



Baptist Union of Victoria
Strategic Document: 2006 – 2010

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From the beginning, the Bible invites us to see that we live with God, or before God. We are called into being by God and invited into relationship with Him. Even though we fail God, we are invited to start again — to be reconciled and to live in peace with God and with each other.

Paul says this in 2 Corinthians 5. 18 & 19, 'All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation. That is, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.'

The heart of our life is God and God's mission of reconciliation into which we are invited; first to receive it for ourselves and then as ambassadors.

This shapes our conviction that the most central need in ministry today is for people to learn to live. People may believe, yet they don't really know how to live what they believe. They want to live Christian lives, spiritual lives. They want to live in peace with God and in harmony with others.

The need is pressing for the BUV to show where the orientation of our lives, individually and corporately, ought to be. We want to demonstrate that the heart of life and living is living with God and with each other, within the peace of God.

Our strategy as a Union leadership involves sharing this vision. We will train, enable, resource and reach-out within this mission of God. Our present and future life centres on God's mission of reconciliation. It is our hope for one another and, through churches that share this vision, for the men and women in Victoria and around the world.

This document captures our hopes and prayers, and charts a strategic course for the next five years for our life together as a reconciled people.

We desire to be

- Committed to peacemaking and reconciliation
- Open and responsive to the ways of God
- Being shaped in life and ministry through continuous engagement with the Bible
- Adventurous people, taking the call to follow Jesus seriously
- Prayerful people, integrating prayer into all aspects of our lives
- Active in developing positive relationships (formal and informal) with our agencies
- Worshipping people, encouraging a variety of ways for people to respond to God's love and grace
- Creating a "missional mindset" in our churches
- Bold in our mission to those who have never belonged to the Church and always conscious of our need to be relating our work to people who see no relevance in the Church
- Standing by people who are marginalized in Victoria and throughout the world
- Loving and respectful in our relationships with each other
- Working closely with those from other Christian denominations

We Want To Help Victorian Baptists Share the Love of Jesus with Everyone

We will do this by

1. Strengthening Our Life Together

We want to develop ways in which we can value and respect the diversity of views and activities within the Union and live healthily and peaceably with one another and with our neighbours, using our resources wisely.

Through:-

1.1. Connecting

We want churches to be connected: living and learning from one another within and beyond the denomination.

We will:

- Encourage links between churches (Baptist and others) across the state to foster fellowship and support.
- Encourage partnerships between churches in different settings- urban, suburban, rural and outback churches.
- Encourage the sharing of stories from a range of churches through our Gatherings, DVDs, website, etc.
- Encourage a greater connection with our indigenous population.
- Commit ourselves to regular consultation with churches across the state to share mutual aspirations and concerns.
- Develop new bases for cooperation with larger churches to provide increased relevance in the relationship and seek to disseminate their expertise more broadly in the Union.

1.2 Communications

We want to be creative and purposeful in the ways we receive and share information, seeking to facilitate the sharing of resources, ideas and activities between churches.

We will:

- Continue to implement the Communications Unit Strategy document at all levels of Union and church life to ensure our communication with churches and agencies is effective.
- Establish a Communications Working Group to continually review policies themes and priorities for the Communications Unit.
- Use the website as a hub for the churches and agencies to share resource material, provide linkages to resources and encourage people to use the website to “review” resources they have used and have found helpful.

1.3 Promotion

We will develop a plan for promoting the work of BUV among our churches and agencies.

1.4 Governance

We want to continue to reshape the BUV; addressing matters of governance, the structure and function of Executive Council and ensuring changes are reflected in our constitution and by-laws.

We will:

- Continue to ensure that our Gatherings are interactive and inspiring.
- Assess the function of all BUV Committees.
- Review constitutions and by-laws.

1.5 Funding

We will ask the Finance and Audit Committee to draft a proposal for a funding model for the BUV that is fair to all Churches, but adequate enough for us to achieve our mission and stated objectives.

1.6 Strengthening relationships with Agencies and Schools

We want to build upon and strengthen our relationships with the Agencies of the Union.

We will:

- Hold round-table discussions with the Agencies and Schools to establish a mutually agreed view on the relationship and to the levels of cooperation.
- Share strategic documents with them to better understand one another's positions.
- Act as a broker to ensure Agencies are able to work more closely together.

1.7 Representation.

We want to see women, younger people and people from NESB (Non English Speaking Backgrounds) actively participating in union life.

We will:

- Encourage the mentoring of potential leaders from these groups.
- Set up regular monitoring and reporting of representation on committees and working groups.

1.8 Sustainability

We want to encourage environmentally sustainable practice so that we move nearer to fulfilling our God-given mandate to be the stewards of creation.

We will:

- Work with organizations such as Green Collect to assist churches in waste management and environmental audits, and to encourage the use of sustainability projects as a means of outreach in local communities.
- Aim towards triple-bottom line accounting in all areas of Union life, and regularly review our policies and practice.

1.9 Ecumenical Links

We want to continue to engage in creative partnership with other parts of the Christian church.

We will:

- Have intentional conversations with other denominations about mission and ministry, particularly the Churches of Christ.
- Investigate the possibility of sharing resources and research, instead of re-inventing them for ourselves.
- Find mechanisms for engaging in meaningful dialogue on theological, missiological, ecclesiological, and public issues.
- Continue dialogue with others regarding Baptism and Eucharist.

2. Encouraging Mission

We want to develop ways in which we can value and respect the diversity of views and activities within the Union and live healthily and peaceably with one another and with our neighbours, using our resources wisely.

Through:-

2.1 Mutuality in Mission

We will:

- Host a meeting of our various mission-focused groups (Evangelism Taskforce, Crossover, Catalyst, GiA, New Missional Communities, BWAA, etc) twice a year to explore ways to work together more cohesively.
- Continue to ensure that all aspects of a church's life (playgroups, children's ministry, youth groups, deacons, etc) are underpinned by a commitment to mission.

2.2 Evangelism

We want to foster a culture of evangelism.

We will:

- Reform the Evangelism Task Force
- Encourage more regionally based training
- Focus more upon relationships than programmes
- Gather and disseminate new ideas and initiatives

2.3 Development of New Churches

We will be intentional about developing churches that have mission as their highest priority.

We will:

- continue our commitment to initiate, support and resource incarnational expressions of Christian Community
 - finding better ways to encourage the support and mentoring of leaders;
 - working on a national basis to promote stories from these new communities.
- Accept responsibility for a clearly articulated strategy for the development of innovative Church plants around the state, including;
 - developing a policy of land acquisition
 - being intentional in developing areas
 - articulating a clearer picture of the kind of person we are seeking to become Church planters
 - ensuring appropriate training
- Help tired and struggling churches to rediscover their mission
- Seek innovative ways to help leaders to sustain their ministry
- Improve our methods of evaluation
- Work with the Churches of Christ

2.4 Community Ministry

We want to see churches better informed and resourced so they connect with the wider community, including learning to work in partnership with other community groups and funding agencies.

We will:

- In cooperation with BCC, ensure that the Community Ministries Coordinator is adequately supported to enable churches to minister to their local communities. The Leadership team will work closely with this person to establish realistic priorities.
- We will actively promote and encourage the expansion of the Urban Summer initiative throughout the State.
- We will create opportunities for training and consultation in community ministry, addressing areas such as: mental health, homelessness, family breakdown, isolation, understanding different faiths, schools, restorative justice and mediation.

2.5 Restorative Justice

We will introduce our churches to the concept of restorative justice and encourage many to establish restorative justice programs in their local communities.

2.6 Indigenous Work

We want to continue the process of reconciliation with Indigenous people.

We will:

- Publicise work already being done, such as Cath Solomon (via DVD etc)
- Investigate and target mission opportunities in specific areas, linking with our churches where possible.
- Keep indigenous issues on church and public agenda.

2.7 Global Mission Perspective

We want to develop a more global perspective of mission for our churches and agencies.

We will:

- Continue to strengthen our links with GiA and BWAA.
- Invite partners from overseas to participate at Gatherings.
- Teach and encourage our people about intercessory prayer, sending a weekly email to assist churches in preparation for their "Prayers for the world".
- Encourage and promote overseas mission experiences for people from our churches, including Deeper's connections with Global Exposure.
- Work with BWAA and Hungarian Baptist Aid to establish an Australian Rapid Response Team to respond to natural disasters in our region.
- Encourage GiA to involve GiA candidates in the work of our non - English speaking churches as part of their preparation for cross cultural ministry.

2.8 Public Issues

We want to develop a “theology of public engagement” to help Baptist churches speak more clearly into the affairs of our nation and state, and to identify local issues through our ecumenical networks and through groups outside the church who are working for the good of society.

We will:

- Review the profile and work of the Public Issues Network.
- Work with Whitley, and others such as BWAA to develop training and resourcing in this area.
- Bring a voice of reconciliation, justice and peace to conflicted areas of our society.
- Help Australian society to address the culture of fear and anxiety that is emerging.

2.9 Support and Advocacy of Refugees and Asylum seekers

We want to be people who welcome and support the ‘stranger in our midst’.

We will:

- Continue to work with RALS
- Seek to facilitate the resourcing of refugee workers
- Continue to implement the Multi-cultural Ministry Strategy document as it relates to this area

2.10 Principles of Reconciliation

We will ensure that all aspects of a church’s life (playgroups, youth groups, deacons etc) are underpinned with an understanding of the principles of a ministry of reconciliation.

3. Equipping The Churches

We want to see our churches enabled to sustain healthy ministry and develop appropriate responses to church life and service.

Through:-

3.1 Bible Study material

We will produce bible study materials on the theme of reconciliation for people and churches across the State.

3.2 Encouraging Creative Responses to a Changing Society

We want to see churches responding constructively with a changing society through

- Telling stories
- Writing papers
- Developing tools
- Sharing resources.

3.3 Resourcing Church Leadership

We want to see church leaders trained, equipped and mobilised to address the increasing burdens being placed upon them.

We will:

- Explore the possibility of BUV taking on some centralised treasurer/book keeping responsibilities for local churches.
- Provide training in:
 - The facilitation of church meetings
 - Financial management seminars for treasurers
 - Duty of Care procedures
 - Youth, primary, and early childhood ministry areas
 - Church leadership and Administrative matters (at our Gathering Programs in particular)
 - Extending RMF's to incorporate training/resourcing opportunities for church leaders.
- Develop an "Introduction to BUV" course for church leaders, exploring the possibility of making these resources available online or on DVD.

3.4 Leadership Training

We want to see Leadership Training as an important aspect of our work, ensuring that there is appropriate leadership in the delivery of our training.

We will:

- Review the training needs of the denomination and how they can best be delivered.
- We will consider the issues of “Of Whom, For What, and By Whom” in regard to training.
- In the short term, review the role of the Director of Leadership Training.
- Develop a network of trainers.

3.5 Multicultural Ministry

We want to affirm multiculturalism in our churches, assisting all churches to learn from people of different cultures and languages.

We will:

- Seek to implement the Multi-cultural strategy document at all levels of Union and church life to ensure that multi-cultural values are fully part of our life and work.

3.6 Age Specific Ministries

We want to see our Churches engage the next generation in Ministry, and to be well resourced to develop programs for each developmental stage.

We will:

- Seek to implement the Early Childhood Strategy Document and affirm BECT.
- Develop and implement a strategy for Primary Aged and Families Ministry.
- Seek to affirm the Deeper Team and implement the Youth Strategy.

3.7 Discernment and Governance

We want to see churches actively pursuing healthy governance and decision making processes and renewing our ability to 'discern the mind of Christ'.

We will:

- Develop resources on governance in a Baptist church including a range of approaches to church meetings, communal discernment, decision-making and the roles of deacons, ministry leaders and elders.
- Develop resources to assist churches in the skills of communal discernment, and ways of listening to God together.

3.8 Alternative/Entrepreneurial Funding Sources

We want to see under-resourced churches and pastors more able to find sustainable ways to move beyond survival and engage in mission.

We will:

- Consult other unions/denominations to see what they are doing in this area.
- Explore the work of Catalyst Innovations as a resource in this.
- Consider the feasibility of Group Purchasing from providers.
- Consider some of the issues raised in the paper "Alternative Funding for Ministry - Some first thoughts".

3.9 Membership

We want to better understand what it means to belong to a Christian community today, exploring membership and why it is not working for many churches now.

We will:

- Revisit the notion of church membership including the relationship between Baptism and Church membership.
- Consider ways, other than formal membership, for people to belong to a church without compromising the legal status of the church and its relationship with the BUV.
- Explore the viability of a regularly reaffirmed covenant as one such alternative.

3.10 Conflict Transformation

We want to build upon Fit4Life material and see churches become healthier.

We will:

- Develop an integrated conflict transformation system across the state, educating and training people in mediation and providing resources for conflict transformation inside and outside the church.
- Explore the UK Bridge Builders model established by the Mennonite Centre in London.
- Seek to develop appropriate processes for conflict transformation in a variety of cultures.

3.11 Life Cycle of Churches

We want to develop an understanding of death and renewal of mission in local church life, affirming that the end of a congregation's life does not mean the end of the mission of God in the area.

We will:

- Develop strategies to help churches face the possibility of ending.

4. Developing Pastoral Leaders

We want to see pastoral leaders of all backgrounds well equipped and supported in order to fulfil their callings effectively in today's climate.

4.1 Ordination

We want to review our current ordination practices and implement new strategies that will enhance the process.

We will:

- Look at how ordination relates to accreditation.
- Examine the issue of ordination being a lifetime vocation or more related to a particular task or phase of ministry.
- Debate whether it is the role of the denomination or the local church to be the Ordaining body.

4.2 Women in Pastoral Leadership

We want to affirm the contribution of women in pastoral leadership and overcome the obstacles to their full participation and acceptance.

We will:

- Establish a "Women and Leadership" Task Force to audit the progress made in the past 30 years.
- Bring recommendations for ways to enhance the opportunities for women leaders in the future.

4.3 Pastoral development and accountability

We want to see our leaders sustain ministry through continuous reflection and review.

We will:

- Implement the changes to the PDP process that will incorporate the Code of Ethics.
- Develop a program for ongoing education in professional standards for pastoral leaders.
- Continue to improve our processes in handling misconduct.
- Expand training in power and boundaries.
- Develop the process of grievance procedures.

4.4 Bi-Vocational Pastoral Leadership

We want to actively encourage the training of people for bi-vocational pastoral leadership.

We will:

- Work with Whitley to address the expectations of those in training, and how we can assist a shift in the culture.
- Find ways to enable leaders to find additional means of support.

4.5 Training for Rural Pastors

We want to see more extensive training opportunities made available for training pastoral leaders in rural and regional Victoria.

We will:

- Continue to explore ways to develop the 'Bush Track'
- Find more ways to make lectures and special events in the city accessible by DVD/websites.