



Settling on a Way Forward for SYCBaps

*The Proposal from the Host Group
drawing on preliminary proposals
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Purpose Statement

Our church exists for the following main purposes:

- to follow Jesus together, in this time and place, into his healing and fullness of life;
- to bear witness to the culture of the Kingdom, and spread the news of its coming into the world in Jesus;
- to provide a regular weekly and daily cycle of participatory communal worship and prayer, online, that is accessible, welcoming, and worthwhile to as wide a range of people as possible;
- to bring people together, both physically gathered and online, for socialising, learning, or engaging in shared action, so that we can enjoy one another's company, learn from one another's experience, and grow together in our love for God, one another, other people, and the natural world;
- to equip, encourage and support one another in living Jesus-shaped lives in our homes, workplaces, community service, leisure and relationships, and so to gather our individual ministries into our common life and prayer.

Identity

We welcome the involvement of people from anywhere, but our geographical identity as a *Melbourne*-centred congregation will shape our imagery and the location and timezone of many of our activities. The question has been raised about if and how we remain identified and connected with the *South Yarra community*, and though not pressing, it will need to be addressed some time.

Our liturgical identity will continue to be *bapto-catholic*, or *ancient-future*, meaning that we combine our Baptist commitments to congregational freedom, openness to change, and the priesthood of all believers, with a catholic commitment to the wisdom of the ancient traditions of liturgical order, shared texts, sacramental richness, and spiritual disciplines. The identity of our spirituality, is closely linked to our liturgical identity, but could also be described as *earthy* (both in its language and in being grounded in its ecological context), *honest* (open to and honouring of our whole experience including our doubts, brokenness, and failure), and *semi-monastic* (committed to an intentional and mutually accountable balance and rhythm of prayer, silence, rest, healing, study, work, and play).

Our social identity will continue to be as *broad and inclusive* as we can make it. We seek to overcome the distrust, hostility and misunderstandings that divide people, and to create a congregational culture and life in which all people can grow in love for one another, and worship, work and play together regardless of age, ethnicity, cultural background, sexuality, socio-economic background, physical and mental ability, educational level, and theological perspective.

We will continue to develop our newly emerging identity as an *online church community*. By this we mean that it should be possible to engage and participate quite fully in our congregational life, prayer and ministry through its online interface. There will also be physically gathered activities in Melbourne, and possibly in other places if numbers there allow, but all activities in which all church members are expected to participate in will be conducted in an online or hybrid form so that those unable to physically gather can be fully and actively included.

*These purposes and identity will be given expression through
two main areas of activity: “worship and prayer”, and “community life”.*

Worship and Prayer

Our principal gatherings for worship and prayer will take place online. These include the regular weekly service of Word and Table, and the main services for the annual festivals of the church year. So long we have enough people to share the load of hosting daily prayer liturgies, we will also continue to offer Matins, Vespers and Compline online, six days a week.

While the online format will determine the shape of all these services, we encourage those who are able to also seek physically gathered experiences of worship together by organising and/or participating in any or all of the following:

- gatherings of small groups to connect into the main services together;
- additional physically gathered services outside of the time of the main Sunday service; or
- group visits to other churches.

Community Life

Although gathering for worship and prayer is at the centre of our common life, Jesus's call to overcome our differences and learn to love one another as he loves us requires us to spend significant time together in other ways too. We've been talking for some years about the need to build our community life beyond the worship service, but moving worship online has definitely made this need for other community activities both more pressing and more obvious. So the part of this proposal now that is most new is that we ask a lot more of ourselves in term of engaging with one another in community activities. ***Full participation in our church life will come to be seen as normally involving participation in both worship and other community activities.***

It would be great if there were multiple things on most weeks so that everyone has plenty of opportunities, but no one is expected to try to be at something every week. Most of these gatherings will be one-off events, or sometimes short series, not ongoing group commitments. None of these gatherings have to include organised prayer, but any of them can. The one rule would be that to count as a church event, it must have an open invitation extended to the whole congregation. The location, time, or nature of the activity may rule out some people (eg. because it is physically challenging), or numbers may need to be capped, but the invitation must be offered to all. You are, of course, still free to invite a personally chosen guest list to dinner any time you like but, without an open take-your-chances invitation, it doesn't count as a "congregational activity".

The following are examples of the types of community life gatherings that have happened in the past and which we hope to see lots more of in the future (some online and some physically gathered):

- *Shared meals - dinner parties, potlucks, picnics, BBQs, cafes or restaurants.*
- *Story-sharing gatherings where one person shares a story from their own life for reflection and discussion.*
- *Workshops on various topics of interest, social, ecological, political, theological, discipleship, etc.*
- *Book reflection sessions - a group commit to reading a book and then gathering to discuss it.*
- *Movie, theatre, or concert outing, possibly with a time of shared reflection afterwards.*
- *Bible studies, lectio-divina (sacred reading), meditation sessions, etc.*
- *Church camp - there's a big one each year, but there could be smaller ones too.*
- *Country outing, perhaps gathering at someone's rural home, or going bushwalking, etc.*
- *Herring Island boat cruise and brunch.*
- *Visiting another church together, possibly with a time of shared reflection afterwards.*
- *Participating together in some community service project.*
- *Participating together in some action of social/political protest and witness.*

We would encourage all our people to try to develop the habit of, when planning to go to some activity or event out in the community, asking themselves whether it is something they could invite others from our congregation to join them in. For example, if you are planning to spend an afternoon visiting an art exhibition, could you send an open invite to the church email list and see if others would like to join you? In this way it would become very easy for small group activities to come about with minimal organisation required.

Some Possible Implications for the Church Covenant

If the above proposals are accepted by the congregation, it is likely that the Church Covenant will be substantially revised or completely rewritten before June 2022 to reflect these new directions. Some things that might be proposed for inclusion in it include:

- a commitment to regular participation in the main weekly worship service;
- a commitment to participating in congregational discernment and decision making processes;
- a commitment to participating regularly in congregational activities other than the liturgies;
- a commitment to each member initiating and organising one or more of those community activities. A person could team up with someone else to organise it, and it could be as simple as inviting whoever wishes to meet for coffee or come for an afternoon walk along the river.