

POLICY

Faith Communities in SCCP

Under Regulation 3.9.2, A Presbytery may recognise, or cease to recognise, a Faith Community. In following this regulation, the Presbytery is clearly at liberty to use its own discretion and policy. Fundamentally, then, this policy must enable the Sydney Central Coast Presbytery to determine with consistency **why, and under what conditions, it would recognise a Faith Community.**

From the Regulations of the UCA, 2015:

FAITH COMMUNITIES

- 3.9.2**
- (a) A Presbytery may recognise as a Faith Community a grouping of people who;
 - (i) are seeking to explore the implications of faith in God, gathering in order to serve the community and/or nurturing one another in faith; or
 - (ii) are worshipping together and seeking to relate to the Church for nurture and support, and
 - (iii) apply to the Presbytery to be recognised as a Faith Community.
 - (b) A Faith Community may include confirmed members of the Church who hold their membership in a Congregation or who have their membership recorded with the Presbytery.
 - (c) A Faith Community will order its life, under the oversight of the Presbytery, so as to encourage its participants, develop its mission, and be accountable for its resources, and may seek the guidance of a Presbytery about possible ways to do so.
 - (d) A Faith Community may appoint leaders from its participants and may designate a participant to attend meetings of the Presbytery.
 - (e) A Faith Community may apply to Presbytery to be recognised as a Congregation. A Presbytery may request a Faith Community to make such an application.
 - (f) A Presbytery may cease to recognise a Faith Community.

NOTES

Why recognise?

Purposes ('mission' (c.))
 explore faith;
 gather to serve;
 gather to nurture faith;
 worship together

U.C. membership optional,
 not necessary

Tasks of the F.C.

Leaders, Presbytery
 attendance options

Directions/trajjectory,
 relational

When and why?

RECOGNITION REQUIRES DISCERNMENT

There may be some good reasons for Presbytery to choose *not* to recognise a particular group as a Faith Community under the Regulation:

- the Presbytery may perceive that it lacks the capacity to offer effective oversight or support;
- the purposes or 'mission' of the group might be irrelevant or even inimical to the life of the Presbytery or the values of the Uniting Church;
- the Presbytery may not be willing to accept responsibility for any perceived risks in the operations of the group;
- the likelihood that the recognition would cause unhelpful conflict with existing congregations or groups within the Presbytery or wider church.

These objections should be seriously considered by the Presbytery when an application to become a Faith Community is received: Presbytery is under no obligation to recognise a group as a FC.

However, there are many reasons why a Presbytery (specifically the Sydney Central Coast Presbytery) may want to encourage the recognition of Faith Communities and their connection with the life of the Presbytery:

- a fresh expression of the life of faith and discipleship exists among people outside of or uncomfortable in our existing forms of congregational life, who nevertheless wish to engage more closely with the Uniting Church's pastoral care, ethos and values;
- as a pathway to lead an existing or emerging Christian community into full congregational life in the Presbytery;
- as a pathway by which a CALD congregation may progress into full congregational life in the Uniting Church;
- as a pathway for a declining congregation to be eased out of congregational responsibilities, whose members so desire and request of the Presbytery;
- to formalise the sharing of property from tenancy to partnership;
- to foster specifically focussed mission or service groups or communities of innovation in faith-related practice who do not desire the full responsibilities of congregational existence, but who wish to identify with the Uniting Church's ethos and values.

As the Regulations enshrine a particular responsibility of the Presbytery to exercise oversight of FCs, the Presbytery needs some benchmarks to discern the purpose and appropriateness of recognising any particular group and committing resources to its oversight and wellbeing.

- What are the mutual benefits to the FC and the Presbytery of this commitment?
- What conditions would the Presbytery require of the FC, in order to make to it a commitment of oversight and support?

A. Application to the Presbytery

1. Application may be made to the Standing Committee of Presbytery by a group of people wishing to be recognised as a Faith Community; or by an existing congregation, minister within the Presbytery, school or Uniting facility on the group's behalf.
2. The Standing Committee will determine whether to consider the application, and may delegate the process to the PRC or a task group formed expressly for the purpose, with relevant terms of reference and timeframe.
3. A recommendation will be made to the Standing Committee by the PRC or task group, together with documentation fulfilling the following mutual commitments. The Standing Committee may determine to recognise the group as a Faith Community of the Presbytery or make any other determination it considers suitable.

B. Mutual Commitments

As a precondition of recognising a Faith Community, the Presbytery will satisfy itself that the following mutual commitments are made:

1. **CONNECTION:** A Faith Community will connect to the Presbytery through a partner ministry centre (congregation, school chapel or other centre), usually through the sharing of premises and a mutual engagement with key leaders. The partner ministry centre will assist with support, nurture, resources, governance, safety and compliance needs, under the general oversight of the Presbytery according to the Regulations.
2. **PURPOSE:** In order to be recognised as a Faith Community of the Sydney Central Coast Presbytery, clear and brief statements of purpose will be shared in both directions.
 - a. The applicant Faith Community will create a brief Statement of Purpose outlining its reasons for gathering, its aims, its commitments to and expectations of its members, how it will meet, how it is attempting to worship, witness or serve, and its own view of its future direction, and include the names, contact details and roles of its leaders.
 - b. Presbytery and the partner ministry centre will furnish similar relevant information on the Presbytery's identity, personnel, mission, vision and values and the nature of the Uniting Church.
 - c. The Faith Community will be included in the Presbytery communications network to ensure that any relevant information (meetings, training, etc) is shared.
3. **ACCOUNTABILITY:** An Memorandum of Understanding will be agreed between Presbytery, partner mission centre and the applicant Faith Community.
 - a. A template for this MOU should be created by the Business Committee. It will include at least:
 - i. mutual commitments of all parties
 - ii. requirements for reporting and review of the relationship
 - iii. arrangements around safety, finance, property and oversight
 - iv. any standards of action or behaviour to be upheld
 - v. timeline and markers for progress as applicable.

- b. The partner mission centre will review the MOU on an annual basis and refer any proposed changes or points of dispute to the Presbytery PRC for decision.
 - c. Presbytery will determine and establish any bank accounts, insurances and any other arrangements considered necessary. If moneys are collected and banked:
 - i. money will be counted by two individuals
 - ii. dual signatories will be appointed by Presbytery for bank accounts
 - iii. financial records will be stored in a manner accessible to Presbytery Business Committee.
 - d. If the FC is moving towards congregational status:
 - i. a planning timeline will be agreed and included in the MOU;
 - ii. the FC will have a leadership team which will include at least 5 members, including an elected Chair, Secretary and Treasurer
 - iii. meetings will be assisted by the partner mission centre and minutes recorded and stored in an manner accessible to Presbytery oversight.
4. SAFETY: The Faith Community will need to agree to uphold the same standards of safety and compliance as the rest of the church in any relevant areas, especially concerning children and vulnerable persons. This will include participation in any required training or review process.
5. VALUES: The Faith Community will need to agree to uphold the Values of the Presbytery as identified in our Vision and Values statement, and any policies deemed relevant by SCCP. (Note that Regulation 3.9.1 correctly does not require Faith Communities to adhere to the Basis of Union or any specific policy of the UCA, as by definition a FC is not a congregation, nor are its members required to be members of the UCA. As the Presbytery is the only overseeing body, conformity with the values of the Presbytery alone may be expected of a FC. Presumably these will be reasonably consistent with those of the Uniting Church.)
6. REPORTING: Once recognised, the FC will report annually on its life to the partner mission centre and Presbytery. The report should include:
- a. updated details of membership, leadership and relevant activities;
 - b. annual accounts supplied to the Presbytery Treasurer for reconciliation and/or audit;
 - c. reflection on future direction of the FC, especially giving advice to Presbytery on indicators of progress towards congregational status;
 - d. details of how the FC is upholding standards of compliance and safety, especially concerning children and vulnerable persons;
 - e. details of how the FC is identifying with the Vision and Values of the Presbytery and Uniting Church.
 - f. all relevant Presbytery or congregational reports will be shared with the Faith Community.

POLICY ADOPTED:
Standing Committee

DATE 21 March, 2018

Sydney Central Coast Presbytery

DATE May 16, 2018 (Proposed)