



LIFEWORKS UNITING CHURCH - LIFE & WITNESS CONSULTATION

Presbytery of the Downs

MARCH 2025

The Purpose of this Consultation:

The Presbytery of the Downs, in accordance with the regulations of the church, seeks to undertake regular consultations in each of its congregations.

Regulation 3.1.4, *Consultations on the Life and Witness of a Congregation*, states:

- (a) Consultations on the life and witness of a Congregation shall be conducted by the Presbytery with the Congregation including any Ministers, Youth Workers, Pastors or Lay Pastors serving in placements in the Congregation and any Community Ministers serving in the Congregation.
- (b) The purpose of the consultation shall be to strengthen the life and witness of the Congregation, to assess future ministerial and lay leadership needs, and to review the records of the Congregation.
- (c) A consultation shall normally take place every five years at the discretion of the Presbytery regardless of the duration of any current placement.
- (d) The Presbytery may conduct a consultation at any time on its own initiative, or at the request of the Church Council or of a Minister serving in a placement in the Congregation.
- (e) The persons appointed by the Presbytery to undertake the consultation shall:
 - (i) consult with such bodies and persons within the Congregation as it determines;
 - (ii) report to the Presbytery and the Congregation; and
 - (iii) make such recommendations regarding the life and witness of the Congregation (including matters relating to placements and property) as they think fit.

The Consultation process is intended to be catalytic in nature – the survey questions are designed to help the Presbytery understand the heartbeat and practices of the congregation; to know what kind of support and encouragement is needed, and what can be offered. Alongside this, to assist the congregation understand and explore their vision, mission and activities to enable all members of Lifeworks Uniting Church to:

- Consider the way they work together in the context of their local mission field
- To celebrate achievements
- Listen to the Holy Spirit for guidance
- And to consider possible changes to existing practices, attitudes and interactions.

The Team:

The consultation team consisted of:

Mrs Kath Warner (Pastoral Relations Team) Team Leader

Rev Dylan Miegel (Minister - St Stephen Uniting Church)

Mrs Naomi Bell (Ministry Candidate and Presbytery Support Officer)

The Process

1. **Prepare** – consultation team leader will connect with the Church Council to arrange an appropriate time when the congregation can fully participate in this journey.
2. **Listen and Observe**
 - Prior to the weekend of the consultation, paper and digital copies of the survey are distributed to members of the congregation.
 - An invitation to community groups and individual members to have an opportunity to meet with the consultation team.
 - On the set weekend of the consultation the team will:
 - meet with the Church Council
 - meet with the Ministry Agent
 - meet with individual members of the congregation and community groups as invited.
 - worship with the congregations and have general conversations with member.
3. **Gather** other information such as:
 - Annual General Report;
 - Membership Roll;
 - Other information about events and projects;
 - Conversation with the Minister;
 - Conversation with Church Council;
4. **Reflect and Pray** – the team will meet and reflect on all the information and listening and prepare a draft report for the PRC.
5. **Recommend and Feedback** – the PRC will finalise the report and arrange for members of the team to meet with the Ministry Agent and the Church Council and share some finding with the congregation.

Significant Dates

15 th March 2025	The consultation team met with Rev Adam Tipple, followed by a meeting with the Church Council, then with Rev Tanya Richards.
16 th March 2025	The consultation team attended worship and stayed for morning tea and general conversation after.
2 nd May 2025	The consultation team met, discussed their learnings and observations, and compiled a draft report.
13 th May 2025	Report submitted to Pastoral Relations Committee.
TBC July 2025	The consultation team report back to the Church Council.
TBC July 2025	A summary and feedback presented to the congregation.

Reliability of Data

A total number of 58 surveys were collected from the congregation in the process. Many of these surveys were partially completed. Regardless, the number of responses indicates that the congregation engaged well with the process.

Lifeworks Uniting Church

Lifeworks Uniting Church is an active congregation with members of all ages in attendance. Though some age-groups are few in number, it is encouraging to see a wide age range attending worship together.

Lifeworks Uniting Church is situated in Glenvale, a developing suburb of Toowoomba that is surrounded by parks, playgrounds, shops and schools, and which continues to experience much growth. There are multiple housing developments underway currently in the Glenvale surrounds.

A Brazilian congregation also meets in the Lifeworks church building and Rev. Adam Tipple has established a positive relationship with their Pastor (both current and previous Pastors).

The consultation team were given a warm welcome by all people and appreciated hearing stories of the Lifeworks journey thus far.

Survey Observations

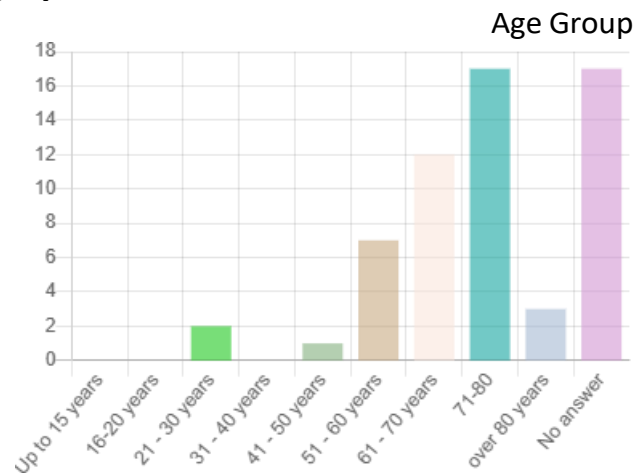
Demographic

Total 58 surveys were returned, not all completed.

More than half of those who completed surveys were aged over 55 yrs old.

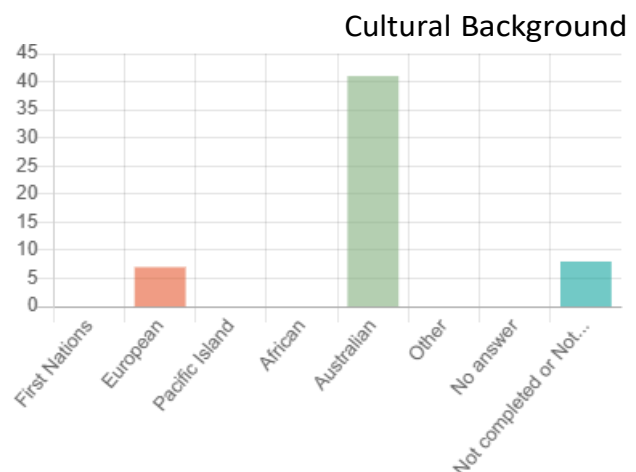
28% no answer

10 completed surveys from those aged under 61



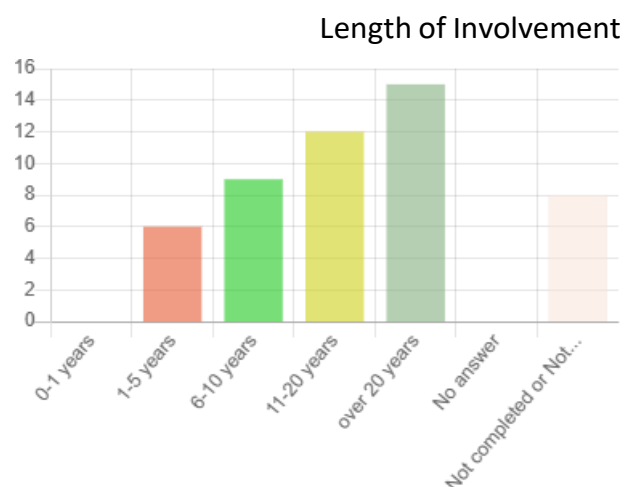
Cultural Background

The congregation overwhelmingly identifies as Australian with reference to European descent

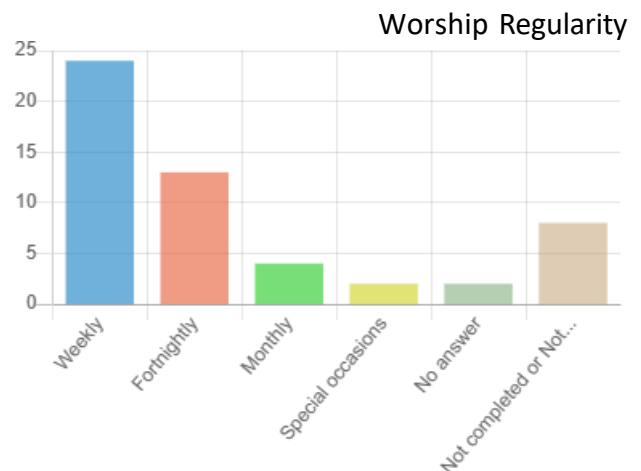


How long have you been involved Lifeworks Uniting Church?

Almost half of respondents are long term members of the congregation while a quarter of all respondents had been in the congregation for less than ten years, which showing a long-term loyalty with a smaller influx of new members in recent years.

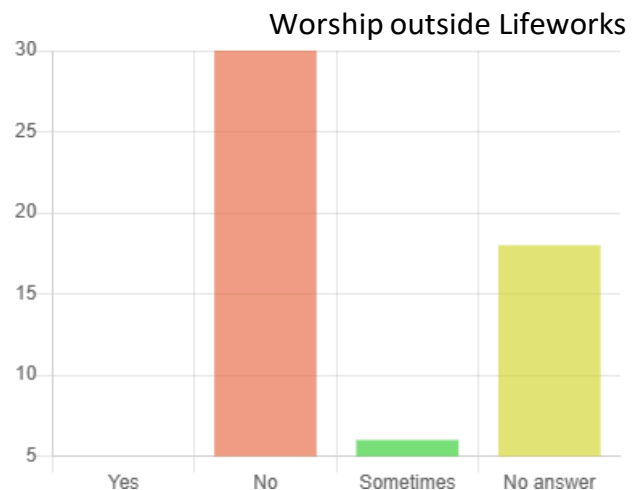


Those who attend church regularly are very engaged with the church, however those less regular attendees did not engage with the survey in a significant level.



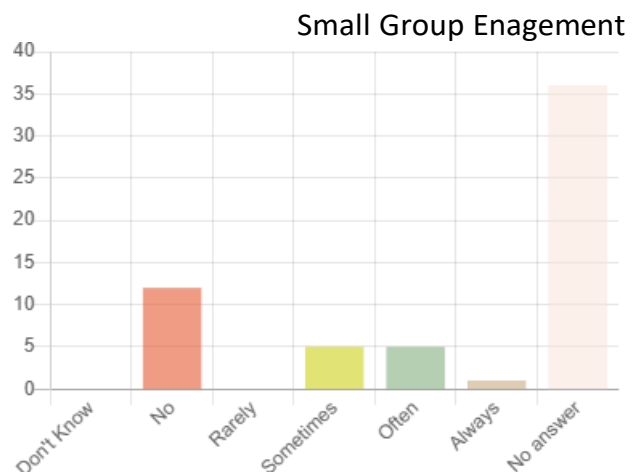
Do you attend other churches in the Community? If so, which ones?

Majority of respondents feel connected and attend Lifeworks regularly, while some who attend less regularly are happy to attend online. A small percentage of respondents have work, family or friendship commitments elsewhere but still feel connected to Lifeworks as their home church.



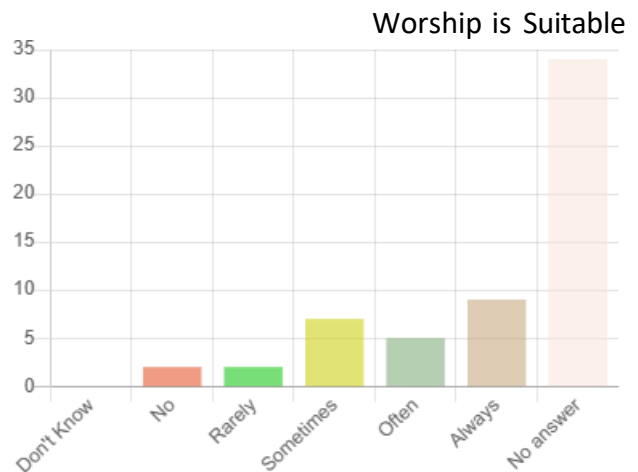
Worship/Prayer Life

Survey results indicate there is a fairly low engagement with small groups currently. However, those who are connected and engaged with small groups find it very meaningful.



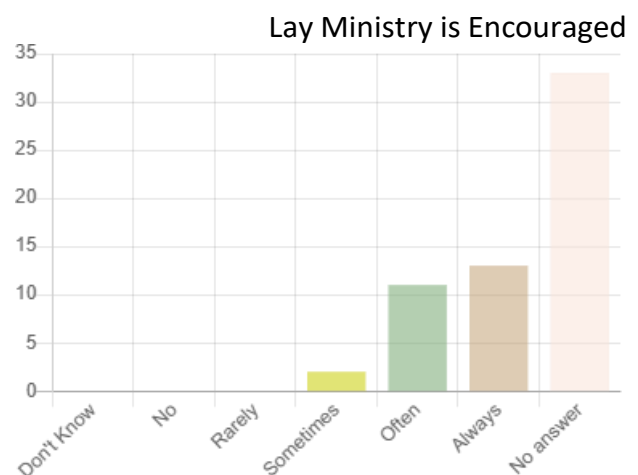
Most of the respondents reported that worship times and styles are suitable for them, with a small minority reported time and styles to be unsuitable. Majority experience a feeling of connection with God through the current styles and times of worship, for a small minority this is not the case.

Several respondents expressed an openness to exploring an afternoon/evening service.



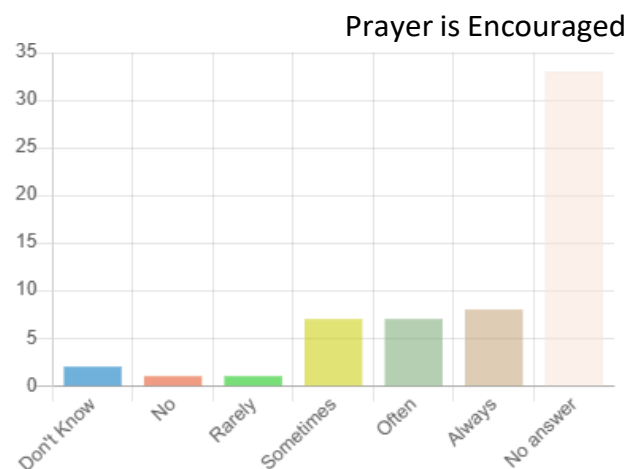
The ministry of lay people is encouraged?

Lay people feel highly encouraged to participate in ministry at Lifeworks.



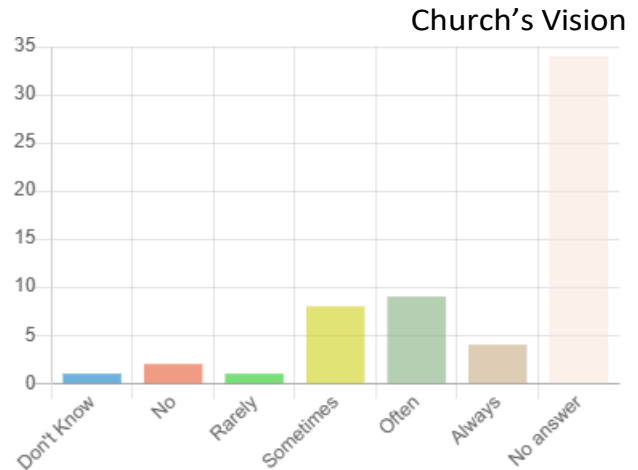
Of the few people who were disappointed in some aspect of worship, a consistent theme is concern with songs that have a repetitive nature.

Would like to see a more intentional focus on prayer during worship

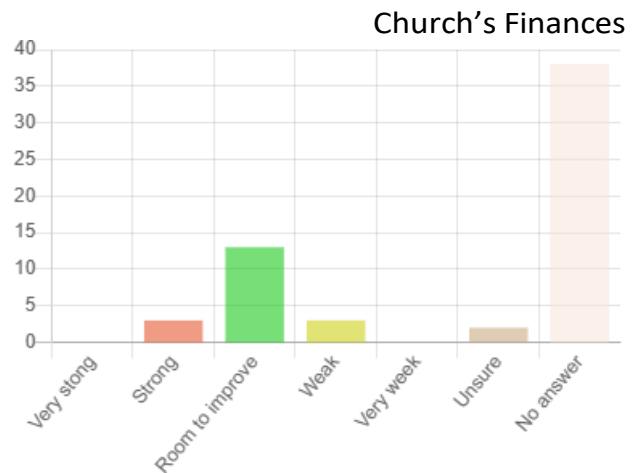


Vision/Direction

Responses indicate a fairly-low engagement with bible study and/or discipleship process, but majority of respondents are connected to the vision and direction of the congregation.

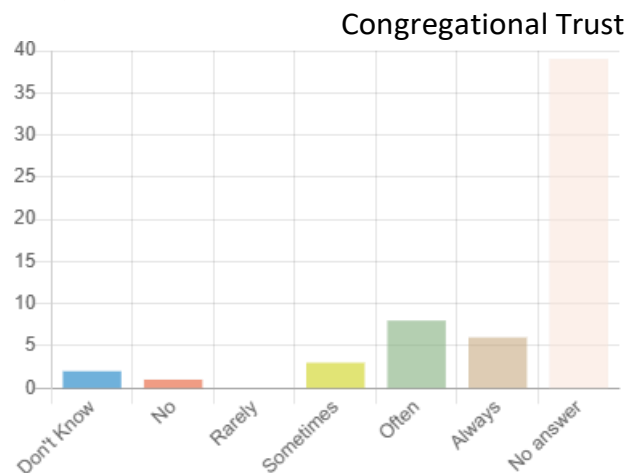


Almost two thirds of the congregation were not engaged with the financial position of the congregation, and one third felt that there was room for improvement.

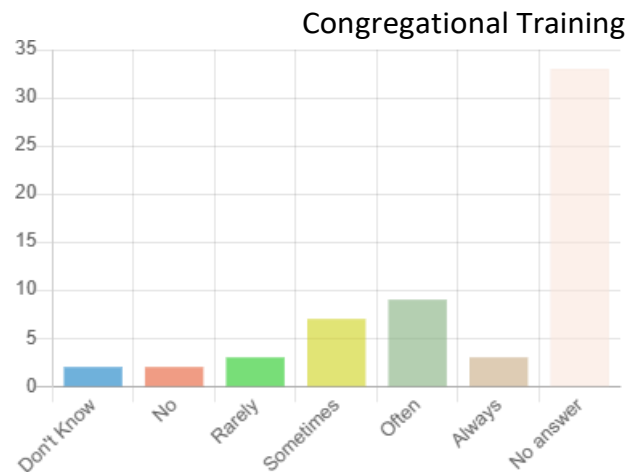


Leadership

Majority of those currently serving in leadership positions have been doing so for a very long time.

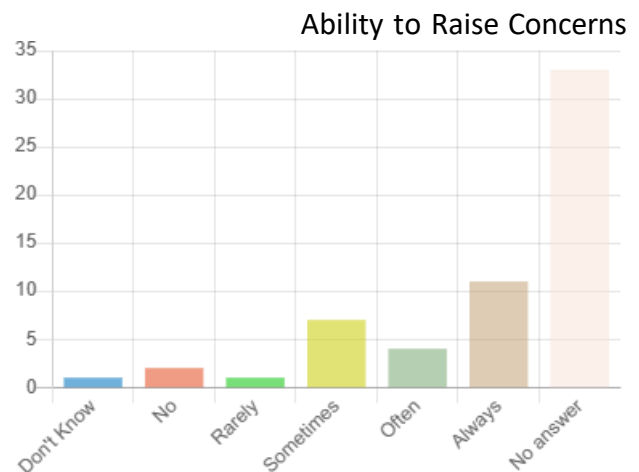


Consistently over 60% of responses gave no answer in this section. Those who did respond were generally positive with a few who expressed a lack of training, encouragement and mentoring for their ministry role in the congregation.

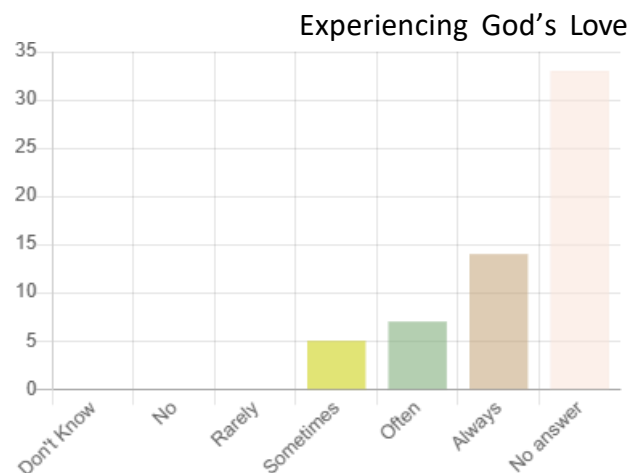


Communication

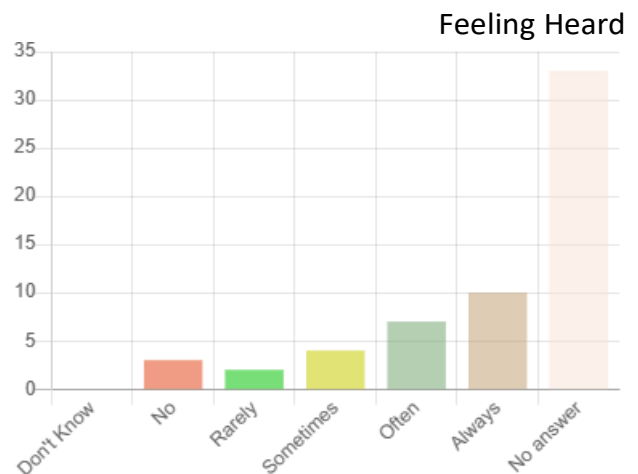
Able to raise concerns?



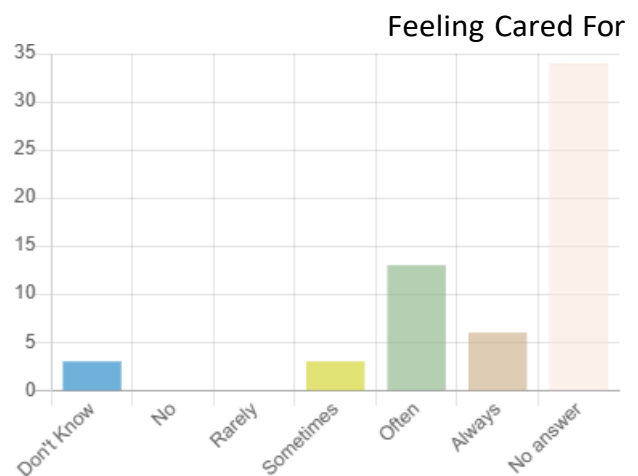
Survey results indicate a positive response to feeling the presence of God's love through others in the church, communication is respectful, and people feel they are cared for.



Approx 1/3 of those who responded felt their opinion was rarely, or not at all, appreciated or heard.



Generally, communication from the leadership is received, and there is room for a review of how communication is delivered.



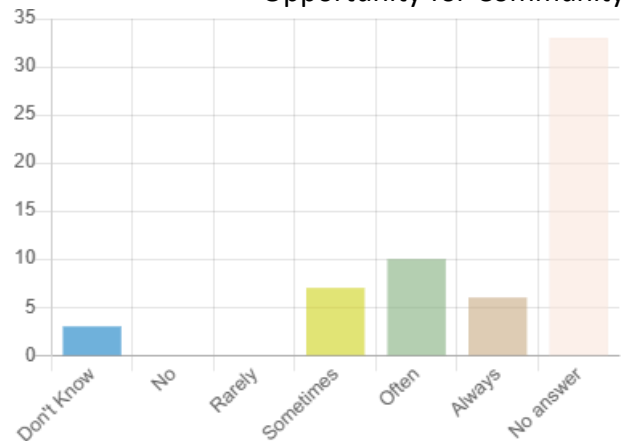
How we feel about the future of the church?

Youth and local community engagement were two standout themes respondents identified as priority for the future.

Community within and beyond

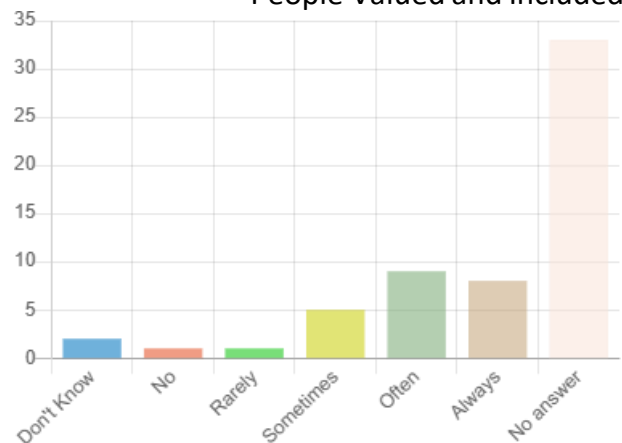
Opportunities exist for building community

Opportunity for Community



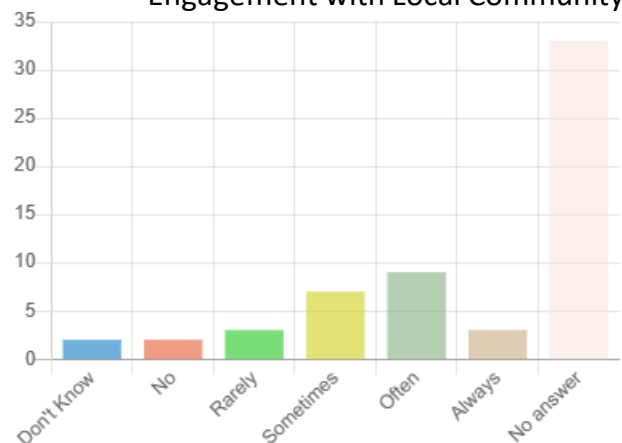
People within the church community generally feel taken care of and connected, there is room for a more intentional discipleship approach for those would like it.

People Valued and Included



A strong desire exists for connection/engagement with local community, but also a need to know more (education) on how to do so.

Engagement with Local Community



Ministry Agents

Rev. Adam Tipple

Adam began his placement at Lifeworks Uniting Church in in 2021 and has also served as Presbytery Chairperson. Congregation speaks highly of Adam in that he suits the congregation well, however there is room for more engagement with the local community and ecumenically.

Adam described himself currently at 'maximum capacity', while also having a strong sense that God is prompting him towards a change in his leadership. He would like to have a more direct approach rather than leading by invitation only with a greater focus on community engagement and mission, leadership development and discipleship.

An obvious shift in focus occurred for Adam when stepping down as Presbytery Chairperson. This provided him the capacity for more creative thinking and the ability to engage more fully in ministry at Lifeworks. Adam noted that Lifeworks has engaged enthusiastically in numerous ministry programs but recognised that time needed to be taken to engage deeply and sustainably with those involved.

Adam displayed a good sense of self-awareness regarding ministry stresses and reported positive use of time off including long service leave to mitigate this challenge.

A positive relationship exists between Adam and Lifework's Church Council who both spoke well of one another. Survey respondents overwhelmingly indicated appreciation and support for Adam and his ministry at Lifeworks.

Rev. Tanya Richards

Rev Tanya Richards has a unique role, currently serving as Connect100+ Community Chaplain. Her time is split between Uniting Care, Lifeworks, and Presbytery roles which offers unique challenges both in time management and focus which she handles with grace.

Tanya's role in Uniting Care locally has been meaningful, particularly connecting service co-ordinators. However, it has been challenging working within a broad role with over 300 staff and 7 initial focus congregations. Tanya acknowledged that her role as Connect 100 chaplain was unable to meet its full potential.

Tanya noted that the church council is a close-knit, experienced group with enthusiasm for new initiatives, but needed to slow down and ensure their ideas could be implemented sustainably with proper processes in place, including clarity of roles, expectations, and risk management.

Tanya is uniquely situated to mentor young women at Lifeworks, something which was noted as a valuable ministry by the Church Council. Survey results indicated that there was significant congregational support for Tanya's role at Lifeworks despite her short tenure.

Church Council

Lifework's Church Council is a well-established group of leaders who expressed a sense of positivity about their ability to communicate and work together. Members felt able to speak and be heard even when they disagreed. A high level of confidence in the office-bearers was noted, including professionalism and important skills.

Lifeworks current financial situation was reviewed in conversation with the treasurer and by sighting financial records. No obvious concerns were raised, though as common for many churches; projected expenses are greater than income.

Celebrations

- New initiatives, including the community BBQ and church Camp.
- A good working relationship with Rev. Adam and Rev. Tanya.
- Use of technology for church meetings and worship: 40-50 online participants in worship.
- The church grounds and facilities are being used well both for Lifeworks worship and for community activities.
- Mainly Music continues to be a great community outreach and has resulted in several baptisms being held at Lifeworks.
- A growing connection to Middle Ridge Uniting Church through a shared Alpha course.
- Many retired ministers contributing to the life of the church.

Challenges

- Church Council includes many longstanding members with few new additions.
- Maintaining, encouraging, and discipling volunteers for the church's many ministries, as well as ensuring new ministries are sustainable into the long-term.
- An ageing congregation and challenges related to keeping connected with homebound members.
- Making new ministries sustainable into the long-term.
- Increasing expenses are disproportionate to current budget projections.

Future Ministry Opportunities

These ideas and initiatives were expressed by the Ministry Agents, Church Council, and Survey Respondents:

- Greater connection and relevance to the Glenvale community.
- Engaging young families and children.
- Utilizing the property, especially vacant land.
- Continue to establish Ministry Oversight Teams and further develop Small Groups

Recommendations

The consultation team affirms Lifework's commitment to leading, growing, and living as faithful people of God within the Glenvale community. These recommendations are intended to support Lifework's ongoing ministry and mission.

- Church Council
 - Intentional succession planning
 - Encouraging and discipling a new generation of leaders within the congregation.
- Pastoral Care Team
 - Continue establishing a team which can:
 - Engage intentionally with homebound members;
 - Encourage, connect with, and offer prayer to regular members.
- Community Outreach
 - Develop the quality and sustainability of community outreach programs:
 - Training/discipling and encouraging volunteers;
 - Development of leaders;
 - Clarity of roles and expectations for leaders/volunteers, particularly regarding events.
 - Mainly Music could be integrated more into the life and mission of the church, providing opportunity for more intentional prayer during worship.
- Use of Land
 - Establish a long-term plan for land development:
 - Co-operation with other missional organisations;
 - Seeking options for business/enterprise opportunities.

General Comments from the Consultation Team

What a privilege to be a part of this consultation and listen to the stories of the people of God. Thank you so much for welcoming us so generously.

Apart from the typical challenges faced by many congregations in Australia ie. ageing demographic, financial limitations and regulatory obligations, we observed a congregation committed to God's leading and guiding them in ministry/mission.

Please prayerfully consider the recommendations and reach out to the Pastoral Relations Committee, on behalf of the Presbytery, for support.

Thank you again for sharing your life with the team so willingly and openly. We will continue to pray for you, for the future ministry at Lifeworks, and beyond into the Glenvale community.

With blessings,