

Gordon-Pymble Uniting Church

Mission Plan “Towards 2025”

OUR VISION

Gordon-Pymble Uniting Church – engaging community, exploring faith

THE MUSTARD SEED AND MISSION PLANS

It feels like the familiar parable of the mustard seed holds particular relevance for Gordon-Pymble congregation as we move into the next four years. Not only does the seed spread and multiply, the trees that grow provide refuge for the vulnerable, as the birds of the air find a home. It is our hope, through this plan, not only to grow as a church but to provide a safe place in a busy world for people to find community and explore Christian faith.

This church mission plan will guide our congregation in the coming years. It sets out the priorities we feel called to, and so will influence decision-making, including budget allocations and staff time. At the end of 2025 (and along the way) the mission plan will enable us to measure how well we achieved our priorities.

Of course, everything we do as a congregation is valuable, but some activities present as our particular calling for this moment. This mission plan seeks to highlight those specific priorities while also acknowledging the importance of other groups and activities that maintain our happy congregation and keep it bubbling along in active discipleship and loving service.

The personal stories populating the document illustrate different ways real people have connected with, and benefited from, our congregation over the last few years. They serve as examples of ‘birds finding a home’ and an encouragement to us that we have a community worth sharing.

WHO ARE WE?

Gordon-Pymble is a confident Uniting Church congregation formed in 2019 from a successful amalgamation. We are a new congregation with a strong and proud history in our former churches. We are inspired by Jesus’ vision and action for a new world where all are welcome, equal and loved – something he called the kingdom of God. We want to see that kingdom increasingly come to life in our local context.

The amalgamation is the primary event in GPUC’s young life. It reflected a bold step to change so that we could be more relevant to our local community. These structural changes for church communities are rarely easy but it was embraced in a mature fashion for the sake of Christ’s larger mission.

Our new congregation seeks to blur the lines between who is ‘in’ and who is ‘out’. In the tradition of Jesus, a strong focus on community means that everyone is welcome, and all belong. The employment of a Community Co-ordinator has resulted in many more people

coming into contact with the church's activities and sites, and subsequently, our reputation as a community resource and a community-minded church is growing. Through this openness, people are discovering natural pathways into groups that emphasise belonging and explore faith.

A story from our community:

Kamran and Shirin came to Australia from Iran a few years ago with their young son Dariush. Moving provided an opportunity for them both to fulfil a long-held desire to explore Christianity, and they joined the Pymble church. Kamran started reading some recommended material and joined Tuesday Conversations. Shirin found a warm welcome and practical help at the playgroup, before joining the Bible Study on Thursday morning. Separately, they both decided to be baptised, and the baptisms, including Dariush's, were celebrations of great joy for them and for the congregation.

Building on the history of the previous congregations, GPUC embraces a contemporary theology that underpins our justice and service activities. Long term sensitive connections with communities in far west NSW have now been supplemented with partnerships with Kiribati through *UnitingWorld* and Margaret Jurd College. As a congregation blessed with strong resources, these activities reflect our desire to be active in Christ's mission locally, nationally and internationally.

Back 'at home' the congregation maintains a healthy care for one another through active pastoral care and a range of fellowship and support groups. Our community is characterised by formal and informal networks that reflect natural thoughtfulness, love and compassion.

A story from our community:

Mary is a long-time worshipper at Pymble. Recently her husband died unexpectedly and then she was diagnosed with a cancer. She finds support in the worship and in many of the church groups and enjoys giving back in hospitality and caring for others. The congregation has been a large part of her support through difficult months.

LONG-TERM VALUES

As followers of Jesus,

1. We value **unity** across the generations, between our former congregations, and between our various services and groups. As a congregation with multiple groups and age ranges, we will be united particularly around our expressions of justice and service.
2. We recognise the need to be readily **adaptable** in our programs and worship, embracing change in order to be relevant to the changing needs of the community.
3. We see **justice** at the heart of Jesus' ministry and so are committed to supporting acts of social justice locally, rurally and internationally.
4. We desire **growth** in all its forms, understanding that to be alive is to grow. As a church we value growth in our discipleship, depth of personal relationships, numbers involved and the impact of our people and programs. We want our church community and programs to be vibrant expressions of God's good news.
5. We desire to leave a legacy for **future generations**, stewarding our resources and thinking broader than only for today.
6. Our faith calls us to a deep and sustained **welcome** of all people who come into contact with our church community.
7. Our church needs to be **safe place** for all ages and stages of life so that people can confidently participate in activities and explore faith.
8. As a Uniting Church congregation, we value ecumenical and interfaith relationships and will work towards constructive relationships with other Christian churches and with other faiths.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES TOWARDS CURRENT PRIORITIES

As we move forward in faith and love, the following principles have guided the development of the priorities listed below.

1. We want our church to be a place where people have multiple pathways to explore spirituality and meaning.
2. We desire to be more visible and relevant to our community.
In particular, we wish to increasingly reflect the local changes we have witnessed in
 - greater cultural diversity
 - shifting age demographics
 - larger numbers living in higher density accommodation

3. We understand our church to be an intergenerational community and we will value and grow opportunities for cross-generational initiatives and connections.
4. We believe our congregation is well-placed for many who are living alone or otherwise isolated to experience community and belonging.
5. We value the vital contribution of our volunteers across our community and commit ourselves to support, mentor, and empower them, and to grow our volunteer base.
6. Acknowledging the congregation is presently exploring property needs, we will do so consistent with the values, principles and priorities of this plan, and mindful of the long-term that needs to be considered.

A story from our community:

Violet first visited GPUC with her daughter and her grandson to attend one of our Playgroup sessions. One day on their way to Playgroup she discovered the English Conversation Class in another room and they were very keen for Violet to join. Violet hadn't been in Australia for very long and had very little English. Ever since that week Violet has been attending the English class and growing in confidence. Violet is a much-admired member of the class as she has a happy nature and often fills the room with laughter. Her English skills have gone ahead in leaps and bounds. Violet has a wonderful willingness and thirst to learn.

PRIORITIES FOR 2021-2025

THE BIG THREE

There are many activities and groups that are important for a church to continue operating well. However, this mission plan first highlights 3 particular priorities that if not achieved, would mean that we fell short of our discerned hopes for the coming years. These are initiatives or priorities to which we feel particularly called for this period to 2025.

Aim	Detail	Responsibility	Targets/Comments
1. The development of a new, sustainable community of faith, aimed at 10 plus year-olds and their families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To provide a space for those outgrowing Messy Church, where families can continue to explore and express faith. • To be a sustainable community of faith where people can grow and belong • To secure a suitable ministry agent whose primary role would be the growth of this community • To use service as a path into Christian faith by leveraging young people's desire to serve and improve their world • To engage with parents in their challenging parent task • To help strengthen the child-parent relationship as they move toward teenage years • To use the connections we have with our local schools and Chaplains to promote this community • To grow the pastoral connections with these families to encourage belonging and ownership 	Faith Development Team Minister Courtney H Nicola R	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friday Fun Connections has begun • On-going monitoring of retention rates. • 6 monthly surveys or feedback to ensure suitability and allow adaptability • Maintain suitability and interest for both children and parents • Minister profile has been approved by ACOMP and JNC in process
2. To maintain unity and a single GPUC identity while offering multiple pathways for faith exploration and growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is a qualitative aim to ensure congregational unity at a time of growth and change • To have the different parts of GPUC unified by their support of our mission partners and our core values • To encourage group-appropriate ways of supporting mission partners consistent with our GPUC responsibilities 	Faith Development Team Church Council Minister	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gaining regular feedback from groups and individuals. • Formalise core values • Development of suitable ways to support partnerships for each group • Effective forward planning assists creative activities • Wise and discerning Church Council leadership

3. To deepen and grow connections with our local community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To have greater commitment to the diversity present in our local community • To foster inclusion in all our programs and activities • To explore the feasibility of expanding the community centre to Pymble, and if suitable, take steps to establish it. 	Community Connections Team Lesley B Pymble reps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An English conversation class has begun • Celebration of 'Weeks' aimed at inclusion, eg Harmony Day, NAIDOC Week • Consultation re Pymble site
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Outcomes, and further details and timelines, will be the responsibility of the particular Team indicated.

A story from our community:

Joan lives independently in an over-55 village not far from the church. She started coming to Computer classes on Friday mornings at the Community Centre almost ten years ago, and has also enjoyed the Mahjong group. With new activity groups being offered during the week following the appointment of the church's Community Coordinator, Joan has been attending the Craft group on Monday mornings, and was very happy to volunteer to help with morning teas at a special information morning at the Centre. When one of the Mahjong group was hospitalised for some months, Joan kept in touch weekly, visiting her and helping with laundry. Joan is now volunteering to lead a group of Mahjong beginners. She doesn't hesitate to let the Director know if something's not right or needs fixing – she certainly knows that she belongs.

OTHER PRIORITIES

Other priorities are grouped under the three teams that reflect how we see the heart of the church – Faith Development, Justice and Service, and Community Connections. These priorities represent the value we place on all parts of our church life, even while The Big Three reflect our major calling. The numbering throughout is for easy referencing and does not indicate importance. We acknowledge the enormous, detailed work done by the Business Team and Communication Team to provide the foundation upon which our mission rests.

Faith Development

Aim	Detail	Team / Staff	Targets/comments
4. Review the Messy Church program to ensure it continues to meet the needs of participating families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review with team and participants • Ensuring quality and age-appropriate faith input 	F.D. Team Nicola Courtney Minister	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual survey • High percentage of MC children moving to FFC • Families retained

5. Develop the links and relationships between Messy Church and FFC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear identity for each program • Cross promotion • Careful 'transition planning' with individuals and groups of young people • Highlight worship aspect in MC 	F.D. Team Nicola & Courtney Minister	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schedule theme-based activities with Messy Church having more overt emphasis on worship
6. We grow in discipleship as individuals and a church community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worship services have a discipleship edge. • Promotion of small groups and Bible Studies • Addressing contemporary issues in all groups. • Develop a growth mindset re discipleship 	F.D. Team Minister Group leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People reflect spiritual growth in NCLS survey • Sense of vibrancy and relevancy of material used

A story from our community:

John and Paula have been coming to Playgroup with their two young children since October 2017. They love the friends they have made and still enjoy playgroup after four years. They now attend Messy Church and have joined Friday Fun Connections. Paula says she always feels welcome and loves the kids taking part in the purposeful projects at FFC.

Justice and Service

Aim	Detail	Team/staff	Targets/comments
7. Establish and develop the partnership with <i>UnitingWorld</i> for Kiribati	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sign the UW agreement • Meet the conditions for funds, prayer and contact • Regular focus within worship 	J&S Team Minister Nicola	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreement has been signed • \$3500 minimum raised p.a. • 1-2 video or other 'contacts' p.a • 1-2 services with UW focus p.a. • Promote prayer needs quarterly
8. Establish and develop the partnership with Margaret Jurd College	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish MJC committee • Develop options of support • Positive relationship with Principal and Board • Regular focus in worship 	J&S Team MJC Committee Minister Nicola	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committee has been established • 1-2 services with MJC focus • Promote prayer needs quarterly

Community Connections

Aim	Detail	Team / Staff	Targets/comments
11. To consider a <i>Pastoral Partners</i> type program to ensure people don't fall through the gaps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss with other churches who use this type of program • Explore other options 	Com Conn Team Church Council Minister	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarity on best way forward • All associated with GPUC feel well cared for
12. To recognise the wonderful care occurring in our existing groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find ways of thanking and encouraging PUNCH, Heart and Mind, Coffee'n'Craft, Book Clubs, Friendship Circle, Tuesday Conversations, Luncheon Group, Stitching Group, Coffee Connections, Yak'nYarn, Bible Study Groups, Friday Community Centre, FFC, Breakfast Forum, Messy Church, Social Golf Group and Playgroups 	Com Conn Team Minister	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Twice yearly encouraging contact from Minister or Team • Participants know they are valued for the support and care they offer
13. To move towards both sites being vibrant community hubs with extended hours and activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Links with Big priority no.3 • Consider impact on or coordination with existing hall hirers 	Com Conn Team Lesley	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active sites with appropriate room to grow • Balance activity and income
14. Expansion of Gordon community garden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore capacity for extra garden beds • Appoint a person to co-ordinate gardens 	Com Conn Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suitable consultation with stakeholders

A story from our community:

Lily lives alone in Gordon, returning to the area after time living in the country. She was pleasantly surprised to find a range of community activities operating out of the Gordon church. Lily joined the art class at the Friday morning community centre and came to Tuesday Conversations when there was an interfaith topic, appreciating the church's openness to other faiths. Receiving a warm welcome on the Tuesday nights she decided to keep attending. Lily enjoys the discussion very much despite considering herself not very religious.

SO, WHERE ARE WE NOW?

Gordon-Pymble congregation amalgamated in January 2019, and the balance of that year was given to building relationships and drawing the two former congregations together. 2020 was dominated by COVID-19 and parts of our amalgamation journey were disrupted in that difficult year. As we emerge from the strictures of the pandemic, the coming years are crucial to us achieving our stated desire to grow and connect with our community in new ways. Let us now move from the seed of an idea around amalgamation to being an expanding and inclusive church community for those seeking shelter and looking to explore faith in Jesus.