BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR APPLICANTS TO THE POST OF

PROJECT MANAGER

Towards the establishment of an Institute for Religious Reflection and Inquiry as a faith community within the Uniting Church of Western Australia

Background

In December, 2006, Cottesloe Uniting Church Council commissioned a professional survey of the western suburbs of Perth. The survey sought to ascertain “community attitudes towards churchgoing which might influence the long term strategic planning of the Cottesloe Congregation of the Uniting Church in Western Australia.”

The Church Council received the results of the survey in March 2008. It is satisfied that the survey’s results were authentic and valid. The major conclusions were:

- There was no basis upon which the Cottesloe congregation could assume that its declining membership would be halted by any demographic or social considerations within the western suburbs. About 30% of the western suburbs community is unlikely to ever consider membership of a church; the remaining 70% of the non-church going sector appears to be seeking a different model to current “churching” if they are to return.

- The decline in congregation membership is not necessarily due to atheism nor indifference to spiritual awareness, western materialism etc. There is rather a straightforward suspicion of traditional or authority-centred religious definitions and worship rituals. This includes the traditional role of a “priest” or “minister” in directing a congregational life.

- However, the 70% segment referred to above, declared a genuine religious curiosity. This was expressed as a strong interest in understanding the nature of an ultimate spirit-God or participating in religious thinking and debate. A degree of enthusiasm for learning how to expand the spiritual dimension of individual lives was indicated.

After a number of discussions and debates both at congregational and Church Council level, the Cottesloe Congregation has now resolved to embrace the challenges inherent in the above findings. In short they are seeking to establish an inclusive, non-judgemental and inquiry based model of seeking the presence of God in His world.

They believe that a unique opportunity exists within the western suburbs to enter into partnership with another Uniting Church agency, Scotch College, so that the educational dynamic underpinning such a new vision of collective community-based churching can be jointly and vigorously explored.
The Proposal

It is proposed that Scotch College and the Cottesloe Congregation of the Uniting Church unite to form an institute of religious inquiry and reflection to serve the western suburbs and beyond. The core features of the Institute would be:

- Learning programs of philosophy and ethics and of religious studies including those faiths not part of the Christian tradition
- Examination of how and where the spirit-God works in human communities
- A sacred place to allow those who wish to communicate with God to do so in communion with others
- A pastoral extension to all members of the institute including professionally based counselling and family support services.

A leader of the Institute would be appointed reporting to an executive committee, the structure of which is subject to future planning. The leader need not be a person in Holy Orders but one who has high level academic qualifications and a complete empathy with the notion of being one with “the pilgrim community.” The contribution of ordained persons of all faiths would be welcomed in utilising the sacred space.

A planning committee has now been established, comprising representatives of Scotch College and the Cottesloe Congregation Church Council. It seeks the services of a Project Manager to provide expertise and administrative skills in the achievement of its vision.

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