

Ministry Report

2025 November - February



General

There has been a lot going on in the last few months, even with a lull in the new year. Looking back to December had a successful celebration of Christmas, both here and in other times and places. The new year has brought with it time for reflection and a hope for energization. To be truthful and honest, after Christmas I was very depleted and there was close to nothing left in the tank. So, I sought to practise that by taking a week and a half off in January to recharge and re-energise. This was a great time of refreshment, and I have come back with renewed vigour.

My hope is that this report will help you have some insight into the work that I seek to do in ministry with the people at St. Matthew's and which you graciously and generously resource me in. I have tried in this report to weave into it some indication of the time involved in some of the various activities which comprise the tasks I engage in as I seek to be in ministry, as I wave myself in the past wondered how clergy in placement fill their time.

Services

As per rosters I have continued to participate in the leadership of services, preaching and leading liturgy in the 8.00am and 9.30am services and in the evening service. We have been blessed with a range of voices who have shared in preaching and leading our services. We have explored themes around mission and the call of Christ, who we celebrated as God with us at Christmas time. I have taken on feedback and suggestions to help people remember or learn about the elements of our services, such as what the meaning of liturgy is and what preaching is. In most service where I have a leading role, I seek to weave in reminders of what we are doing and why we are doing it. This is hopefully helpful for both newcomers, but also those of us who have been a part of Church services for many years.

Attendance continues to fluctuate each week as people manage their commitments in other areas of their lives. None should ever feel guilty or be made to feel guilty for not coming to Church or being able to come to Church. We are blessed by those who come just as we seek to be a blessing. In January, we had our combined morning service. Thank you to those who were able to lean into the sharing of music which might be outside of their preferred style. Attendance was strong throughout the month. Overall, the impression is that our services remain consistently attended and we have welcomed a few new people and a range of visitors.

We have seen new people join our services either as visitors or as new members. We are always encouraged by growth in our community. We have seen a range of people take on new roles or take up roles that they haven't been rostered on for a while. and celebrate the contribution which they make whether through participation in helping with aspects of our congregation's life or simply being present as the Body of Christ.

I have been engaged in working with connections in the wider Church through our local Presbytery hub, which includes Wesley Castle Hill, Quakers Hill Uniting and Galston Uniting, as well as being in conversation with Turramurra Uniting Church and Uniting Heart and Soul in Woollahra. Out of these conversations, I participated in a pulpit swap with Rev. Vanessa Williams-Henke in December in the Season of Advent, where she came and led services at St. Matthew's, and I led a service for Uniting Heart and Soul in Woollahra. This seemed to have been well received by both congregations from some of the feedback I have received. We have more of these exchanges planned between us and are looking to have other Churches involved in this endeavour of Uniting Together.

I continue to seek to use my gifts of creativity, my formation in education and my theological and biblical skills seeking to present the Word of God in engaging ways. I have explored a range of ways of sharing the Gospel alongside of more traditional sermons integrating my learning about neuroscience of memory and sound educational practices into our patterns of discipleship as part of our Church services. Knowing that not all may be comfortable with what may seem novel approaches to preaching etc I strive to maintain a balance and to ensure that I regularly include more traditional styles of sermons as well.

We have had different people offering their gifts of preaching, leading the learning together section of the service (formerly known as the kids talk – but we are a community which is growing together and as such we learn together). It has been great to see how people approach these elements of our service in different ways.

For those interested in what proportion of my ministry during the week is dedicated to preparation for the Sunday services, the preparation of a sermon, on average, takes around half a day. The preparation of the orders of service usually takes a couple of hours each week. For Sunday evening services there is preparation on the day, rehearsal for the evening service music (of which I am the principal musician) and then shutting and locking up. Leading and participating in the Sunday services occupy close to full day each Sunday.

Faith and Discipleship

Bible Study

We have several Bible studies that take place. It would be great to hear from some of the groups and about what they are learning. We recently hosted a seminar for Know Your Bible, which was well-attended. I continue to lead the Tuesday night lectionary Bible study. This has grown over time with new people coming along. We have used a loose and organic approach where we followed people's questions and interests about the passages, with some help from sources such as the Bible Project to give us greater insight and understanding.

We had a recess during Christmas and New Year and have started once again this month. We are currently using a different method to approach Scripture. It is the Lectio Divina and is a more contemplative scaffold to assist us in what God, as Spirit, might be saying to us in this time and place. In Lent we might use a Lenten Study, probably what the Uniting Church Assembly is offering. Anyone is welcome to join this group.

Sunday Service-Related Resources

I have continued to provide a reflection in each week's newsletter. This usually incorporates material related to the theme and readings of the service each week. My hope continues to be that this offering provides content around faith and discipleship for those who may miss the service – in person, online or on YouTube. It also continues to augment and provide further material to enhance learning around the theme and readings of the services. This takes an hour or two to compose.

I have maintained providing Active Discipleship/Applied learning activities to assist people apply what they might be learning in our gathering. This is provided so that there is consolidation of any learning in the services and is a way for people to consider applying what they may be hearing from God or a means to continue to explore faith and discipleship in a way related to the content of the service. As I presented in a recent message, "a sermon isn't a sermon until it is applied." This is a quote from a Southern Seminary YouTube video about what a sermon is. Here is a link to that if you would like to learn more. <https://youtu.be/DHhWDvPPovY?si=2ZgxUg3oawJCKlfe> If we listen for and attend to what God is saying through the Word, in Scripture or as it is preached, then it is important to consider how we might respond. This activity takes between 30 minutes to an hour to put together.

Fusion

Fusion has been blessed by our dedicated leaders who offer themselves fortnightly on Fridays in leadership with a group of young people. Whilst the group is not large, having a regular attendance of about eight young people, there is a lot of fun, fellowship, and learning. I have taken on the administration areas that Daniel Gibb used to manage, as well as being a part of the leadership team. This year I have worked to make some of that easier for parents by converting the permission form into a digital one so that people can complete it on their electronic computing devices. We even now have a QR code link to help people access that form. It now also allows for families to fill out just one form for multiple young people.

We have met as a team and developed the program for the term. Fusion recommenced this month for a new year, still blessed by leaders who have had a longstanding commitment to the group, most if not all, who were members of it themselves. Fusion, alongside of the two hours per fortnight there is some time beforehand to set up and then some time afterward to pack away and lock up. This usually is about an hour commitment, with additional time for meetings and some administration time each term.

Pastoral

Funerals

I have helped people prepare for a participate in several funerals or memorials services, both members of our St. Matthew's Church family and for members of the wider community. I have sought to provide pastoral care through this process and times as well to those involved. It is good to note, for those who like to understand how this work to comprise my workload, that in taking into consideration visits to the family, preparation, the time for the service etc. on average, a funeral makes for the equivalent of a full day of ministry.

Weddings

I presided over my niece's wedding in December and am in the process of preparing for the wedding of Erin Matthewson and Sam Lam who are members of our congregation and were engaged in the notice time at one of our evening services.

Weddings, like funerals take an equivalence of approximately a full workday's allocation of time when meetings, administration tasks and the service itself are taken into consideration. If a couple elects to do relationship enrichment through me then that usually involves an additional 3 x 1.5-hour evening sessions.

Baptism

I presided over one baptism in November in one of our 9.30am services. We have some upcoming baptisms booked for the coming months.

Prayer and Care

I continue to attend the Prayer and Care Group Meeting and have had some pastoral conversations with people in need as a result of this. This group is a vital and life-giving part of the ministry of our congregation, and I very much appreciate the blessing of leadership of those who facilitate the group.

Visiting

I have been able to visit people in their homes and in hospital in recent months, both those who are regular attendees – either online or in person – or those who are no longer able to be an active part of our congregation or for whom I have some pastoral connection with. Part of this has been to support people who I was assisting in leading a funeral or memorial service following the death of a loved one. I have also made phone calls to people and supported them through conversations.

It is interesting to note that a usual pastoral visit involves about 2 hours of time commitment which is equivalent to one quarter of a standard eight hour working day. This is not an issue or concern, but it is a dynamic which I balance in scheduling my duties and work each week.

Here is a summary of the pastoral care that I have been offering in recent months (noting that most of the pastoral interactions are not a one-off occurrence):

- 3 Members of the congregation visiting and pastoral support with grief
- 1 member visit and pastoral support in recovery
- people visit and pastoral support in nursing homes.
- 1 person visiting for preparation for funeral.
- 2 people meeting and pastoral conversations in person or by phone.
- 2 colleagues meeting and pastoral support.
- 2 couples - Wedding meeting and relationship enrichment course
- 2 members of the congregation pastoral visits

Mission and Outreach

SRE (Special Religious Education [Scripture])

Since July 2024 I have been teaching a kindergarten class and a Year 3 class on a fortnightly basis as a continuing part of the SRE team at Jasper Road Public. Thus, each Tuesday I am involved in Special Religious Education, including the preparation of lessons for this. At the end of the year, I led a special event service for combined Catholic and Protestant Scripture classes for Years 3-6. Whilst supported by other SRE teachers, they did not feel competent or have the capacity to lead this kind of an event with a large group of young people across a range of year levels. As I have had much experience in this through my many years of school chaplaincy, this was something I was able to do. This seemed to have been well received. However, I did miss sharing this load with our youth and young people's worker as the creativity and leadership role then became something I carried myself.

Each week when I have an SRE class, I usually take an hour or two to prepare the lesson and then around just over an hour to cover the 50-minute lesson, which is around a 3-hour commitment each week it takes place.

Preschool

With the changes to my role associated with the decreased paid staffing that we have been able to sustain, this has resulted in some elements of those roles falling to me. I have still not been able to establish a regular pattern of attendance of visiting the preschool. However, I am part of the preschool management committee as a congregational representative.

I continue to liaise with the director about our Church's possible involvement in an intergenerational program which is based on the model of the TV program, 'Preschool for Seniors' which is proposed for this year.

I presented to the Christmas story using puppets in two sessions to combined classes before the preschool went into recess for the school holidays. This was fun and an additional outreach from our community. It would be good to build on this in future years. Like the SRE special assembly, I did miss sharing this load with our youth and young people's worker.

Christian Meditation

I continue to participate in the Christian Meditation Group meeting each week. This is a group which sees members from other churches and the wider community come into our church space for weekly meditation and fellowship. The group has seen some growth. We continue offering a session on Monday nights which I am mostly able to attend. School holidays also meant that I was able to be a part of the Tuesday morning group. I continue to assist in the preparation of the Church spaces for these groups and the returning of things to their regular states as part of readiness for our Sunday services.

Coffee and Discovery

I try to attend each Coffee and Discovery event where I can when they fall on a Thursday where I am not on leave or on my days off. With the events that I have been able to attend, I have shared in the leadership of the devotions.

The Willows

I continue to assist in coordination of a roster for St Matthew's volunteers to lead a service at the Willows Retirement. We currently provide leadership once a month, and others from other churches lead on other weeks. My continued thanks to the team of volunteers who have taken on this missional ministry as we serve people in their latter years of life.

Digital Ministry

I continue with assisting in the curation and moderation of the St. Matthews Facebook page. The strategy to share what is going on in the life of the Church, provide some resources for faith and discipleship such as what is shared in the newsletter and encourage community interaction seems to be having some traction. Following some digital marketing training, along with members of the digital ministry focus group, we have seen others take up the posting of sermon snippets or moments of interest from our services.

The busyness of weekly ministry has not yet opened a space to take on exploring new initiative such as podcasting or other ways of engaging the wider community and world through the digital space.

I have taken on the upkeep of the church's digital electronic sign board, which was previously managed by Daniel Gibb. This has been a bit of a learning curve and I have struggled a little with the technology in mastering this. However, I have been able to update and refresh what we present to the community. I have also been blessed with two people who have offered to assist with this task. I then prepared some instruction how to use the software and the hardware based on my experience and learning through some degree of trial and error combined with intuitive exploration of the technology.

Strategy

General

I continue to work with our congregation to ensure that we are in line with standard Uniting Church practices. I have worked with Church council to be aware of and ensure that our church structures comply with Uniting Church Regulations.

Missional planning is constantly at the forefront of how I engage in ministry. In terms of my approach to themes for services and sermons, I have, as the Revised Common Lectionary has allowed, sown seeds of missional thinking as we listen for God's Word and seek to be faithful disciples.

Ministry Focus Groups/Teams

Our focus groups seek to look towards the future and what needs to be considered to keep us vital in our ministry as a congregation. In terms of the project of collating a projection of congregational giving which I have assisted, there has been a positive result, and we have seen a lift in giving. Thank you to all who have been able to offer this to support the resourcing of ministry.

I continue to seek to attend as many of the ministry/focus groups that I can so as to assist our amazing volunteers and to continue to grow in understanding of our congregation and its life. I am currently a member of the digital ministry group, the property group, and the finance group. The Care and Prayer group also falls in this area. Some of our past focus groups need reactivation, such as the caring group, youth and young people ministry group. We are also looking to re/establish a musical ministry group. We have seen the establishment of a social justice / community action group. I seek to support this group and attend this.

We have established a working group to plan for the celebration of our fiftieth anniversary. I am part of this group.

I would like to work to help reinvigorate or start new focus groups but have not had the space in my timetable to do this yet.

Missional Visioning Planning

This continues to be an ongoing project. I have spent a significant amount of time in October and November working on a resource to assist us as a congregation approach developing a missional strategy and plan. I have worked to draw on all the learning I have previously had and have been involved in during the past year, as well as insight I have gained through over twenty years in ministry and being a part of the leadership of the Church. I have also sought to research, collate, and incorporate a range of Uniting Church resources which are or have been available.

This has been, and has been, a significant task. It is nearing completion, but the demands of Christmas and then the need to take some time to restore my soul, and then the need for planning and preparing for the new year, have meant I have not done much on this in the December to February period. However, I have continued to do learning in this area and seek conversations with people with expertise and experience.

Ministry Team

Changes to Administration Roles

November saw the culmination of a consultation process which we undertook to review our administration role. This was a difficult process, and the result was the lessening of the hours for administration work that we are able to support. With great sadness this resulted in Robyn Morrell opting to accept a redundancy. This was a process which took a lot of time and a large degree of emotional energy. It was a time that was personally very difficult as I was seeking to offer care but was also the agent on behalf the congregation who was sharing and implementing the decisions made. This was, upon reflection, morally bruising, but not to the degree of needing counselling. I have worked through this time and my participation in it with my clinical ministry supervisor.

Pastoral Carer Role

I have worked with some of the members of the Church Council executive to develop a plan to recruit and employ a pastoral care worker. This has been an interesting and challenging exercise as we sought to ensure that we could fund the role, adjust our desires and expectations to comply with the changes in workplace and employment practices and regulations. We have worked with Synod to craft the role so that complies with Uniting and legislated demands and conditions. We continue in the process of recruiting someone and formalising the documentation which is needed in order to do so. We have twice come to the point of selecting and appointing someone in the role. However, due to a range of circumstances, some of which were a result of a failure from me to act in a timely manner, we have not yet appointed a person and are now in a new phase of discernment and process.

Wider Church

Presbytery

I continue to work with members of the presbytery team, attending presbytery meeting and training. I continue to actively support those local ministry agents who are in placements within our designated hub of St. Matthew's, Wesley Castle Hill, Galston Uniting and Quakers Hill Uniting. I have also attended presbytery ministry growth group meetings which are about supporting and encouraging in growth as ministry agents.

Synod

I have undertaken to be a mentor for a colleague in their period of discernment process and am meeting with them regularly to assist them in the learning journey and to develop a plan to aid them in their discernment.

I participated in a seminar which prepares candidate for ordained ministry in leading funerals. I will shared some of the wisdom that I have learnt from doing funeral services which departed from the regular patterns or have difficult dynamics for one reason or another. During the day, I was part of panel answering questions about my experience with difficult funerals.

Disaster Recovery Chaplaincy Network (DRCN)

I continue to be a disaster recovery chaplain and have refreshed my training in this. I am grateful for the continued blessing of Church Council and congregation to accept any call which I receive, and we are blessed to have people who can step into leadership of our services should I be unable to lead at late notice. I undertook the two-day DRCN Duty Officer training at the request of the coordinator. I am in conversations with the DRCN and the Church Council as to whether or not this is a role I can and should take on.

National Assembly Transforming Worship Circle of Interest

I continue to be a part of the Panel (steering committee) which coordinates the work of the circle. I have contributed to resources such as the liturgical resource for Older Person's Sunday. I maintain this work due to its relevance to the life of our congregation and how it can resource my leadership as I assist in resourcing the leadership of others. We have one and a half hour meetings every quarter or more often if there are tasks to do. I contributed to a resource page through sharing prayers.

National Assembly Growing Circle of Interest

I continue to be a member of the Panel (steering committee) for this circle of interest. This again, like Transforming Worship, is very relevant to the needs of our congregation and resources me in my ministry, just as I seek to help resource others in theirs. This involves participating in online meetings as scheduled. These meetings are usually 1.5 hours in duration.

PreachFest Conference Planning Committee

I was asked to be a part of the PreachFest Conference planning committee. I have attended meetings, which are usually online, and carried out tasks as they are assigned given my indication of capacity to complete.

Personal Growth and Learning

Synod Missional Leadership Hub

I continued to participate in the year-long Missional Leadership Hub. This was a range of seminars for ministry leaders being led by Rev. Dr Karina Kreminski and Dr Armen Gakavian. We met monthly on Zoom to learn more about some recent thinking about mission, share what we have been involved in and encourage each other as we seek to encourage the Church in mission in our own contexts. This has been a helpful thing to be a part of and it has been a source of ideas and support, especially as I seek to develop a resource which will assist our congregation in developing a missional strategy and plan. This program concluded in November with a visit to Surrey Hills to share learning and experience some of the community ministry being done there.

Training

- I undertook the 2-day Duty Officer training for the Disaster Recovery Chaplaincy Network (DRCN)
- I undertook training in order to be able to facilitate Ethical Ministry Refresher seminars for colleagues

Seminars

I have attended the following seminars:

- Presbytery Ministers Day
- 2-evening Music and song selection and writing seminar with Uniting Creative
- Care and Prayer training led my Dean Drayton
- 'Joining the Conversation' about being an intergenerational church
- Ministry Masterclass on working with youth and young people

For my own wellbeing and benefit, in my own time, I attend a group for Interplay. I did the training for this practice when I was at theological college. It is good to revisit it. Some of my learning in this group I have been able to apply in our Church services.

Conferences

I attended the one-day Future Church Conference in January which was about the future of the Church being including engagement with social and justice issues.

Supervision

I have met with my commitment to regular supervision around ministry practice meeting with a colleague who, as my supervisor, is one from the Uniting Church and is locally based. I have worked with her before in ministry and she is very helpful in assisting me reflect on issues to do with my ministry and to aid me as I seek to improve in my practise.

Days Off

This is a discipline I seek to maintain. My pattern centres around a Thursday and Friday, as well as Saturday, off every two weeks on those weeks in which Fusion does not occur. However, if circumstances require flexibility sometimes in order to honour other commitments, then I will, at times, move around the time I have as down-time. In January and February, I was usually taking Friday and Saturday.

Usually, I continue to kayak as part of my nurturing of my wellbeing. I continue seeking to paddle on waters that flow under bridges I have crossed in my travels as a way of varying the paces I go kayaking.

Annual Leave

I took one and a half weeks annual leave in January, where Lynda and I explored the City of Sydney as tourists. This was a lovely time of refreshment and reinvigoration.

Uniting Together

Similar to the purpose of hubs, I and some colleagues from Uniting Heart and Soul in Woollahra and Turramurra Uniting Church have been meeting to consider how our congregations might explore our common links and look to ways where, as appropriate, we might support each other in mission and ministry. I have presented this to Church Council who are supportive of this initiative. As mentioned already we had a first pulpit swap in November. This is a time for growth and creativity as we share ideas and encourage each other in our ministry and stretch our skills in different contexts.

Routine Duties

I have produced material for both the weekly newsletter and In Focus. I process and answer emails and phone calls as appropriate. I help set up the Church for our Sunday services, and other activities and ensure that things are packed up and ready ahead of the following week.

There are probably other things that I have forgotten to mention. Please let me know what detail or information you require or can be helpful in future reports.

Other Activities

As a member of the property team, whilst things were quiet in the January period I did the following few odd jobs around the Church.

- I have installed skirting boards in the downstairs foyer but need to finish the filling of screw holes and touching up the paint.
- Put weather strips on the downstairs doors.
- Put a shelf in the mobility access toilet for toilet paper.
- Put coat/handbag hooks in all the toilets in response to a request.
- Put up all the emergency evacuation posters.
- Refreshed the line marking for parking spaces in St. Matthew's Lane
- Moved the Fruit of the Spirit paintings from the lower hall and hung them in the main Church space.

Whilst these might not be considered part of my regular role, other than the skirting boards which took most of a morning to do, they were not jobs which took a lot of time or effort. They are also something that I enjoy doing and allow me to contribute to the life of the Church in a physical way.

Emergency Response Planning

I drafted an emergency response plan for our congregation and those who come and share our property for a range of activities. This is an area where we need some work to be done.

Feedback

It is a blessing to receive feedback on my performance or how I am or am not meeting people's expectations. This is not always comfortable to receive, but I truly believe that the truth sets us free. Thank you to the people who have had the confidence and love to share feedback with me in recent weeks. There have been several areas of my ministry that people have provided feedback on in recent months. Sometimes, I am in error and need to know what I need to correct. Other times I may be able to explain why things are as they are, or why I do them as I do.

Conclusion

There has much been going on and much which will unfold as the year progresses and we continue to grow together. I am happy to visit people or have conversations at any time. If you have any questions about anything in this report, please do not hesitate to have conversation with me in -person or via email. I hope this is helpful in sharing some of how I go about ministry as I seek to serve the wonderful and dedicated people of St. Matthew's Uniting Church Baulkham Hills

Blessings,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jon Humphries', written in a cursive style.

(The Rev) Jon Humphries

Ministry Leader & Minister of the Word in Placement