

# Foresightful conversations

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## What do we mean by ‘foresightful’?

Foresight is a great asset. In fact, it is so valuable that perhaps it could be considered as another asset category. Foresight is the capacity to look ahead. Foresight makes it possible to predict and plan. New knowledge arises from engaging our capacity for foresight. Foresight lifts us beyond from the ‘problem saturated present’ and transports us into an imagined, different future. The possibilities that we see with foresight encourage and excite us. Foresight is one component to vision. And for Christians, engaging with God’s Spirit in foresight-full thinking inspires and energizes us!

There are six foresightful conversations to consider. Each conversation is introduced by a **Topic**, followed by a **Focus** comment. Each conversation begins with a **Thinking about** section. Use these questions to stimulate the groups’ thinking. Use the **To begin** line as a conversational ‘opener’ for the first sentence for each participant. Each conversation invites participants into a story telling space.

The conversations include opportunities for the participants to reflect on their own story of ways in which the story of Christian faith has found life and meaning. However, each conversation also invites the participants to go beyond the stories of past and present. The conversations will guide groups towards story making about the future, inviting participants into foresightful spaces. Perhaps your agency or council could select between two and four conversations that seem to be most fitting to your situation.

In your congregation, find a meeting time when you can engage in the following exercise.

You will need about 90 to 120 minutes.

For each of the following foresightful conversations –

- ‘our’ and ‘we’ refers to the congregation
- recognising that each question is complex, take time to consider what level of conversation the question is inviting you into before you begin the conversation
- some of the language used might not be typical of everyday conversations about your church, so try to look beyond the words themselves to what the questions are asking
- the focus is on the relationships your church has with its members, the people they serve, and the wider community.



## Practical Matters

### You will need

- **Patience:** The questions are complex. Clarity of vision never comes easily! The aim of the *Foresightful conversation* is to gather insights that both inform and help to clarify vision.
- **Time:** Experience suggests that each round of conversation requires about 15 to 20 minutes. If groups are limited to 6 or less (catering for a total of, say 36 people) 15 to 20 minutes works well. Larger groups – say 8 (catering for a total of 48 people) will require 25 to 30 minutes per round. This means that to complete the six rounds in one sitting will require about 90 to 120 minutes.
- **Conversation prep time:** Add to each round a 2 to 3 minute silent thinking time, During this time encourage participants to jot down ideas that come mind as they read the *Focus* and *Thinking about* sections After the silent preparation, launch the conversation.
- **Copies:** of the introductory paragraphs above, titled *What do we mean by 'foresightful'?* – one for each conversation group.
- **Copies:** of each round of conversation's *focus* and *thinking about* briefing printed and allocated to one table per conversation.
- **Discipline:** There are six topics for conversation. Each topic is associated with a 'round of conversation' Please limit a particular 'round of conversation' to the topic indicated by the title of the 'Round'.
- **Hint:** Several copies of each conversation **topic** could be at respective 'round's' tables so that each participant can have a copy.
- **A room arranged with six tables.** Chairs will be required, so that participants can be seated for each of the conversations. Ensure that there is sufficient space for one person in the group to record the group's findings as the conversations develop.
- **Recording sheets:** Distribute the flipchart papers so that each table has just one set of asset flipchart sheets, and one colour of felt pen.
- **A facilitator:** who will allocate persons to groups, allocate groups to tables for their initial 'round of conversation' keep time, remind groups to record their insights, and move groups around the six rounds of conversation in an orderly, 'round robin' or tabloid games style.

The six foresightful conversations offered are:

Conversation One – Inviting Life-giving Relationships

Conversation Two – Valuing Neighbours' Knowledge and Reputation

Conversation Three – Technology, Services and Storytelling

Conversation Four – Making Leadership Development a priority

Conversation Five – Exploring partnerships and alliances

Conversation Six – Embracing diversity



## Conversation One – Inviting Life-giving Relationships

### *Focusing*

Everyday, in and around this church property, in our workplaces and neighbourhoods, we hear people telling stories about their lives. Some stories, like that of Isaiah, begin with encounters with God in worship. Sometimes we hear stories of hope. Others are filled with concerns and anxieties. Some of the stories we hear share answers to prayer, or evidence God's actions in the teller's lives. Some stories are requests for prayer, a desire for companionship, or seek a blessing from God in one way or another.

### *Thinking about these stories...*

Imagine each of us giving much closer attention to listening closely to the stories of the people with whom our church's activities and service put us in touch.

Now imagine each Christian in this church telling their personal stories of transformation. Each person sharing her or his testimony to God's love and grace in their daily living.

- Imagine us listening and sharing our testimonies frequently. How might this change the ways in which we relate to others?
- What might we do differently or in addition to what we are doing now?

### *To begin*

When I think about listening attentively and sharing my testimony...



## Conversation Two – Valuing Neighbours’ Knowledge and Reputation

### *Focusing*

We know from conversations with our friends, as well as from the National Church Life Survey reports, that most UCA Christians are familiar with at least 3 churches. That is: UCA members visit or worship with at least 3 churches during the year.

And we know people from other churches, too. We often meet in the street or shops or at cafes or in homes and share experiences of our respective Churches.

People who come into our church programs or come looking for help often tell us about the reputation of other churches or community services, too. What would we hear if we took the time to listen?

### *Thinking about our awareness of other churches in our neighbourhoods....*

- What stories do we know about their activity in our neighbourhoods?
- How have these Churches worked to find different, more effective ways to express God’s call to mission?
- How do these stories reflect their effort to create vital Christian practices of Christian spirituality and service?
- What do these stories tell us about combining astute awareness of the changing nature of the neighbourhood, new ministry practices, up to date use of technology and new forms of community service to provide more accessible, satisfying and engaging experiences with Christianity?
- What do these stories tell about their purpose and identity, as well as what they value?
- What do we deeply value about the insights we have gained from observing the life and stories of neighbouring congregations?

### *To begin*

My experience of other churches in our area is and awareness of their reputation ...



## Conversation Three – Technology, Services and Storytelling

### ***Focusing***

We are aware of the ways in which technology is an increasingly important factor in our daily lives. The Internet, computers, email, DVDs videophone calls, SMS, and so forth.

In the church, technology has also become an increasingly significant factor to ministry and mission. We are familiar with data projected images and hymn or song lyrics. We know about emailed faith messages and meeting reminders. Most likely, we are familiar with SMS faith talk, iPod Christian MTV and the use of pod casts if we are under 30 years of age.

Sharing our faith with other people often seems difficult. But there are many ways of sharing faith, itself a gift from God. Giving money, visiting the sick, caring for neighbours, listening to a person in distress, being available to another person, helping in so many ways... Sharing faith is at the heart of each of these actions of sharing. On each occasion we have an opportunity to act and speak as Jesus would. So, the WWJD question, *What would Jesus do?* really is a faith sharing, faith raising challenge to us.

### ***Thinking about technology, and its capacity for shaping some of the ways in which we celebrate, share and express our Christian faith...***

- How will emerging technologies change the current conventions and ‘rules’ about ways that Christians, and the Church can deliver their message and services to the Australian community?
- How might the ways we listen to, reflect on and tell our own story change in an increasingly on-line and global world?
- What would we like to do more of through technology, services and storytelling?

### ***To begin***

Some of the changes I have witnessed in respect to technology impacting our church are...



## Conversation Four – Making Leadership Development a priority

### *Focusing*

Most of us meet other Christian friends fairly often. When we meet, sometimes we share stories about our respective churches. Often these stories arise when we have an exciting new ministry arising, or a special program. The presence of a new Minister of the Word or Deacon in our Church gives a natural opportunity to share the news and reflect on the experience.

We are also becoming more used to searching for people to take leadership roles in the Church. People who have held leadership roles for sometime step down. Who might replace them? Where do we search, and what are we looking for? We have a tendency in the Uniting Church to search for older, more life-mature people. Sometimes we are looking for people just like us.

Missional churches understand and are committed to a positive practice of leadership development. Recruits are more valuable than volunteers. Trained and ready people are more effective than ill-equipped ones. Age is not a factor. Skills, competence and capacity for the task are some of the more critical elements. Especially when ministry or mission initiatives are developed with a particular generation in mind.

### *Thinking about how we develop, sustain and retain leaders in our Church...*

- What stories do we know that can inform us about attracting and retaining the most skilled, passionate and committed practitioners (lay and ordained) in their mission and ministry?
- What kinds of working arrangements and church cultures will these gifted people work best in to the benefit of the mission and ministry of our Church?
- How might our Church make the best use of new opportunities for leadership development and training emerging across the Melbourne Christian community?
- What will we do to assist our congregation to uphold the essentials of equipping disciples of Jesus Christ to thrive in the faith of Christ and in the practices of Christian faith?
- How will these commitments be expressed in the investment and resourcing priorities of our Uniting Church?

### *To begin*

Leadership in our church reminds me of... and helps me to imagine ...



## Conversation Five – Exploring partnerships and alliances

### ***Focusing***

Growing and missional churches form relationships with organizations to achieve together what they cannot achieve on their own.

Sometimes these relationships are partnerships, negotiated between the church and a para-church organization. *For example:* a local church might form a partnership with the Churches Commission for Education in Schools to supply and support a Chaplain in a State School. Sometimes these relations are alliances, agreed to by each party to accomplish a common goal of objective. *For example:* a local church might agree to supply its building at a nominal rent to a community organization so that together they can provide a neighbourhood community service to parents with preschool children. The Victorian Playgroup Association and local churches often form alliances.

Sometimes, an alliance or a partnership enables a church and its related organization to gain access to philanthropic funds, or even to government funding through the grant submission process

Partnerships and alliances benefit the people the partners or allies are called to serve.

### ***Thinking about our Church's experience of partnerships and alliances...***

- How has our church benefited from partnerships or alliances with Governments, other organizations or community service bodies?
- Based on our experience of partnerships, what do other organizations look for in a potential partner, such as our Church?
- What might our church have to offer a prospective partner?
- What might our church look for in a prospective partner or ally?
- What might Australian governments (State and Federal) demand in respect of partnerships between a local church and a community organization, and the government?
- How might these requirements or demands benefit our Church if we were to seek funds from beyond our congregation to fund a particular mission initiative or program?

### ***To begin***

From my experience, there are a lot of organizations providing services in our area, such as...



## Conversation Six – Embracing diversity

The UCA has many stories about experiences of encouraging the church to be more diverse. Right now, as well as in the future, engaging with various forms of diversity is really significant for the UCA. It is a serious issue for our particular Church, too.

One look at the recent ABS Census statistics tells us that our neighbourhoods are rapidly changing. A visit to the local shopping centre witnesses to the speed and breadth of cultural and ethnic diversity developing in our neighbourhoods.

Most of us who worship on Sunday morning are likely to be aged over 65 (the ‘Builder’ generation – *build it up and keep it going*) of between 64 and 50 (the ‘Boomer’ generation – *use it, feel comfortable and enjoy it*). Together, we nurse real concerns for the Christian spiritual lives of our Gen X children and Gen Y grandchildren. Perhaps we feel increasingly unable to influence their spirituality. Secretly, we may entertain real doubts about our ability to bridge the generation gap.

Unambiguous inclusivity is a hallmark of missional churches. Big churches of more than 250 members can provide for this inclusivity in ways smaller congregations cannot. Big churches can adopt diversity on almost any level.

### *Thinking about engaging diversity as a positive experience...*

How can Uniting Church stories and experiences of embracing increasing diversity encourage our local church into a different future?

*For example:* recall stories and experiences in respect to

- culture, ethnicity, and language;
- practices of Christian spirituality in everyday life;
- neighbourhoods and particular localities in which local churches and community organizations are present;
- ways of attending to the structural and organisational needs of churches, relationships with other people, groups and organizations;
- interpreting the stories of faith, and in particular of Christian faith...

### *To begin*

When I walk around my neighbourhood, I am surprised by...

