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Over 80 Uniting Church members across four presbyteries came to engage with Keith Suter's scenarios.

Suter gets the ball rolling on reform



Last month over 80 church members from across four presbyteries within the Queensland Synod gathered to discuss the outcomes of Dr Keith Suter's thesis "Does the Uniting Church in Australia have a future?" **Ashley Thompson** reports.

Since its release last year, Dr Keith Suter's four possible scenarios for the Uniting Church's future has received mixed reviews, causing fear in some parts of the church and stimulating conversation in others.

Retired minister Rev Dr Lew Born opened a lunch time discussion held on 2 September at Beenleigh Region Uniting Church with sharp criticism of those who have ignored Keith's thesis:

"It is an abysmal betrayal by some national and synod leaders not to grant any recognition and status to this gift of Keith Suter's dissertation to the church he loves—warts and all.

"His professional status has international recognition and this work provides unquestioned competence with academic verification. Any commissioning corporation would pay tens of thousands of dollars for this gift."

Keith's four proposed scenarios include: "Word and Deed", "Secular Welfare", "Return to the Early Church" and "Recessional, the End of Church", each one falling on the end of an axis that favours high or low Christian spirituality and high or low government expenditure for church welfare.

Lew said the purpose of this discussion was not to push for "Suter's scenarios" as they have been dubbed, but stimulate conversation and confront fear.

"If the situation is as serious as it seems to be, no deck chair shuffle or band aid application has any chance of reversing long established trends."

A spokesperson from each table brought forward recognisable differences in opinion such as big vs small churches with the acknowledgement one size does not fit all.

Newlife Uniting Church minister Rev Melissa Lipsett urged members of smaller churches not to be afraid of larger churches as the church's commitment to be in regional Queensland was fervently represented by outer-city presbyteries.

Newlife congregation member, John Gibson shared his home group's thoughts on Keith's thesis and acknowledged, "There is no one person or one committee that can drive the comprehensive changes that are required."

"The number one challenge I hope this group will focus on is to decide a strategy to get the issue constructively considered at Synod."

Discussion proved beneficial to all those who deeply desired to see the topic brought to the attention of the wider church, as Catherine Booth said, "If we are to better the future, we must disturb the present."

"Solution is more likely to require spiritual reformation rather than administrative or structural adjustments," said Lew in closing.

"But it is late already."

Find out more about Dr Keith Suter's thesis by visiting churchfutures.com.au

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Rev Dr Lew Born