

# Blackwood Uniting Church, For Future Generations

Blackwood is a strong, inclusive church with a significant community program, competent and innovative leadership and a variety of social justice and mission activities. This justice and mission focus locally nationally and globally is something the congregation is known for and will continue.

Cluster groups offer an informal web of connection, opportunity for service and support for those who are a part of the morning worship communities and (in some cases) their extended networks. They underpin Friday night meals in a way which makes the organisational and pastoral tasks in doing the meals manageable.

The age profile of the church has a number of senior adults who are served in programs such as Friday Friends, communion at Resthaven and pastoral care. This important focus will also continue.

During the Listening and Looking Forward week, I spoke with over 120 people individually and in groups, people who were connected with the church, from the wider community and in other churches. The conversation generated a large number of ideas, most of which are not in this report but will be passed on to Council. Blackwood is a place where people are encouraged to pursue their ideas and these people should continue to seek ways to develop those which align with the overall mission, seem timely to implement and others wish to be part of.



In group conversations we explored the importance of understanding 4 possible scenarios for faith formation<sup>1</sup>. Mostly churches focus on faith formation with people who express a high need for God and a high receptivity to organised religion. Blackwood Uniting engages people from all scenarios. The mosaic image of Blackwood Uniting, offers a motif for the way the church works. In each part of the mosaic people experience community, discover the possibility of God, and need to have opportunities to be formed in their faith and take steps in faith.

This report does not attempt to summarise everything Blackwood does and will continue to do but suggests areas of focus for the next 3 years to underpin the Mosaic with opportunities for faith formation, discipleship and worship.

## 1. Families with children

Blackwood already has activities which connect with families with younger children (up to mid-primary school) and community programs through Kid's Hope.

- 1.1 Expand the play group program to encompass Tuesday (with a repeat program from Monday) and Friday with a different format again, perhaps for Dads, for pre-kindergarten children or less structured play opportunities in a café style for parents or grandparents. This, alongside the crèche in the community program, would facilitate there being a program for children each week day. Blackwood Uniting Can communicate to the community that it has activities for families with young children every week day.
- 1.2 Expand Messy Church to meet on the 3<sup>rd</sup> (as well as 1<sup>st</sup>) Sunday of the month beginning in 2013. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday could have a music focus more than a craft focus.
- 1.3 Intentionally plan to resource these families with
  - 1.3.1 faith formation within their families for parents and grandparents (eg books for your child's spirit; how to pray with children; developing your (grand)child's spiritual life) through provision of materials, courses and mentoring both in the church and in other place settings

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.lifelongfaith.com/faith-formation-2020.html>

- 1.3.2 proactively offering rituals and sacraments in these programs and across these programs and other church activities (eg blessing / naming of a new baby; welcoming a baby to Messy Church or Morning Church for the first time; baptism; anniversary of baptism; giving a first children's bible; starting kindergarten; starting school; giving first adult bible and showing them how to read it; blessing a new home; as well as losing a baby and struggling with pregnancy.)
- 1.3.3 Develop special focus children's worship services in each term where the community is invited to join in the worship focus.
- 1.3.4 Establish a family and children faith-formation team to plan and implement faith development opportunities for families with children

## **2. Community Programs**

The community program sees 100's of people of all ages (predominantly women) sharing creativity and fellowship. Like the program with children, opportunities for faith formation and worship for this community need to be explored. The relationships with the church team and the program participants are strong and can sustain some intentional faith formation. Possibilities include beginning and end of term ritual; offering prayer when it is perceived it is needed (and not just if requested); offer to bless a new home; ritual for a new grand-child and learning Christian practices such as prayer, healing, forgiveness and reconciliation.

Many people raised the possibilities of a Community Garden and Men's Shed at Blackwood as activities which men would engage. I would encourage these options to be explored by the Community Program Management Committee.

## **3. Worship**

Creative and thoughtful worship is highly valued by those I interviewed. There is strong competent leadership in music. The development of worship which responds to wider communities needs can help bridge those who are in other parts of the mosaic to worship. I recommend further developing worship opportunities for the community (such as in association with Pink Ladies Day) and developing teams to prepare and lead special worship opportunities the community can be invited to such as Mothers' Day, Social Justice Sunday, Migrant and Refugee Sunday, Blue Christmas and ANZAC Vigil and Dawn Service. Cantamus offered to be more involved in the music in special services should that be helpful to the church.

## **4. Property**

This church has a well-used and well maintained property. The property team operates extremely well. Like any church with buildings which have not had significant re-development for over 40 years the time for some significant re-assessment of property needs for the future needs to be undertaken in the next 3 – 5 years.

## **5. Communication**

Many people raised the best ways for such a diverse community to keep in touch with each other. This issue can be managed in a number of ways. There is an excellent website and community time in church as well as notices.

- 5.1 The community time could have more intentional reporting back from church council and from the various parts of the mosaic.
- 5.2 Blackwood Times could be approached to have a church feature 2 or 3 times a year and possible columns from ministers

## **6. Inter-church Activities**

There are strong inter-church activities in the Blackwood area. In particular the Churches of Christ and the Uniting Church have similar mission foci which are strongly focussed on the local Blackwood community and developing partnerships with businesses and other community groups. Discussions on collaboration will be important in the future life of both churches.