camp 2017 at Nyngan

Next year for UCC objectives include:

- Assessing the interest in involvement or commitment of Kinross Wallaroi and MLC as well as three congregations.
- Developing a media strategy and high quality video.
- Further develop the website.

A proposal to establish a partnership with Ravenswood and Ivanhoe school has been strongly supported by this congregation. An initial visit has been made by a teacher from Ravenswood and Julie. The Ivanhoe principal is very excited about the partnership. A visit with Ravenswood is now being suggested for May 2018.

The UCC Steering Committee wants to use the process of us establishing the relationship as a case study to be documented so that this can help other congregations understand what is involved in the process and what is important to successful outcomes (hopefully!).

As a congregation we need to give a name to our local project of partnering with Ravenswood and Ivanhoe and any other country relationships we may have or develop.

Janet Scott
Chairperson, Uniting City & Country Project

Property Report

The Property Committee consists of Lyn McLennan (Chair), David Brawn, Jungnam Lee (of SCUC), Alf Reichardt, Bruce Watson and Keith Wilson. It held meetings during the year and the members further discussed issues by email.

As occurred in 2016, the focus of the Committee's work has been work on the roof. Rotting in the carpet of the Library at the rear of the Highway centre was traced to a leak in the roof. As a result, further waterproofing work was performed on the rear flat roof. Following completion and testing of that work, the rotted carpet was replaced. A further small leak in that roof area, near the stage in the Hall, was exposed by the recent heavy downpour and the contractors have been requested to return and rectify that leak.

New blinds were installed in the Hall in place of the old damaged or broken blinds. These are particularly useful in the summer months to reduce the heat in the Hall and we encourage all Hall users to (gently) use the blinds for this purpose.

An air conditioning unit has been installed in Nicola's office which becomes very hot during summer. Paving work was carried out in the courtyard outside the Yellow Room to repair sunken paving which had become a trip hazard. We have also completed a number of small repairs to the Manse, the Highway Centre and Woodhouse. We have not received any further request from the neighbour of the Manse to replace the rear fence, so this is an item which will need attention in the future.

The Woodhouse property has remained tenanted by a family with young children. The real estate agent managing the property on behalf of the Church reports that the property has been kept in a tidy condition and the rent paid promptly. We have undertaken some work on Woodhouse during the year, replacing the oven which could not be repaired at a reasonable cost, and installing an air conditioning unit in the living area. The family has just renewed their lease and agreed to a \$20 per week increase in rent to take effect from January 2018.

A successful working bee was conducted early in the year and another is planned for 2 December. Our thanks to all who participated and will participate in these working bees or who have otherwise contributed to the maintenance of the Church property. In particular, we note the efforts of the members of SCUC and which are greatly appreciated.

The Property Committee is currently looking at ways to reduce electricity costs, on both economic and environmental grounds.

We extend thanks to all (including those in Sydney Covenant Uniting Church) who have helped, in many ways, in maintaining the buildings and grounds. We appreciate the work

of Ravenswood ground staff members who have continued to look after our lawns. We also thank our long term contractors, Matthew Wyatt-Sprat, electrician and the plumber, Ken Simpson, whose knowledge of our buildings has provided very useful input to any work undertaken.

Lyn McLennan November 2017

The Luncheon Group

The Luncheon Group met on the first Thursday of nine months during the year. This year we changed the format to have more interaction instead of a guest speaker. It gave us a reprieve from our busyness in life to stop and meet with others and share life together, really listen to one another. This has been enabled by the generous hospitality of our hosts. Thank you to Jeanie and Eric Atkinson, Sue and David Conde, Judy and David Elmslie, Ruth and John Mitchell and Janet Scott and Paul Swadling for opening their homes to us. Everyone bought their own sandwiches which were followed by the signature dishes of Janet Scott, Sue Conde, Jeannie Atkinson, Margaret Pardey, Rosemary Watson and the bought delicacies. It was worth coming to sample these dishes.

Thank you to Rev. Paul Swadling who conducted a communion service with many of the people contributing before our lunch together. It was a special time of fellowship. The number of people attending lunch each month was between twenty and thirty and sixty coming to the Christmas lunch. What a Christmas lunch with many thanks to Jeanie Atkinson for hosting the event. The food was delicious and more importantly was our community stretching out into the wider community. The most encouraging aspect of our group this year is that the depth of community has increased both between old friends and new. We will be looking out for you to join us next year.

Yvonne Dewar and Janet Scott

Trading Table Report

The Trading Table has kept us busy this year and we are very grateful to all those who've kept us well supplied with a variety of things for sale.

Our takings for the year are \$1611.35 which has made us very happy to be able to contribute to church funds. We ask for your continued support.

Flo Brawn and Rosemary Watson



Uniting Gordon Community Centre (UGCC)

UGCC is grateful to our volunteer tutors and organisers for the committed and enthusiastic sharing of their various abilities. They are Jeanie Atkinson (Painting and Drawing), Michael Barnes (Current Affairs), Bruce Kwong (Computers), Lesley Meldrum (Needlecraft), Shirley Morley (Mahjong), Roslyn Rossettin (Walking Group), Paul Swadling (Stories in the Courtyard), Rosemary Watson (Wrap with Love) and Bruce and Rosemary Watson (Lunch in the Courtyard).

UGCC also includes the playgroups (see separate report) and we are grateful to Nicola Robinson for the care and creativity she supplies for children, parents and grandparents.

2017 MAYORAL AWARDS FOR SENIORS

On Thursday 2nd March the Mayor of Ku-ring-gai presented UGCC with the award for Outstanding Contribution to the Community by a Group. On the same occasion the Mayor also presented awards for their service through UGCC to Sue Conde, Jeanie Atkinson and Bruce and Rosemary Watson. UGCC is grateful for this community recognition.

STRATEGIC PLAN FOR UNITING GORDON COMMUNITY CENTRE

UGCC recognises the valuable contribution of the members of its Management Committee: Kerry Blight, John Buchanan, Sue Conde (Director), Ann Dalton, Nicola Robinson, Roslyn Rossettin, Rosemary Watson and Paul Swadling (Chair).

In 2017 the management committee engaged in a strategic planning exercise which produced the following (summarised) results:

OUR VISION

The Uniting Gordon Community Centre is a growing, inclusive activity hub which welcomes people of all ages and cultures, enabling them to pursue interests and ideas as they walk beside each other, exploring the meaning of life in our changing community.

OUR MISSION

The Uniting Gordon Community Centre aims to assist the development of a vibrant, connected, interactive Gordon community.

We are continually improving the UGCC activity hub by listening to new ideas, being responsive to changing needs, including community newcomers, trialling new activities, providing opportunities for social interaction and friendship formation, being open to different suggestions, supporting one another, providing opportunities for volunteers and planning for growth.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS 2017 – 2020

The following three goals emerged from the strategic planning carried out by the UGCC Board:

GOAL 1: Attract new people to become part of the UGCC community in 2017 by regularly promoting the community spirit of the Centre' many activities.

GOAL 2: Identify possible new activities and incorporate them into the UGCC program.

GOAL 3: Begin conversations with likely new volunteers about programs they may be prepared to run. Recruit new volunteers to run programs as appropriate.

These goals are spelt out in detail in the full report and need to be worked through carefully in the coming three years. Anyone interested is welcome to a copy of the full report.

COMMUNITY ARTS FESTIVAL

Ability Links - an organisation that works closely with people with disability, their families and carers to support them to fulfil their goals, hopes and dreams - invited UGCC to showcase our art class at a Community Arts Festival on 12 October 2017 at the Dougherty Centre, Chatswood.

Associated with Mental health Week, the event ran from noon to 6 pm and consisted of workshops and information stalls. Jeanie Atkinson and Janet Scott set up a display from the UGCC art group and Jeanie ran a workshop for people with disabilities. Rosemary Watson set up a second display by the UGCC Wrap with Love group.

AT THE SEPTEMBER 2017 MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING:

By way of providing a glimpse into Management Committee operations, Sue Conde, Director, presented a report which included the following matters:

Wrap with Love Knit-in: On Friday 25th August a wonderful, colourful and successful display was held in the church. About 80 rugs have now been sent off to be distributed to needy people overseas. The management committee suggested leaving the display up for the Sunday service next year. UGCC is grateful to Rosemary Watson and Flo Brawn for their wonderful organisation and a very successful morning. There is a need for increased publicity for next year's event to encourage more people to attend.

Website and Facebook: UGCC needs an interested person who has the skills to improve our Facebook page.

Morning Tea for tutors: The committee proposed a morning meeting with the tutors to get their feedback on how everything is going.

Ideas for new classes: A jigsaw mat has been purchased.

A space for Mandarin grandparents to have a chat: It was suggested this could possibly be at 10.00am on Friday mornings in term. A few walkers may also like to join in. Nicola will see at playgroup whether there is any interest. This might start next term.

UGCC FINANCES:

While the fees and lunch price for UGCC are not expensive, prices are continually updated by a little each year to avoid the situation where a sudden, larger price hike is needed. Fees for Painting and Computer classes are \$58 per term and other classes are \$54 per term. A special rate for two people from the same household is \$81 per term. Casual rates for all classes are \$8 per week and the price for lunch (sausage sizzle, dessert and a glass of wine) is \$6.

The September meeting heard that UGCC had \$3800 in funds and approved \$2500 to go GUC. Each term a contribution of \$2500 to GUC has been approved. The charity we supported in 2017 was again the Lindara Family Program and a donation of \$1500 was presented to Lindara at our Christmas Service and Morning Tea. In the 2017 calendar year UGCC has provided a total of \$10,000 towards the budget of Gordon Uniting Church from the Friday programme. The Playgroup program has provided funds of approximately \$6000 to GUC in 2017.

Paul Swadling (Rev) Chairperson UGCC

Stitching and Caring Group -2017

Our Stitching Group meets weekly and has once again enjoyed the hospitality and warm welcome of members to their homes this year. It is healing to share our creative ideas, our worries, our hopes, especially our hopes: Good News stories have been themes for our church community again this year.

In the last 12 months we have financially supported the Muscular Dystrophy Association and Julie Greig. Julie now lives in Bathurst and coordinates the help given by Gordon and Pymble Uniting churches together with Ravenswood, Knox and PLC communities with various schools in the far north-west of NSW who need support and contacts.

We have maintained knitting beautiful and varied squares at our Thursday evening group meetings and also at Friday's Community morning: we hosted a special Wrap with Love morning held in our church at Gordon which was successful and the finished shawls have been sent to Cambodia, Australian Refugees and others. Our Shawl Ministry continues on

at Gordon with a ritual of love & healing in the giving of shawls to those who have special needs within our church community.

A number of our members deserve special thanks for sharing their many creative talents - Rosemary Watson, Liz Wood, Flo Brawn, Beth Bunyan & others together with those who host our weekly get-togethers – Robyn Chidley, Janet Scott, Rae Andrews, Rosemary Watson, Helen Collins and we are also grateful to use our church rooms if needed.

Importantly, we create loving, supporting friendships within our group. May the “c” words always be essential to us – creativity, closeness, caring and compassion.

Judy Pitman, Rosemary Watson and Beth Bunyan

Breakfast Forums

These breakfast events started back in 1995 - then “Men’s Breakfast” - and the aim from the start has been to have 4 breakfasts each year. This aim has not always been achieved as was the case in the period of this report.

In August 2016, we welcomed the son-in-law of David and Sue Conde - Peter Boulden - who spoke on “Trains - past , present and future”. Whilst Peter had worked on road and tunnelling projects here and overseas, he spoke on rail projects including the current projects in NSW, notably the Sydney Metro.

November was when Rob Floyd, then Director of UnitingWorld, spoke on the subject of “Whatever became of International Mission?” Since he spoke to us, Rob has moved from UnitingWorld to the position of Associate General Secretary, Assembly Resources Unit.

As our first breakfast in each year is usually in February we have difficulties with dates to fit in with our intended speaker. However, we found the right date in April 2017 when we were very happy to welcome Tiffany Thomas Kane OAM - Ravenswood student. Tiffany had great success at the Paralympic Games in 2016 and those present were able to pitch some interesting questions to her.

In August, our lawyer members, Peter Norman and Lyn McLennan gave a pictorial presentation of their trip earlier in the year to Cuba.

The last Breakfast Forum for the year was in November when distinguished professor< David Throsby of Macquarie University gave a very interesting talk under the title “What does Economics have to say about the Arts”.

We thank all who helped with our forums over the past year. We are always happy to receive suggestions for speakers so if you have some thoughts in this regard, please talk to one of the people named below.

Bruce Kwong, Herb Schoch, Bruce Watson