

1 June 2024

Memo to Church Council

Update and Progress re The Future Fund.

As you are aware we have been finalising our administration and technical matters to allow us to present a finished product titled The Future Fund to attract untied and non-specific gifts and bequests to be used and applied by GWUC.

We have now finalised all matters with Synod Secretariat via Karen Bell and will seek to present our draft brochure to her as well as to our external auditor John Yates of Yates and Partners.

We have aimed to develop a product that will allow congregation members and other interested partners to make gifts, donations, and pledges of untied amounts to Glen Waverley Uniting Church. These amounts as expressed through wills and other documents, which can then be applied by the Church and through its Church Council for matters and projects which are of an untied nature and consequently will not require any involvement of Synod in managing these untied bequests and gifts.

Historically, the Uniting Church has advertised and sought bequests and gifts. However, in recent times the Assembly through Synod amended its processes so that any bequests or gifts, which are subject to specific uses or tied by specified obligations are to be centrally managed by The Secretariat within Properties of Synod Vic and Tasmania. This has been to ensure that the legal processes and practices are adhered to in terms of the specific defined uses, the interpretation of those uses by individual congregations is standardised and to ensure a consistent and valid legal administration and management approach.

GWUC researched and supported the centralization, we have worked through situations where bequests have been received with defined ties and specific applications and uses of the bequests defined through the will and advanced and communicated by Trustees of the wills and estates.

It necessitated that we seek to close and manage the GWUC Endowment Fund, which had been established many years previously by GWUC to receive the gifts and bequests from the estates of congregation members.

Following the changes stipulated by Synod, we were unable to take into the Endowment Fund any funds with a stipulated result/use.

We were advised that we could maintain the Endowment Fund Balance and the congregation chose to accept recommendations from the Finance committee and the Church Council to then amend its terms to enable acceptance of gifts and bequests prior to November 2022, but that would only apply to those items and gifts which were untied.

It was also recommended that following the Synod changes, we should seek to establish an alternate vehicle to receive and then use bequests which were made to GWUC and were for use within the general operational purposes and were therefore excluded from the revised operational and management administration to be undertaken via the Secretariat function within Synod Properties.

Prior to the establishment, we undertook significant research and counselling/consulting with Karen Bell of Synod, John Yates, and Gary Philpott a lawyer and former congregation member who assisted in the setting up of the Endowment Fund.

We were cleared to set up the GWUC Future Fund, this has occurred and within our Xero Financial Accounts, we have established a Reserve titled the Future Fund and attracted seed capital/funding from several congregation members.

Additionally, we have received gifts from estates to be applied/used for the general operational function of GWUC.

We now need to progress the communication of the Future Fund to members of our congregation, whilst also ensuring that the communication methodology and approach does not in any way constitute the perceived or giving of advice.

The Next steps – Our Way Forward.

As a congregation, GWUC has been strongly supported by a generous and committed group of people through planned giving, through gifts for Welfare, and then through the consideration after their passing by making gifts through their estate via wills and other defined actions. We are appreciative and most grateful.

We do not want or wish this to change. However, recent activities following the receipt of tied bequests, which are initially managed via Synod and then administered/managed by the Finance Committee expose the challenges and risks, albeit well-intentioned of the giving with tied conditions and obligations. Congregation members seeking to leave funds and then applying applications and conditions to those gifts.

The Future Fund has been established to manage bequests and gifts made to and in favour of GWUC without any conditions and ties and for the general operations and projects as approved by the Church Council.

Any wills and bequest items which include ties and/or conditions will be managed centrally through Synod Secretariat, Properties.

We need to develop a means of communicating these changes across our congregation and this represents the next step and will involve a range of activities.

The Finance Committee is mindful that there have been concerns as to marketing and pushing people to adopt and make gifts across a variety of organizations and many diverse types of groups, from sporting and leisure clubs and groups all seek to inform and gain funds from members through bequest programs.

This approach from GWUC is purely information-giving. It is not for our ministers and leaders to seek to influence and/or pressure congregation members whilst on their sick bed or in the last moments of their lives. We have all heard of these horror stories.

Rather, it is to enable them to make timely and informed decisions, with their family and advisors, as to the opportunity to assist GWUC in its ongoing operations, to reflect the joy and value of their time over the years, and to make a timely conscious decision to make a gift or bequest that will aid GWUC to continue to operate.

We have developed a new brochure with some guidelines, we need to have this verified through the Communications Committee and Church Council, both as to the style of wording, the message, and the opportunity for us to assist and answer broad questions and certainly NOT offer any financial advice.

We then need to run this through Karen Bell and John Yates.

It will then be added to two other brochures:

- Synod Bequest Brochure
- GWUC Endowment Fund Brochure- which whilst the fund is closed can apply to bequests made and untied before the Synod changes.

We will then build a portfolio of brochures together with a covering document.

This will form the basis of our communication documentation.

That communication pack and its documentation then needs to be presented to our congregation in a series of open, non-threatening information opportunities.

We aim to run a series of workshops to be led by several well-known and regarded people from GWUC. We would seek to run workshops on a Wednesday and Thursday afternoon over a couple of months, say September/October 2024, and include these with other subjects.

Additionally, our Office Manager will maintain a suite of documents and packs that people can request, and we will send them out in the mail or online. Any requests are to be managed sympathetically and confidentially. We cannot offer advice; we cannot be

seen to be offering estate and financial planning input. It is illegal and we are not permitted or capable. We must also preserve all issues regarding confidentiality and privacy

There is a piece of work to be completed here as to an online and web-based document framework to enable people to access and use the materials online and within their environment and timeframes.

Recommendations.

1. Review and consider the promotional brochure.
2. Seek input from the Communications Committee as to the brochure and the workshops and their formats.
3. Agree to refer the brochure to Karen Bell of Secretariat, Properties, Synod and John Yates of Yates Partners.
4. Gain involvement and hopefully participation from our ministers in the workshops.
5. Approval for Finance Committee to proceed to communicate and inform our congregation of the use of the Future Fund.
6. Subsequently to undertake a refresher in 12 and 24 months.



Ken M Coutts
GWUC Treasurer