

# Congregation of Mark the Evangelist

## Mark the Evangelist Futures Project

### Discerning a Preferred Option

4 December 2016

#### Preamble

On 4 December 2016 following worship the Congregation will meet to finalise its discernment of the preferred accommodation option from those identified by the Mark the Evangelist Futures Project feasibility study which began in August 2015. The range of options under consideration are still those found by our feasibility study to be viable from financial, commercial and mission points of view. These are Options 1, 5.a., 6.a., 6.b., and 7.a., as described in material circulated for the 4 September and 23 October meetings. (This documentation can be found on our website

[www.marktheevangelist.unitingchurch.org.au/spoar](http://www.marktheevangelist.unitingchurch.org.au/spoar). The most accessible outlines are in the 'SPOAR v14.2 Summary' and the 'Feasibility Assessment Table' on that web page).

At the direction of the 23 October meeting, Church Council has consulted with and received requests from the small number of members who were unable to support the proposal as amended at that meeting. Two additional requests have been received in response to the Church Council Chair's invitation to all members. Church Council's intention was not to seek fresh ideas on property options to be explored, but to discover what members would find helpful in their further consideration of the proposal. A summary of the responses received together with Church Council's commentary has been distributed via the MtE SPOAR website.

Some of the requests relate to the meeting process itself, and they have been taken into account in the planning for this 4 December meeting.

The most common request expressed both at the 23 October meeting and in response to the Church Council invitation, was that consultations be undertaken with the Education Department to ascertain whether they might consider purchasing part of the site for the announced new North Melbourne primary school. A preliminary approach has been made to the Victorian School Building Authority which has carriage of this government initiative. In Church Council's consideration of how a formal enquiry could be presented to the Authority, only one viable approach has emerged, namely that the School Building Authority be asked to consider purchasing the whole of the portion of the site to be divested under Option 5.a.. Church Council is convinced that the alternative approach – the Government's purchase of the northern portion not including the Church (either Option 6.a. or Option 7.a.) – is unworkable because no government authority could contemplate paying the necessary premium above the estimated commercial value to enable these options to become as financially sustainable as Option 5.a.. For Option 6.a. the premium would need to be \$4 million while for Option 7.a. it would need to be \$2 million. This conclusion has been confirmed by the MTEFP consultant, SEMZ Property Advisory. Church Council is continuing with its approach to the Education Department, subject to the decision of the Congregation as to whether Option 5.a. is preferred. The Congregation can therefore continue with its consideration of the option to be preferred.

The proposal for the congregation to consider is essentially that resulting from the discussion and amendments agreed at the 23 October meeting. Church Council proposes to amend the proposal to make it clear that it is the Hall, the Supper Room and the Cottage which are to be developed under this option. Church Council also proposes not to proceed with the lease possibility. The wording of the amended Proposal will be put to the Congregational Meeting for approval. The Meeting is proceeding with consideration of Option 5.a. because of the substantial level of support it received at the October meeting.

The meeting will again be conducted using the consensus decision-making process. The Chair will emphasise that this is a prayerful process, in which we are seeking to discern God's will. He will briefly outline the process, ensure that all members are able to participate fully, and ensure that decisions are made in a process of genuine dialogue. Please note that there can be no proxy votes brought to a meeting. Members must be present to vote, although correspondence can be received and read to the meeting. Only confirmed members and members-in-association can make determining votes. The meeting will be conducted within a set time limit, finishing by 1pm at the latest. If no decision has been reached by the time we are approaching this limit, as before we will determine whether a decision is necessary at that time or can be left to a subsequent meeting. Approval of the final proposal will be sought by "consensus" or "agreement". "Consensus" means that all voting members agree to the proposal; "agreement" means that *not all agree* with the proposal but that all are willing to *live with* it. More detail about these procedures is given in the accompanying Meeting document, "Consensus Procedures".

In our earlier conversation groups and meetings two things have emerged as being particularly important to a large number of members:

- That MtE maintain its community, worship style, and particular characteristics, whatever shape its future takes.
- That the work of Hotham Mission be continued in North Melbourne and the surrounding suburbs.

These were identified by most participants in our various small group conversations as being 'deal breaker' concerns for them. The Church Council and its working group are very keen to see that these desires are met in this process. What follows is designed to assist us all to that end.

### **Amended Proposal**

That the congregation resolves to express its preference for proceeding under Option 5.a. to sell the portion of the property which includes Union Memorial Church, the Manse, and the Curzon/Queensberry commercial and residential properties for the purpose of development of the portion retained including the Hall, the Supper Room and the Elm St Cottage to achieve adequate meeting space and facilities for its worship and mission.

### **Key Points**

- Church Council proposes that the Proposal on the table at the end of the 23 October meeting be amended to make it clear that it is the Hall, the Supper Room and the Cottage which are to be developed under this option.

- Church Council proposes that the 23 October Proposal also be amended to remove the possibility of leasing out the portion of the property which is not to be retained. The MTEFP consultant, SEMZ Property Advisory, has advised that it is extremely unlikely this method of dealing with the northern portion including Union Memorial Church (under Option 5.a.) will return anything like the proceeds from a direct sale of that portion of the site.
- We are again addressing this proposal – essentially Property Option 5.a., which retains the Hall, the Supper Room and the Elm St Cottage – on account of the level of support it received during the September and October coffee discussions, a Church Council discussion, and the 23 October Congregational Meeting. The support for Option 5.a. carries the essential qualification that adequate meeting space and facilities need to be gained in the renovation process. Further imaginative architectural work will be required as the business case is finalised.
- This proposal focusing on Option 5.a. involves selling the northern portion of the site, including Union Memorial Church. This would result in sufficient property sale proceeds to achieve three objectives – to renovate and integrate the three remaining buildings on the southern section of the site to maximise the floor space and facilities available and thereby maximise our mission opportunities, to ensure that the Congregation of Mark the Evangelist is financially sustainable into the future, and to share part of the sale proceeds with the wider church.
- Option 5.a. enables the congregation to continue to be accommodated on a site of which it already has beneficial use and which, as many members have indicated, is not only familiar but appropriately modest and welcoming as a worship and office space.
- As illustrated in the Feasibility Assessment Table among the papers for this meeting, under Option 5.a. the financial, missional and commercial goals of Mark the Evangelist, Yarra Yarra Presbytery, and Synod Property Services are all acceptably achieved.
- The subdivision and sale of the northern buildings would take around 2 years after which the renovation of the retained buildings would take another year or so.
- There are challenges for the congregation in this option involving the task of overseeing the project, heritage and planning approvals for the subdivision, property sales, and acceptable building renovation plans and costs. However these challenges are nowhere near as great as those presented by all but Option 1. That ‘sell all’ option carries property sale and off-site accommodation identification challenges of its own.
- On the other hand, this site provides an exciting opportunity for the first time in over thirty years for the development of the original Supper Room into attractive medium scale meeting and hospitality spaces with workable kitchen and adequate toilet facilities. Upgrading of the Hall, especially of the sound system, will be undertaken. Expansion of the kitchen and meeting room section of the Elm Street Cottage will be planned. With creative architectural attention the entrances, spaces and linking structures between the three buildings to be retained will be transformed to create an integrated, flexible and attractive set of worship, mission and office venues.