

A section from the
On the Way Together
Report
September 2009



inquire imagine
innovate
implement



On the Way Together **Report on a Spirited journey towards the future**

On the Way to Together is a special project of the Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of Victoria and Tasmania. This project has been developed in response to a requirement of the Synod meeting 2007 that the General Secretary provide to the Synod meeting of 2008 a Synod strategic plan.

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Innovate

Taking initiative and making plans

Understanding imagined stories as real initiatives

Now the Synod has adopted the proposals of *On the Way Together*, each Council and its agencies and commissions is ready to engage the next two movements: *Innovation* and *Implementation*.

Innovation engages all we have imagined through our provocative propositions and proposals. We now plan ways to put the scenarios imagined in our proposals into effect. During this time, we pause to rest and meditate. We discern how God's resources, available through the Spirit's gifts and material resources, can be applied as we join God's mission in particular settings and relationships.

UCA Councils, agencies, commissions and committees will already have developed ways to plan their activities. Some will be formal, resulting in highly structured documents. Others will be informal, relying on flows of information and relationships between leaders and groups.

Informal initiatives

Innovation can come through informal initiatives. Without fanfare or permission, an individual or a group may sense the empowerment to be creative. So they take the initiative, creating a new reality in the light of a provocative proposal.

Formal initiatives

Some initiatives grow from a small group turning ideas into plans, then acting on them. The group might seek permission or, better, work within a proscriptive setting. Permission is granted with agreed broad limits. A plan might be structured,

such as a mini-strategic plan or a project plan. Another plan may be more chaotic, reflecting an intuitive approach to making real what has been imagined through a provocative proposal.

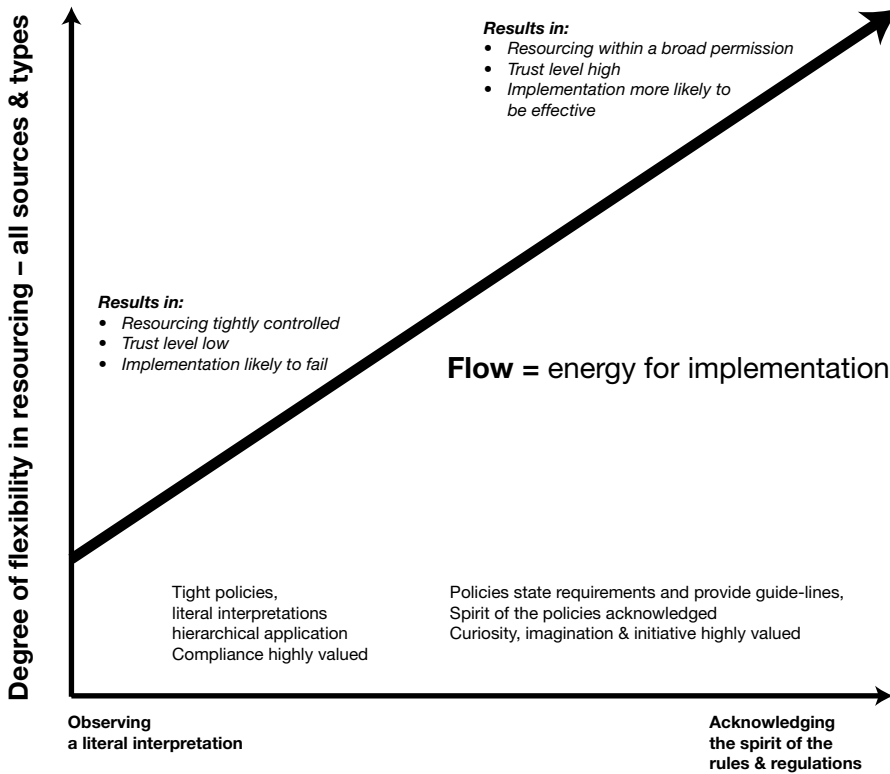
Structural and formal initiatives

Church committees tend to be formal and structured about their innovations. Usually this involves 'gates' that can shut out creativity and deny the council valuable flexibility. Maintaining simple, flexible structures responsive to particular situations is critical. One of the core criteria for any group's function with regard to innovation is creating the conditions that ensure creativity thrives.

The following diagram, figure 3, illustrates the relationship between flexibility and structure with respect to energy flow when implementing a plan.

Some innovation will result from the meetings of councils and their standing committees. Usually, this comes as liberating policies. Provocative propositions and proposals can easily be turned into liberating policies, provided imagination and innovation are upheld. One way to do this is to re-read and refresh provocative proposals in the context of the council's meetings. Provocative propositions can also be used as a focus for prayer and thanksgiving. Through innovative and permission giving policy making it is possible to generate research, trials, experiments, and surprises. These policies guide councils as they discern where and how God is present in the neighbourhood and in the church.

Fig. 3 Sustaining energy for effective implementation of plans.



Degree of flexibility in applying resources policy.

What resources are available to assist in the development of plans to innovate?

Using *On the Way Together* Themes

- **Be intentional** about allowing the five life-giving themes to inform and shape priorities and initiatives. As your group, committee or council works with the five themes, you might begin to notice how they shape both planning and evaluation.
- **Note emerging sub-themes.** The five life-giving themes might also assist you to identify sub-themes relevant to your context. Take note of these emerging sub-themes. They provide significant points from which to arouse more specific provocative propositions and provocative proposals.
- **Listen to the conversations** that occur spontaneously around your group’s planning activity. These

conversations might be about the theme descriptions. If so, you can note points of coincidence or divergence in respect to the group’s experience of the local situation. Such conversations can alert the group to local opportunities and particular strengths upon which to build new initiatives.

- **Remain alert to the local community** or neighbourhood events and activities. Seek naturally arising coincidences between the themes of these events and activities and the five life-giving themes. Such coincidences can become significant intersections between the witness and worship of the church on the one hand and the neighbourhood celebrations, rituals and social patterns on the other. These intersections invite the church into the public space. They offer great opportunities for missional initiatives.

- ***Listen persistently for the spiritual heart beat*** of the neighbourhood and community. As you do so, reflect on how the five life-giving themes provide a connection or a response to the spiritual needs. Again, these links offer opportunities for missional initiatives. Consider the rich resources of Christian spirituality. Look for ways to bring these out from beyond the cloistered walls of the church building, into public spaces and conversations.

What makes a plan strategic?

What is unique about a church's strategic plan? First, the plan will show how we have listened to the gospel as received from the Bible, scholarship, tradition and experience. Second, the plan will demonstrate the church's awareness of itself as called into being by God and responding to God's commission to mission. Third, the plan will show awareness of the neighbour: people, relationships, needs and opportunities God calls us to in particular settings.

Any church undertaking a strategic planning exercise faces two dangers. We must take care not to objectify the neighbour with whom God calls us into relationship. We must also ensure that we are not presumptuous of the compassionate, liberating work of God's Spirit. We humbly remember that God's mission is our vocation. Therefore, we seek God's grace, guidance and initiative when planning.

Strategic Planning resources.

Another option when creating initiatives is to develop a strategic plan. Such planning approaches have become sciences in their own right, with much literature available. Most of this arises from the organisational sciences and reflects entrepreneurial values. Some church people are uneasy

about these values. They may seem at odds with the values of the church. Enterprise has marked much of the activity of the 'builder generation'. Being entrepreneurial is a common value within the 'boomer generation'. This value has often found expression in the birth of new institutions, the development of church property or the desire for church growth. The church has benefited from enterprise and entrepreneurship. It still requires these values and their associated gifts.

The Uniting Church holds other values as well. These include care, compassion, liberty and inclusivity. Our values work in a dynamic synergy. They naturally energise, redirect and moderate each other. When enterprise and entrepreneurship are dismissed from our considerations, innovation is the poorer. In fact, there is a very real sense in which enterprise and entrepreneurship are key factors in effective innovation. Perhaps the most important core factor is the direction and inspiration of the Spirit of God amongst us.

When the church engages in a strategic planning exercise, whatever approach is selected must be subject to the critique of gospel values and theology. Resources available must be assessed for appropriate values. In addition, resources used must facilitate the conversation between the gospel and the culture of the neighbourhood or region of the church engaging in the planning.

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The following resources have been used in the *On the Way Together* project. In particular the first listed has been found to be highly constructive.

Holy Conversations – Strategic planning as a spiritual Practice for congregations; Gil Rendle and Alice Mann; Alban Institute, Herndon Virginia, USA 2003.

The Power of Asset Mapping – how your congregation can act on its gifts; Luther K. Snow; Alban Institute, Herndon Virginia USA; 2004.

Memories, Hopes and Conversations; Mark Lau Branson; Alban Institute, Herndon, Virginia USA, 2004.

Discerning God's Will Together; Danny E. Morris and Charles M. Olsen, The Alban Institute, 1997.

www.congregational resources.org; Ed. Richard Bass, The Alban Institute, 2005

A Field Guide for the Missional Congregation – Embarking on a journey of transformation; Rick Rouse and Craig Van Gelder, Augsburg Fortress, 2008.

Appreciative Inquiry; Watkins and Mohr, Jossey Bass Pfeiffer, 2001.

Strategic Foresight – the power of standing in future; Nick marsh, Mike Mcallum and Dominique Purcell; Crown Content, 75 Flinders Lane Melbourne Australia; 2002.

The World Café - shaping our future through conversations that matter; Jaunita Brown, David Isaacs, et al; Barrett Kohler Publishers Inc, 2005.

What might a strategic plan include?

A council, agency or commission might elect to develop a strategic plan. Plans can be developed for the whole of a council's role and functions or for a specific project. The scope of a plan depends on the extent of a provocative proposal, since plans are ways to innovate what has been imagined.

A strategic plan sets out the *operational intentions* of the group. The plan will reflect the provocative proposal that initiated planning activity.

Typically, then, a plan might include:

1. **A purpose** – stated in the same form as the provocative proposition(s). Stated in this way, the purpose retains the connections with the five life-giving themes and the key theme descriptors. These remind us of the church at its most whole. Provocative propositions and proposals require our highest possible imagination. Provocative propositions and proposal have already established the timeliness of the initiatives being planned.
2. **A series of objectives** – steps by which the scenario imagined in the provocative proposal(s) developed from the provocative proposition will be accomplished.
3. **Methods** – associated with each objectives, indicating how the objectives will be engaged.
4. **Resource allocation** – indicating what the available resources are and how they will be allocated to each of the methods associated with each of the objectives. Resources include people, time, equipment, property, relationships such as alliances and partnerships, links with associations and institutions.

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5. **Risk management methods** – indicating what the risks are to each objective being met and how these risks can be managed. Risk management methods are often expressed as policies to guide the implementation of the plan.
6. **Assessment and evaluation activity** – indicating the frequency and methods to be used to assess and evaluate the planned activity. These will always be stated and formed in relation to the purpose. In addition, this section of the plan will indicate how changes to the plan will be negotiated during the life of the plan.
7. **A budget plan** – indicating the financial activity required to sustain the plan. This will take account of where funds come from, expenditure and the flow of funds over the period of the planned activity.

Plans need not be long or complicated. The simpler the plan the better. For this reason, committing the final form of the plan to a planning grid may be preferable to a lengthy, written document. The plan is a working document. It should be able to be

- read easily,
- communicated clearly, and
- revised frequently.

Remember, the purpose of the plan is to achieve the scenario imagined in the provocative proposal.

The quality of the plan will influence the ease of implementation.