

Parramatta Mission Council

An Update for our Congregations

Ian Gray – Chairperson Parramatta Mission Council

16 October 2020

2019 -2020 has been a strange and complex year. All of us have journeyed through this difficult year needing to accept the reality of “letting go” and embracing the new normal. All aspects of our life, community, church, and relationships have been altered – and some things will never return to the way they were.

At Parramatta Mission we have also been journeying through a challenging and complex season of transition where experiences such as suffering, grief, loss and uncertainty have touched all of us. I am holding onto a belief that suffering will take us somewhere that will sustain, renew and transform our lives in the knowledge that Christ is in everything.

A Season of Discernment

In the period leading up to December 2019 the Church Council undertook a comprehensive financial and Leadership/Ministry review of Parramatta Mission including receipt of a comprehensive 3-year financial plan for all of the Mission prepared by its management team.

One of the outcomes of these processes was an emerging proposal to shift the future focus of Parramatta Mission to the delivery of ministry and services in the City of Parramatta LGA, including Westmead.

One of the key drivers for this proposal was to ensure that maximum resources could be deployed to support the principles of “Inspiring the Common Good” in the Parramatta CBD and the burgeoning growth and ministry opportunities in Westmead.

Our Mission has built a nationally recognised platform of care and clinical support across its network of services. Careful attention was given as to whether Parramatta Mission had the capacity to maintain and expand services to offer optimal support and care for some of the most vulnerable and marginalised people in our community.

The extent by which Parramatta Mission would be able to deliver its ministry in the future was subject to an independent review of services and financial capacity in early 2020. This assessment was undertaken so that informed and well considered decisions could be made.

In June, the Board and Church Council, on the advice of its Review Steering Committee, resolved to adopt a way forward known as ‘A mission of the Congregations’; this included a number of changes necessary to ensure the future sustainability of Parramatta Mission, including the transfer of most of Parramatta Mission’s services elsewhere within the vast network of care and ministry of the Uniting Church in NSW and ACT.

A Season of Change

The season of change across Parramatta Mission has extended to the life of our congregations by a decision to conclude the ministries of Rev Dr Manas Ghosh and Rev Christine Bayliss Kelly. The supply ministry of Rev Dr Clive Pearson also concluded on 30 September. We give thanks to Manas, Christine and Clive for their ministry among us over recent years.

The placement of Rev Dr Amelia Koh Butler as Chaplain to Western Sydney University will also conclude no later than 30 June 2021 due to the inability of the Mission to fund this placement in the future.

After 13 years as Senior Minister/CEO of Parramatta Mission, Rev Keith Hamilton’s placement will conclude on 28 February 2021. Keith has now gone on extended annual, long and study leave to

progress his PhD studies. He will return to work for one week on 21 February 2021. We wish him well during his period of leave.

Sarah Bishop, as Chaplain to Children's Hospital at Westmead, will continue in this vital role as it is an externally funded position operating through the Mission.

At a Board level, the members of the Community Care Network Board retired at the end of June 2020 after providing excellent guidance, advice and governance of Parramatta Mission. A fresh season of governance has emerged. An Implementation Board has been established under a new Chairperson – Mr Paul Linossier – with three responsibilities: to oversee our services to June 2021, to guide the transition of the services of PM and to sculpt the remaining services in accordance with the decisions of the Church Council.

The Church Council has established the Combined Congregations Leaders Meeting (CCLM) that includes representatives from each of our congregations. The CCLM will lead and guide life across all our congregations. We are extremely grateful for the energy and commitment of this group who are so actively involved in reshaping our congregation life in this season of change.

Despite numerous challenges in 2020 the staff of Parramatta Mission has continued to deliver its services and ministries to a very high standard. It has in fact, been a testimony to the resilience of its staff that PM has remained resolutely dedicated to the wellbeing of its clients, consumers and all those connected with the Mission.

Our wonderful congregations have been drawn together (virtually!) during the COVID-19 lockdown and the reshaping of PM. Everyone has engaged and embraced all challenges with grace, humility and hope.

A Season of Hope and forgiveness

As we move from darkness to light, all involved at Parramatta Mission need to be the “yeast” in this challenging time as we shape our future at Parramatta Mission with patience and hope. 2020 has changed so many aspects of our lives but also creates opportunities to influence and offer hope. We need to be a forgiving people, as the scale of change all around us may not always make sense or be easy to comprehend.

The importance of forgiveness is central to our future as a church living out the Gospel through word and deed in Parramatta and Westmead. I see abundant goodwill and opportunity emerging to explore fresh expressions for Parramatta Mission.

Seasons of renewal and hope are not unusual within the life of Parramatta Mission. I invited our resident historian, Dr Elizabeth de Reland to provide some historical context:

“A couple of thoughts which may help - PM has constantly reinvented itself since 1821. Firstly, via the building of our first chapel and then by the building of two more churches with larger and larger capacities, and then in 1971, via the start of the 'Regional Mission' - and at various other points since. So, what has happened recently may be viewed as yet another point of reinvention, another 'season' -- albeit one that downsizes rather than the other way around. Our Wesleyan roots as a Mission are also bound by a commitment to 'word and deed' mission, so because what is being retained within the recent changes, such as the PM congregations, Meals Plus, 175 and Wesley Apartments – we are in fact remaining true to both our core values and our history.”

Transition of Services

Over recent months a collaborative process has been undertaken to discern where the services of Parramatta Mission should be transferred within the Uniting Church. After much deliberation, Wesley Mission has been prayerfully determined as the preferred recipient of services, subject to a due diligence process. Like Parramatta Mission, Wesley Mission is a Parish Mission of the Uniting Church and is also committed to “word and deed” with its life and witness imbedded within its congregations.

In the future, our congregations will be encouraged to continue to prayerfully and practically support the services being transferred to Wesley Mission, including via the provision of knitted blankets, toiletries, clothes and essentials. The passion and care of the vulnerable and marginalised by our congregations will continue.

The New Parramatta Mission

In addition to its congregational life, the 'new' Parramatta Mission will continue to provide Meals Plus, the 175 Motel and Wesley Apartments. Our Westmead and Parramatta campuses will be central to our future as a church. New and fresh expressions of the Gospel will emerge as this journey continues.

The future redevelopment of the Parramatta and Westmead campuses will also provide a sustainable revenue stream for our congregations to live out the Gospel through word and deed.

Presbytery is also facilitating a discussion between Parramatta Mission and other Uniting Church congregations in the greater Parramatta area to vision a closer relationship.

The project plan is to be operating as the new Parramatta Mission by July 2021.

Transitional Leadership

The Church Council recently endorsed a transitional leadership model for Parramatta Mission to be effective from October 2020 which will conclude no later than 30 June 2021.

Rev Vladimir Korotkov has been appointed as the Interim Lead Minister of Parramatta Mission (70% supply ministry). Vladimir's role is to oversee the transformation of Parramatta Mission from a pastoral, cultural and 'whole of organisation' perspective. It is envisaged that Vladimir's role will be to listen, interpret and equip our congregations to move forward with hope and enthusiasm as the new PM emerges in the months ahead. He will facilitate congregational involvement in the discernment of new ministry models and their involvement with the continuing services – and explore how these may relate and work together.

Vladimir will work across the whole of PM through its transition period and in doing so, ensure a high level of collaborative engagement, robust conversations and intentional pastoral care.

In Keith's absence, Vladimir will join the Implementation Board and collaborate with the Board Chairperson and acting CEO to ensure that the transition of services is pastoral, effective and in accordance with the values and ethos of the Uniting Church.

Mr Mark Newton has been working at Parramatta Mission as the Director of Operations for the last few years and has now been appointed as the Acting CEO of Parramatta Mission whilst Keith is on leave. Mark is a skilled executive who has a heart for the Church and the proclamation of the Gospel. Mark will lead the executive leadership team and drive the business change programme, divestment activities, property development and the restructure of the Mission. I look forward to introducing Mark to the congregations of the Mission in the weeks and months ahead. Please pray for Mark and his leadership of the Mission.

Following an extensive consultative process led by the CCLM, Rev Dr Clive Pearson and Rev Dr Amelia Koh Butler have accepted fresh ministry roles within the transitional pastoral team that will provide ministry across all our congregations.

Clive's role is a 50% supply placement, whilst Amelia will remain in full time placement with about 85% of her ministry time redeployed from her Western Sydney University Placement into our congregational life.

In broad terms, Vladimir, Clive and Amelia will work collaboratively and focus on the following:

- **Worship** - Leadership, Development, Planning, Delivery;
- **Pastoral Care** - Provision and Development;

- **Education and Local Mission Support** - Christian Education and Formation, Support and Developing Local Mission/ Supporting and Developing lay leaders;
- **WSU Ministry** - Transition from Chaplaincy to Congregational Outreach.

Amelia will also be developing and managing online and digital support for Parramatta Mission congregations in the areas of pastoral care, discipleship and worship and the nurture of leadership in this area.

The Pastoral team will also work with the CCLM to ready the congregations for hybrid (combination of in person and digital) church life in the future.

It is envisaged that the next few months will involve much listening and pastoral work on grief, loss, and ways of imagining a new future for Parramatta Mission, including its congregations.

A range of fresh communication initiatives are being planned for the weeks and months ahead as we continue the journey of transition to the new Parramatta Mission. A further update will be provided to the congregations in November.

Best wishes and take care.

Ian Gray

Chairperson

Parramatta Mission Council

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