

Members' testimonials as to why they are members of our Congregation

Assembly documents are not my preferred choice of reading material, but I did find one document which interested me immensely. It was a discussion paper entitled **Being Church Differently**, which was commended by the 11th Assembly of the Uniting Church in 2006. It was a document which I found inspiring because it encouraged the formation of new congregations and faith communities based around people who work in particular areas, or who have a common passion for expressing their faith in action.

It was a breath of fresh air for me. In my 20's and 30's I thought I could make a contribution to the life of the Church as an elder in my local congregation, but gradually became disillusioned as administration and finance took centre stage. Where was the opportunity to talk about what I believed, about what I understood to be my lay ministry, about the relationship of the Church with the world?

The Assembly paper suggested that these new faith communities would not be bound by meeting weekly on Sundays; they were not constrained by church buildings located in defined geographical areas, and they were not bound by the need to have an ordained clergy officiating. They could however help the Church connect with the increasing number of people who have no regular contact with organised religion, offering them an opportunity to explore their faith, and discern what God is calling them to do.

I cut my ties with the local congregation and went looking. One of the church agencies I found was the Urban Ministry Network, now called the Creative Ministries Network. The focus of this small agency was on the world of work, and on giving expression to God's call to act for justice, peace and reconciliation. It was an agency which struck a deep chord with me, and I was very keen to help set up the CMN congregation, using the Assembly document as our guide.

Barry Mitchell

The Benedictine active meditative process and exploration of the Bible stories requires me to be much more active and engaged in the Bible stories and Jesus life and teachings.

The processes we follow have allowed me to share how the Bible stories speak to me and relate to my daily life. I also hear more of what other people are experiencing and their faith journeys than I did belonging to traditional congregations.

The process of sharing from exploration of the Bible stories and from studies has been a different experience than listening to traditional sermons. As a congregation member I experienced listening to both good preachers and some who were not that good. Being stuck listening to sermons which did not touch my experience, including joys and struggles, was often disappointing and frustrating.

Sharing a meal has been an important part of the experience of gathering for worship for me. It has created a time and space to talk and share life experiences together. It is also a reminder of God's providence in our lives.

Whilst I sometimes miss not meeting in a traditional church building, sharing worship and studies in people's homes provides an atmosphere of warmth and added closeness to the gathering. It is also liberating not spending large amounts of time and energy being concerned about and discussing the maintenance requirements of church buildings.

Gary Bowman

The CMN Congregation is where I can obtain insights into issues that are relevant to everyday life, think about new ideas, find new ways of looking at large and small problems. Gatherings are informal and friendly.

No hymns, no pulpit, no stained glass windows, no set formats, no one telling me what is right and what is wrong, no-one more important than anyone else, no-one judging me or correcting me.

Gatherings are for structured thinking, and especially for contemplating the meaning and relevance of Bible passages to everyday life, to politics, to personal issues and our own histories.

A precious time for listening and sharing. Nowhere else do I have these types of supportive, non-judgmental conversations and reflections.

Margaret Neith