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A new vision with a mission heart

Gavin Pretorius started as the new Executive Director of the Board of Finance & Property (BFP) in August 2004, taking over from Jim Mein who is now the Moderator of the New South Wales Synod of the Uniting Church in Australia.

The start of a new director offered an ideal opportunity to look afresh at the strategic plan of BFP.

The BFP management team got together earlier this year and formulated a completely new strategy. This was very much driven by the Synod goals, *The Basis of Union*, input from other Synod boards, various church entities and prayer. The strategy was workshopped with board members during February 2005 and approved after some refinement.

Some insights and initiatives emanating from the strategic plan are shared here.

Mission, vision and values

The BFP strategic directions and initiatives are built from its mission, vision and values.

Reflected in this mission statement (right) is the understanding that the BFP exists to serve and support congregations, presbyteries, Synod and



Gavin Pretorius: The Board of Finance and Property has used the change at its helm as a chance to re-examine its mission, vision and values.

Synod entities by providing investment, finance, accounting, information technology, human resources, risk management, insurance and property services.

The BFP wants to use its God-given abilities to serve the church as part of its ministry. It wants to do this in humility, with a servant heart, and with a motive to glorify God — thereby helping and serving those in the Uniting Church to

fulfil the mission the church is called to in Christ.

The vision (below) of BFP describes reaching a destination in our journey that we dream and pray about. Proverbs 29:18 says, "Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he."

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Mission statement: "With God's help, and a servant heart, to provide professional services and innovative leadership in the effective management and creative use of the church's resources to achieve its mission."

Vision statement: "The Board of Finance & Property be recognised as the professional and innovative partner in the delivery of resources and management services to support the creation and sustaining of a growing and vibrant church."



from the EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

GAVIN PRETORIUS

Greetings!

It has been just over one year since I started as Executive Director of the Board of Finance & Property (BFP), on August 23, 2004, and it has been an amazing journey so far.

I was recently interviewed by members of the Joint Nominating Committee (JNC) that oversaw my recruitment. This interview was part of a formal follow up on how I was travelling in my new role, and to report to the Council of Synod.

One of the questions I was asked was whether or not the role was what I'd expected. My answer: It was so much more than I expected.

The depth and breadth of the Uniting Church in Australia — and all that the church is involved in — astounded me. My role has been incredibly rewarding and I'm grateful to my predecessor, Jim Mein, for passing on to me a very well run board.

Perhaps one of the greatest blessings is the staff of BFP. The managers are highly competent and professional and the all staff are enthusiastic, committed and just plain great! There is a real sense that God is doing a wonderful work among us.

"The thing that strikes me most about Uniting Church people is how accepting they are of diversity and different backgrounds."

I was also asked by the JNC what I enjoyed most. There is a lot that I enjoy, but I have really been inspired by the people I have met so far.

The thing that strikes me most about Uniting Church people is how accepting they are of diversity and different backgrounds. Seeing what some of our people do in the community in terms of caring for the

frail, the poor, the sick, the disabled and others in need has made me step back and get a new perspective on what life is about. This care is exactly what Jesus calls us to.

That said, there is no doubt that our church has some challenges ahead. The declining and ageing membership, difficulties faced by rural congregations, difficulties in obtaining resources for new churches, the issue of redundant and inefficient use of congregational properties, the damage that the sexuality debate is causing and increasing pressures of legislative compliance and accountability are some of the major challenges facing us.

The good news, though, is that our God is a living and powerful God who will not abandon us. I firmly believe that if we, as a church, turn our eyes fully on God in humility, we will find a positive way through these many challenges.

Newsletter to make connections

Much like the impetus to develop a new strategic plan, with a new director in place the opportunity was also taken to re-launch the BFP newsletter with a new name and feel.

The Synod Communications Unit was asked to help develop a new name and design for the newsletter. We hope you like it!

The purpose of the newsletter is to inform congregations, presbyteries and Synod entities about the help and support services that BFP can provide.

It also aims to increase the awareness of legislative changes, compliance requirements and developments relating to BFP service areas that might impact church entities.

The newsletter's focus is on providing support services and information that assists all church entities in achieving their goals and mission.

The new name **Connect** perfectly describes what the newsletter

wants to achieve:

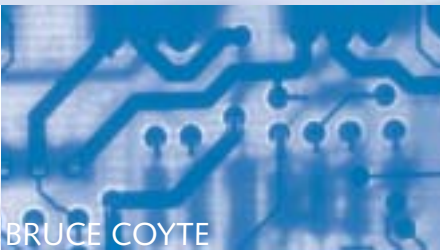
- Connecting with a geographically diverse clientele.
- Connecting people in our church to the right services and advice.
- Connecting people to a communication medium that alerts them to legislative changes and compliance issues.
- Connecting people to people in BFP who want to help.

We hope to produce **Connect** at least three times each year. But note: Only selected people in each church entity will receive this newsletter – so please pass it around and make it available to all.

Also, if you want to be on the distribution list or correct any mailing details — or if you prefer to receive an emailed version — call Margaret Seymour on (02) 8267 4300 or email bfp@nsw.uca.org.au.

Connect can also be accessed via the internet at <http://nsw.uca.org.au/bfp/main.htm>.





BRUCE COYTE

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Don't do it!

If you do not trust the sender and/or the subject heading of an email do not open it, do not open the attachment and do not reply. Just delete.

Also, never verify your passwords or banking information by email. (Banks never ask verification questions via email.)

"Unsubscribing", or answering a question from an unknown sender, says to that sender, "I'm alive and you can send me junk email anytime."

Important questions to ask:

- Are you serious about protecting your information?
- Do you have virus and spam protection software with automatic updates from the internet?
- Do you continually log on to the Microsoft web pages to check for updates?

The Synod's Information Technology Services Group (ITSG) works with other groups and committees within the church who are working together to offer reduced technology costs, make access to information easier and provide a central Helpdesk.

This year, at our National IT Group's meeting, standards for domain names were established. These standards will help in identifying and making search inquiries easier. The preferred options are unitingchurch.org.au for congregations and small agencies and uca.org.au for synods and larger agencies. For more information on these standards email me at brucec@nsw.uca.org.au.

The New South Wales Synod has an intranet which has invaluable information from ITSG, Synod boards and the Secretariat that you will find very useful.

If you are a congregation minister, treasurer or secretary and would like access to the intranet, email brucec@nsw.uca.org.au and apply for a security logon.

Please also don't forget that the New South Wales Synod does have an IT support group and we are always willing to provide help in all technical matters.



VICKI ROPER

HUMAN RESOURCES

Hi there from the Human Resources team!

Our door in the Pitt Street offices (level 3) is always open so don't be shy, come in and pull up a pew.

The Human Resources Group (HRG) was formed in November 2004 to provide much-needed human resource services to the congregations, presbyteries, boards, and agencies that make up the Uniting Church New South Wales Synod.

People choose to express their discipleship within the church either by volunteering their time or being employed to provide services to the church. Their sole intent is to do what they do best — providing service in God's name.

However, as employment legislation is continually evolving, what might be current or acceptable today may be outdated or inappropriate tomorrow. This means that more and more employers (managing both paid staff and volunteers) are feeling overwhelmed and spend much of their time negotiating the unfamiliar territory of human resources (HR).

The good news is that we are able to provide the HR resources you need and help is only a phone call away. Say goodbye to feeling overwhelmed — or compelled to become a pseudo human resources practitioner — and say hello to us!

We can be contacted by phoning Vicki Roper on 8267 4365, Viola Mueller on 8267 4473 or Kathryn Houlahan on 8267 4288. Our email addresses are vickir@nsw.uca.org.au and kathrynh@nsw.uca.org.au and violam@nsw.uca.org.au.

Frequently Asked HR Question

Q: Do we need to give all employees, even casuals, letters of offer and position descriptions?

A: In short, YES. All employees need to know the terms and conditions of their employment, what you expect them to do and how you expect them to do it, and this must all be agreed before they commence their employment with you. To give you peace of mind, and to ensure you have covered all the essentials, please contact us before you employ someone. We are more than happy to help.

from the FINANCIAL SERVICES MANAGER



KEGAN KASHIAN

MYOB – it's your choice

A question often asked is: How come the Uniting Church New South Wales Synod's version of MYOB (developed with Benkorp) is dearer than those sold at Church Resources, Officeworks and other places?

The answer is the off-the-shelf version available in shops isn't the same as the special Synod version. Our version also has a customised (UCAP) Chart of Accounts and user manual at an extra cost of \$110 including delivery and excluding GST. This is only available through Benkorp and is designed to complete the annual BFP6 return to Synod.

You will need both the core software and the additional UCAP version if you're a first time MYOB user.

Benkorp's contact details are 1300 138 627 or blessings@benkorp.com

BFP6 2005 Return

Mail out of the 2005 return will take place by end of July 2005. The due date for completion is October 31. If your return is complete by the due date except for audit, please send in your unaudited return followed later by the auditor's statement. But please don't make this too late! If unforeseen circumstances (for example, you have no current treasurer) prevent you lodging your return by the due date, please contact us as soon as possible and provide us with full details so an extension can be considered.

Complete your budgets

A large percentage of BFP6 2004 returns are received with the budget column left blank. For good stewardship it is stressed that at least one year's budget should be

prepared before June 30. Budget preparation should involve the treasurer together with the whole church council focusing on the work and mission of the organisation. It is imperative that a comprehensive, accurate and timely budget is prepared annually. This keeps BFP happy but more importantly it ensures that you determine the future financial resources needed to enable your congregation's mission.

Centralised payroll

We are currently trialling the centralised processing of the payrolls of two metropolitan congregations. Once the process is bedded down we will be considering rolling out this service to other Uniting Church organisations on a presbytery by presbytery basis. A nominal annual charge will apply.

"Budget preparation should involve the treasurer together with the whole church council focusing on the work and mission of the organisation."

LEGAL UPDATE

This issue takes a brief look at the latest developments in the move to International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS)

The Financial Reporting Council (FRC) announced on July 3 2002 that Australia would formally adopt International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) for reporting periods commencing on or after January 1 2005.

All Australian entities preparing financial reports under the Corporations Act 2001 must comply with the Australian equivalents to IFRS for financial years beginning on or after January 1 2005. On July 15 2004, the Australian Accounting Standards Board (AASB) issued 40 new or revised standards to harmonise Australian standards with the IFRS.

IFRS will also impact reporting entities not under the Corporations Act where regulators and governments require an entity to adopt the standards.

This should not impact on the majority of church entities, however some parts of the church, such as the Uniting Church (NSW) Trust Association will be impacted.

If in doubt - check now as the impact of the change is substantial and will require a lot of work and planning.

Useful web sites for information on IFRS are:

- www.cpaaustralia.com.au
- www.icaa.org.au



INVESTMENTS

We wonder sometimes what people think of us – it's a natural human trait. In business we need to *know* what customers think. Without customers, a business ceases to exist.

Last year Uniting Church (NSW) Investment Services decided to ask its customers what they thought of us.

We sent a questionnaire to all customers and waited for them to tell us how they feel about our products and services.

More than 1,800 people responded.

We are now using these responses to guide our future plans.

Our customers told us they want a range of competitive and flexible products from someone they can always trust.

Our customers want better

quality service and value from their financial decisions.

Our customers told us many favourable things about the services we offer. They also told us to do some things better. *And we have listened!*

We are making changes to provide even better outcomes for customers who entrust their money to us.

We are committed to offering financial solutions that reflect the higher values of the Uniting Church and we're striving to exceed customer expectations.

We are especially keen to improve service levels for Uniting Church customers. We may not have devoted enough time to understanding their needs in the past — but that is changing. We recently appointed Cathy Hammond as Client Relationship Executive. Cathy's role is to find

ways to meet customers' individual financial needs.

Anyone, including Uniting Church staff, can receive real value from using our savings and investment accounts – there are many advantages. Compare the high rate of interest, easy access and *no account fees*. You will also be impressed with our highly competitive Term Deposit rates.

Our customers have told us they like sharing higher values with an organisation they can trust and that helps others.

Ask us today how we can help you.



TONY DIMAURO

RISK MANAGEMENT

BILL TOBIN

Risk management refers to all the decisions made and actions taken to eliminate or minimise the likelihood and consequence of harm, damage or loss. In one way or another, we all subconsciously undertake these activities every day of our lives.

Unfortunately, people can also occasionally make mistakes and some form of harm, damage or loss is sustained.

Our aim is to minimise the chance of such mistakes being made — with structured risk management seen as fundamental to effective safety management.

The risk analysis process forms the cornerstone of the New South Wales Synod Occupational Health and Safety management system.

Risk analysis makes a difference by requiring us to think about, articulate and document those things we often do subconsciously and how to perform work safely.

The process includes:

- systematically identifying hazards (the potential for harm),
- assessing risks (the likelihood and consequence of harm) in relation to specific work activity, and
- where appropriate, identifying and implementing necessary controls.

Thorough risk analysis will sequence and document the jobs and tasks involved in the work activity of our operations. If done well, it will enable the compilation of a documented and agreed methodology for completing work safely which is relevant to each workplace.

Implementation of the risk analysis process has already commenced in UnitingCare Children's Services. A series of six workshops involving facility directors and management committee representatives was conducted in Sydney and regional areas between February and May 2005.

Briefing sessions have also been undertaken with aged care executives and regional directors, as well as staff from Corporate Service and Human Resource Management, with a view to determining a process and timeframe for conducting risk analysis workshops.

Following expressions of interest, other workshops have been conducted with the Property Resources Unit, the Board of Education, Newtown Mission, Ella Community Centre and Newcastle Lifeline. Further workshops are scheduled for congregations and presbyteries.





MICHAEL BARR

The Property Resources Unit (PRU) has been operating since 2000 providing specialist property services to all parts of the church. Its six-member team is building a reputation for high quality advice.

Unit staff have also become increasingly aware of the need to balance our primary goal of building the kingdom of God and the PRU's mandated structure as a "profit centre" (responsible for our own income and costs). The PRU receives no subsidy from the New South Wales Synod to provide these services.

Treasurers are only too aware of the balancing act between income and expenditure when income is scarce and needs great. The PRU is no different. It is important that we stay focused on working with God according to our role in the body of Christ and, together, using our entrusted collective resources to model what it is to be effective followers of Christ in our community.

Since its inception, the PRU has helped dozens of congregations with either advice or services and provided over \$500,000 in distributions to the Synod. These distributions are generally from job profits rather than from our fees for service. The PRU targets a return of 15 per cent on our costs of running the Unit – which is less than similar organisations. In 2004-05, we provided over \$30,000 in discounts to those parts of the church in need — thus ensuring that our fees did not make the difference between any project's success or failure. All surpluses made by the Unit go towards the ongoing work of the Uniting Church.

These discounts are only possible thanks to the ongoing generous support of ministries such as UnitingCare NSW, ACT Ageing and UnitingCare Burnside.

The PRU provides:

- Strategic property services;
- Development management services; and
- Project management services (for construction projects).

We look forward to assisting you with your future projects!

PROPERTY RESOURCES



STEVE PIENING

What do we do for you?

An update on the role of Property Services should be of interest to any new faces on your committees as there is nothing more frustrating than not knowing where to get advice or help when you want it.

As our name suggests, we are here to resource you regarding property matters. So just what do we mean when we say property in the context of the church and what do we look after that you might need to know something about?

Property Services can help you with:

- Buying, selling or building church property.
- Borrowing for church property projects.
- Giving a lease to, or leasing from, someone.
- Legal documents that require the church to sign such as contracts, funding agreements, business name registrations and applications to council for development/subdivision.
- Bequests given to the church.
- Insurance policies that protect buildings, contents, liability of the church and voluntary workers (but not workers compensation).

We are also the insurer for all property claims and voluntary workers' injury claims plus we act as the go-between with insurers for all other liability matters.

We have responsibilities to advise on compliance issues relating to buildings such as asbestos and electrical tagging.

We also maintain the database of all Synod properties, act as custodian of title deeds and record valuations of all properties when that information is received in our offices.

We maintain control of the proceeds from sales of property and submit applications to the Synod Mission Resource Fund for exemptions from tithing.

In the next issue of *Connect* we will start giving more detail to help you with each service area listed. Please feel free to call us before then with any questions.

PROPERTY SERVICES

from the front page

These values (right) describe the ethos, ethical standards and behaviours to which BFP will adhere. It purposefully chooses to make Christianity a part of its ethos and emphasises following the example of Jesus.

Overview of the BFP Strategic Plan

The thrust of the BFP's strategic direction is to build on the existing "shared and support services" concept.

This approach builds up centralised expertise and capabilities that allow congregations to access support and services in a more cost-effective and efficient manner.

It also allows Synod boards and entities to utilise bureau and non-core support services so that they can focus on their own core activities.

Values

- **Christian faith** — by aligning our values to Christ.
- **Servanthood** — by following the example of Jesus as servant.
- **Integrity** — by being honest, ethical, trustworthy and accountable.
- **Compassion** — by being sincere in caring for others and supportive of finding solutions for our staff, our communities and the church.
- **Professionalism** — by being performance- and customer-focused, dedicated to innovative leadership, good stewardship and corporate governance.

A broad overview of the strategic plan is depicted in the diagram below.

Six major focus areas have been chosen. Some of the main strategic goals and initiatives have been included for each focus area.

BFP STRATEGIC PLAN TO 2010

Strategic focus areas

Overview of main strategic goals and initiatives

Support & Shared Services

The primary objective here is to promote and further develop the existing "shared support services" model to assist church entities. Major initiatives include better communication, investigating the possibility on an in-house legal service and better risk management services.

Financial Services

The focus here is to improve financial reporting and governance, leverage off the upgraded accounting system and better utilise IT connectivity, particularly for geographically remote congregations (dialling in and internet access). To develop services such as payroll, online treasury and other accounting and tax services.

Information Technology Services

We want to use new forms of technology to support ways for the church to work more effectively and to enable new forms of church to emerge. Of critical importance is the need to look at initiatives to strengthen the IT infrastructure as well as working collaboratively with other synods on national IT initiatives.

Investment Services

The challenge for the investment arm of the church is to both provide competitive investment options and to ensure that adequate distributions are made to Synod over the long term. To this end, initiatives include applying for a financial services license to allow for enhanced products, re-branding and other activities to increase deposit levels.

Property Services

This consists of Property Services Group (PSG) and Property Resources Unit (PRU). PSG will implement a new property system, upgrade the insurance system and with PRU will look at property processes to better manage property projects. PRU will focus on new services, property investment management, aged care and strategic property reviews.

Human Resource Services

This is a new BFP activity and will work on developing HR capabilities to provide services to some 1,600 employees. This includes initiatives such as improving the HR policies and procedures, forming a network with HR expertise in the various parts of Synod and looking at HR systems.

Cathy's focus is on client results

It takes a lot of grit to have worked — and survived — in the dealing room of one of Australia's largest banks.

Surrounded by adrenaline-fuelled dealers making split-second decisions on when to buy and sell worldwide commodities, Cathy Hammond (pictured) honed her investment banking nous in no less than 22 years as a client relationship manager at National Australia Bank.

Cathy recently transposed her commercial investment skills into quite a different setting as Client Relationship Executive for Uniting Church (NSW) Investment Services.

She cherishes what she describes as an open and honest work culture.

Cathy spends her time liaising with the full spectrum of UCIS clients — from presbyteries to individual congregants, from large institutions such as UnitingCare to church-affiliated independent schools like Newington — offering her expertise in managing



banking relationships and providing clients with the products and services that best suit their particular needs.

"We're providing a set of services as professionally as any bank can but without the bank charges," she says. "And with the experience and contacts I've gained, there's no major bank in Australia where I can't walk in, find the best market rates for my clients and ensure they get the best return possible."

With what she describes as "the enormous buying power of the church", Cathy sees room for growth.

"I can see enormous potential for the various parts of the church to save a lot of money. The more we can pull together all the separately controlled congregations and services, the more I can beat down the rates of the bank.

"That means more money in the church's pockets."

Contact Cathy on (02) 8267 4318 or cathyh@nsw.uca.org.au

Safety first: Check your smoke detectors every week



A warning signal from a smoke detector can save lives!

There has been a spate of recent news articles about house fires where there has been a tragic loss of lives including young children. In some instances this could have been avoided with appropriate fire detection measures.

The Board of Finance & Property asks that property

committees check all residences, even where they are rented to outside parties, to ensure that smoke detectors are fitted where required.

It would also be appropriate to put notices in the congregation newsletter to remind all members of the need to check detectors are fitted in their own homes and, importantly, if they are battery powered to check the batteries are not flat.

SERVICES

■ Need to make some financial or investment decisions?

Give Investment Services a call on 1300 133 673 or (02) 8267 4300 (from mobile phones). You can also email us on ucis@nsw.uca.org.au or check out our latest information at www.ucis.uca.org.au

■ Thinking of building, selling or renovating your property?

If so, contact the Property Services Group on (02) 8267 4348 or (02) 8267 4352 or email stevep@nsw.uca.org.au.

Or perhaps you need specialised property services — strategic property services or development/project management services (construction projects) — then call the Property Resources Unit on (02) 8267 4319 or email michaelb@nsw.uca.org.au.

■ Do you have enough insurance cover?

For insurance queries call Helen Meillon on (02) 8267 4350 or email helenm@nsw.uca.org.au.

■ Want help with employee issues?

Give the Human Resources Group a call on (02) 8267 4365 or send an email to vickir@nsw.uca.org.au.

■ Not sure what kind of computer and/or software you may need to purchase?

Send an email to Information Technology Services Group at its@nsw.uca.org.au with your IT inquiry.

■ Don't take the risk!

If you have questions about risk management give Bill Tobin (Manager, Occupational Health & Safety Group) a call on (02) 8267 4365 or email him on billt@nsw.uca.org.au for advice.

■ Do you have questions regarding accounting, tax, the BFPB, BAS, privacy issues or payroll?

Please contact the financial managers on 8267 4333 or email kegank@nsw.uca.org.au.

HOW TO CONTACT US

**Board of Finance and Property New South Wales Synod,
Uniting Church in Australia Phone: (02) 8267-4300
Fax: (02) 9264-4487 Web: www.uca.org.au
Level 3, 222 Pitt Street, Sydney NSW 2000
PO Box A2178, SYDNEY SOUTH, NSW, 1235**

This newsletter is produced by the NSW Synod Communications Unit

Phone: (02) 8267 4304

Fax: (02) 9267 4716

Web: www.uca.org.au/cu

Level 9, 222 Pitt Street Sydney NSW 2000

