



B12 REMOTE AREA MINISTRY TASK GROUP

1. REMOTE AREA MINISTRY WORKING GROUP

The Remote Area Ministry Working Group (RAMWG) gives thanks to God for those who work in the remotest areas of Australia to bring God's grace through word, sacrament and practical care. We also give thanks for the work of Frontier Services who raise funds for the work of the Bush Chaplains and tirelessly promote Outback Links to provide connections between those who need help and those who are able to offer help.

COVID restrictions have had a significant impact on ministry in remote areas – not only limiting the freedom for pastoral visitation but with closed borders, the work of Outback Links volunteers has been severely curtailed. Corporate donations to Frontier Services has also fallen sharply, only partly offset by a fairly large increase in the number of private donors. Nonetheless the work has continued to meet the needs of the remote communities in Australia

It has been five years since the restructure of Frontier Services activities in 2016 and the transfer of patrol ministry (now known as Remote Area Ministry) from Frontier Services to Synods/Presbyteries. At the time it was recognized that further discussion was needed on how the UCA, as a whole, was to respond to ministry needs in remote areas. In response the Remote Area Ministry Working Group was established with participants from Synods/Presbyteries, Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress and service agencies operating in remote areas. For the past several years this has been the forum where discussion on remote area ministry, consideration of new Bush Chaplain placements and appropriate funding has taken place.

The process has often been awkward with key responsibilities not clearly defined and often required to overlap. Frontier Services is primarily the fund-raising arm and is required to interact extensively with the Bush Chaplains (the new name for Patrol Ministers or Patrol Padres) in order to manage and to protect their status as a Public Beneficiary Institution (PBI). The Synods/Presbyteries, on the other hand, have oversight of Bush Chaplains in their jurisdiction, including placement and disciplinary responsibilities. Over the past five years the RAMWG and Frontier Services have worked closely together to ensure mutual co-operation as they stand together with those in the Bush. A Process Chart is included in this report to identify key responsibilities

Key points of discussion have been:

1. The Remote Area Ministry National Framework established by the Assembly in 2015 and the Terms of Reference as established by ASC in 2016 remain appropriate.
2. Consideration is regularly given to the appropriateness and resulting effectiveness of existing Bush Chaplain patrol boundaries, especially in the light of the RAMWG Terms of Reference which include "development of new models of ministry and approaches across Synod boundaries".
3. Also, regarding new models of ministry, consideration has been given to how partnerships with UCA agencies may be further developed. The significant operational role of UCA agencies, ie UnitingCare nationally, and within Synods, Australian Regional and Remote Community Services (ARRCS) in the Northern Territory and Juniper in the Kimberley of Western Australia, which all have key service delivery roles in remote areas.
4. Following discussion between Frontier Services and UAICC, a Bush Chaplain was appointed in Oodnadatta in South Australia.

5. In 2018 a Bush Chaplains Conference was held in Adelaide with very positive outcomes including identification of pastoral and OH&S issues, and the development of a draft Bush Chaplains handbook.
6. At the request of the RAMWG , Rev Felicity Amery prepared a Discussion Paper which is included for information with this report.

There are currently 18 ministries in remote areas, of which 17 are fully or partly funded by Frontier Services according to the budget requests made by RAMWG. In total, the funding provided by Frontier Services is \$1.5 million.

Four new ministries (3 in the Northern Synod and one in Western Australia) are not able to be funded by Frontier Services at this time and are either funded through the Synod directly or have not been initiated.

<u>Synod</u>	<u>Remote Area</u>	<u>Budget Requests 2021-2022</u>
QLD	McKay	\$ 30,000
QLD	Kennedy	\$ 124,000
QLD	Cunnamulla Burke & Wills	\$ 121,919
QLD	Cape York - Aurukun	\$ 110,000
Northern	Centralian	\$ 132,506
Northern	West Arnhem-Jabiru	\$ 117,000
Northern	Tennant-Barkley	\$ 112,000
Northern	East Arnhem	
	Katherine	
	Kimberly	-
NSW	Barwon	\$ 80,000
SA	Sturt/Parkin	\$ 132,000
SA	Oodnadatta	\$ 65,025
SA	Ceduna	
TAS	Midlands Glamorgan	
TAS	West Coast	\$ 60,000
WA	Pilbara	\$ 125,000
WA	Murchison	\$ 118,602
WA	Goldfields	\$ 80,000
WA	Gascoyne	
VIC	High Country	\$ 72,000
		\$ 1,480,052

Current Membership of the Remote Area Working Group

David de Kock – WA – Convener
 Colleen Geyer - Assembly
 Jannine Jackson – National Director Frontier Services
 Mark Kickett – UAICC
 Stephen Robinson – Assembly Disaster Response
 Bruce Moore - UnitingCare Queensland

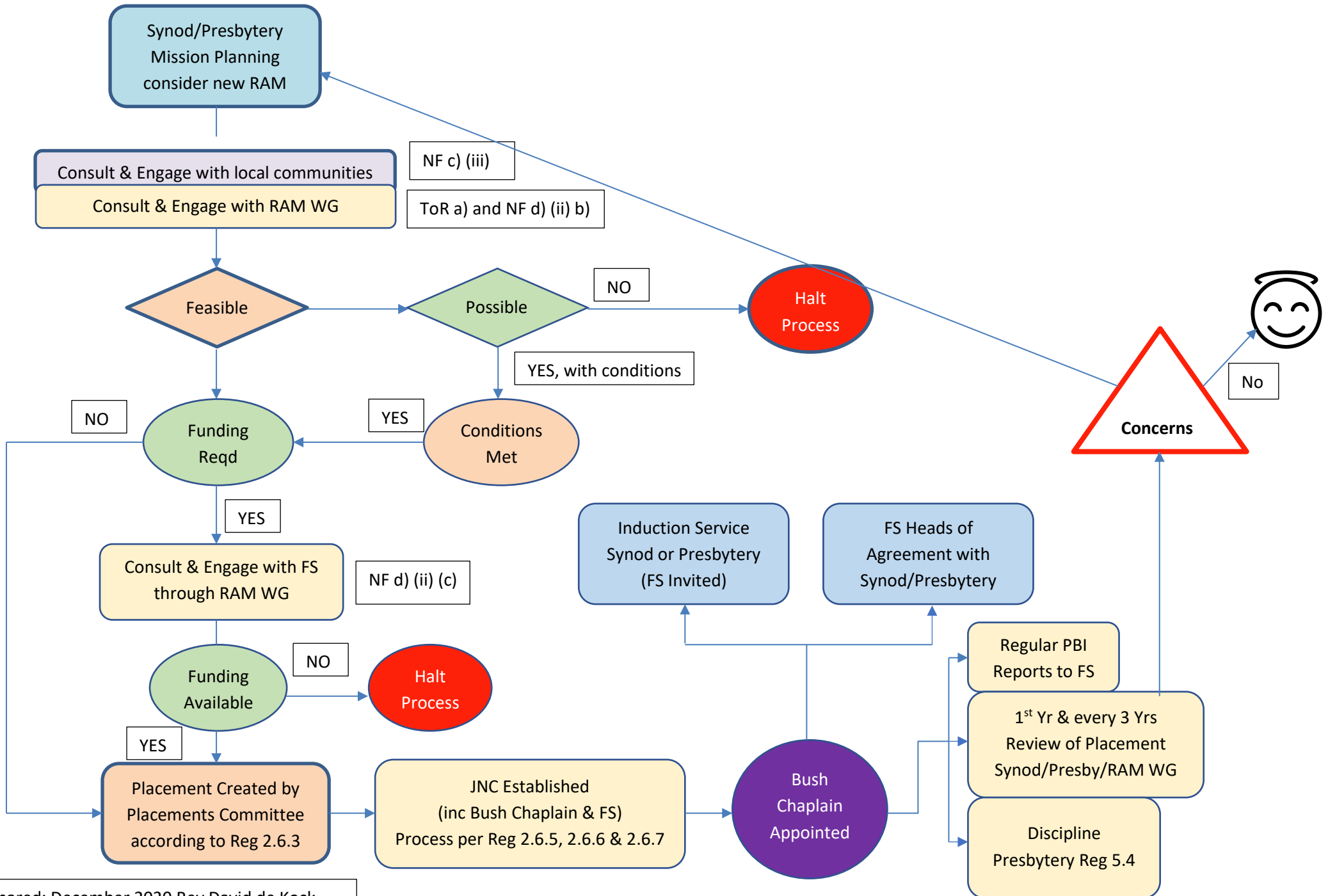
Debbie Bye – Gippsland Presbytery
Garry Hardingham – Carpentaria Presbytery
Haloti Kailahi – Northern Synod
Mark Faulkner – New South Wales/ACT
Felicity Amery – South Australia

Appendices

- A Process for making Remote Area Ministry Placements
- Bn Draft Paper for RAM Working Group – Summary (Feb 2021)

David de Kock
Convener

APPENDIX A - PROCESS FOR MAKING REMOTE AREA MINISTRY PLACEMENTS



APPENDIX B - DRAFT PAPER FOR RAM WORKING GROUP – SUMMARY

February 2021

Rev Felicity Amery (General Secretary SA Synod) was asked to prepare a paper on different models of engagement in (rural and) remote regions of Australia.

- *Possibility of models other than Bush Chaplains – rural and remote*
- *Based on Terms of Reference, National Framework as well as FS Constitution and Governance Model*
- *Include an approach to assess Vitality of Call (include FS in the appraisal approach)*
- *Include models of oversight of Bush Chaplains across the states*

CONTEXT for the Paper

The Uniting Church in Australia and its founding denominations have a long and respected involvement in the provision of love, care and support to geographically isolated families and communities. Ministry, (on the ground presence and activity), has included Bush Chaplains, agencies, community development projects, volunteer work parties and support for remote families.

The Remote Area Ministry (RAM) National Framework affirms the UCA commitment to working in covenant relationship with First Peoples through UAICC. It is shaped by contexts of geographic isolation and encourages the collaborative work of consultation with remote communities and the building of partnerships wherever possible.

The RAM Working Group meets to conduct an annual assessment of patrols and their boundaries and to work with Frontier Services, its funding body, to identify sustainable projects that will meet the needs of remote communities. The Terms of Reference for the Working Group encourage it to do strategic planning around remote area ministry, explore new models of delivery, undertake research and advocacy on issues impacting on UCA members in remote areas, review the National Framework and determine the way funds from Frontier Services are allocated.

The Assembly Standing Committee and the Assembly General Secretary, Frontier Services Board and its National Director, the Remote Area Ministry Working Group (RAM), Synods and Presbyteries have continued to work collaboratively to provide high quality and consistent ministry and services.

At its meeting in March 2020, members of the RAM Working Group acknowledged that there were a growing number of questions around both regional and remote ministry needs, delivery of services, oversight responsibilities and appropriate models of delivery. It was time for an intentional conversation and this paper seeks to address some of these questions and resource a conversation.

CONTENTS of the Paper

1. Contemporary Data
2. Guiding Principles of Remote Area Ministry
3. Issues around the definition of Remote
4. Conversation with Stakeholders

5. Some Emerging Thoughts
6. Issues Around Accountability
7. Oversight and Support
8. Attachment 1 – Feedback to Questionnaire
9. Attachment 2 – Vitality of Call for Bush Chaplains

1. Contemporary Data

Queensland	NSW/ACT	VIC/TAS	South Australia	Western Australia	Northern Synod
Carpentaria	Barwon	Midlands Glamorgan Tas	Parkin-Sturt	Pilbara	Centralia
Kennedy		West Coast Tas	Oodnadatta	Murchison	West Arnhem- Jabiru
Cunnamulla			Ceduna	Goldfields	Tennant-Barkley
Cape York Aurukun		High Country Vic		Gascoyne	East Arnhem
					Katherine
					Kimberley

2. Guiding Principles – affirmed at the Assembly Meeting in Perth in 2015

1. God is already present and engaged in mission in remote Australia and among the people who live there, 1st and 2nd Peoples.
2. In seeking to discern how the UCA might participate in what God is doing in remote areas, priority must be given to our covenant relationship with the First Peoples through the UAICC and a commitment to partnerships between 1st and 2nd Peoples.
3. The church must commit to an approach to remote area ministry that is based on consultation and engagement with local communities and contextualised by place, need and local capacity.
4. The churches ministry and service must be orientated towards building capacity and resilience in local communities
5. The UCA is committed to a whole-of-church response to remote area ministry
6. Partnerships should be developed between the relevant councils and/or agencies of the church where ever possible in order to be good stewards of the churches resources so that remote area ministry develops in sustainable ways.
7. A national mechanism should be established to enable all the councils and agencies of the church that are involved in remote area ministry to communicate and collaborate in the development and delivery of appropriate, effective, sustainable remote area ministry

3. Issues around the definition of Remote

The work of Bush Chaplains, historically known as Patrol Ministers, has always been associated with remoteness, geographical isolation and the ‘frontier’. It has been acknowledged that isolation has in

the past been defined as significantly large geographic distances, limited road access and limited communication and contact with others. These factors resulted in reduced access to medical, financial, legal and educational services and the growth of a ministry model based on a program of intentional visiting, attendance at regional community events and a mobile spiritual and pastoral presence in remote areas. In recent decades with the arrival of technologies such as satellite and internet, the significant changes to vehicle capacity and safety, and the increased mobility of the general population, the needs of people in remote locations has changed.

At the same time radical changes have occurred in our regional communities. Small towns which once serviced regional and remote Australia have declined in number and capacity and in some cases no longer exist. This trend is a paper in itself and I don't intend to discuss it in detail. However the consequence is that medical, financial, legal and educational services they once provided have moved to larger centres and a significant movement of people away from regional Australia.

So while technologies have assisted people in remote areas to be more comfortable and safer, regional areas we once identified as rural have become remote, rapidly expanding the areas of Australia in need of alternate models of service and care by the church. This provides a challenge for the UCA to reconsider how it understands remoteness and what future ministry and service models might be needed.

4. Conversation with stakeholders

In order to hear what people in the field might be thinking about these issues 45 people with an interest in the conversation were consulted with particular intention to input from Bush Chaplains. It is important to note that COVID 19 arrived in the middle of this conversation and may well have impacted on peoples responses.

5. Emerging thoughts

It is clear from speaking with this limited cohort working in the field that;

- Bush Chaplains enjoy what they do.
- There is significant diversity of context, need, gifts and skills and ability to access resources.
- There is a limited pool of people equipped and experiencing a sense of call to this ministry.
- There are not a lot of new ideas around about how the church might respond to the changing and growing needs of rural and remote Australia, but there is a keenness to talk about it.
- There is a growing cultural and linguist diversity in both rural and remote regions of the country.
- There is a commitment to work positively with 1st Peoples.
- There is a perception that people in rural and remote areas respond slowly and with some resistance to change and
- That short term or part time models would not be affective.
- Bush Chaplains do not always feel supported and cared for – they experience the impact of isolation and remoteness.
- In some cases Bush Chaplains find it difficult and/or resist evaluation and processes of accountability provided by the Presbytery/Synod and Frontier Services.

In collating the data from the survey there are some emerging perspectives and some good ideas that the RAM Working Group might consider.

[Saltbush - Uniting the Scattered Community](#) – is developing a model for growing and shaping presbyteries for the future, outside of the Sydney basin, focused on connecting and encouraging rural and regional Uniting Christian communities to focus on mission. It's a vision for reshaping and refocusing presbyteries and recognises the need to focus on discipleship and mission.

It raises questions regarding who is responsible for administration, training and equipping, accountability, defining roles and responsibilities?

The model Saltbush is testing includes:

- Restructuring to encourage imagination
- Grounding the gathered community in discipleship and mission, online and face to face
- Relational oversight
- Involving members and community in decision making – using small groups
- Delegation of property, finance and administration when requested or suitable people (qualifications, time, energy) are not available.
- Recognises the primary role and responsibility of the Presbytery to offer pastoral and ministry oversight within congregations, faith communities and other organisations in its bounds and the declining people resources available to presbyteries to undertake this work.

[Promotion of local Lay Pastors](#) - Rev Lindsay Parkhill has been experimenting with a model that identifies local people and seeks to recognise them as voluntary Pastors;

- Pastors are local, known and respected in their communities,
- Grounded in local culture and language,
- They tend to stay
- There are challenges around the provision of training and equipping for leadership in ministry and ongoing support
- Questions around provision of critical pastoral care, supervision and accountability remain
- This is not just a model suitable for remote Indigenous communities
- Lindsay raises some issues around mystification and confusion about how UCA and dominant culture works when this model (which includes aspects of church structures defined by the dominant culture) is applied to Indigenous communities.

[The traditional model of Bush Chaplain](#) remains relevant in some contexts:

- The Frontier Services brand remains well respected and valued
- Ministry agents are often present in the community/region over a long period of time
- Strong relationships are built up
- It has also been acknowledged that it's an expensive model,
- it is dependent on the gifts and skills of an individual,
- sometimes restricted by the somewhat maverick nature of this calling,
- and its effectiveness is hard to evaluate.

Project Funding Model

- Working with local communities on a project
- Using Community Development processes
- Developing well trained and experienced teams to work with local people
- It's a short term exposure model (e.g. 1 month painting, 3 months building a garden, an artist in residence, renovating a shed, language learning, equipping people to increase their capacity to access resources online)

6. Bush Chaplains and the issues around accountability.

The National Director of Frontier Services, Jannine Jackson and General Secretaries from the Synods have raised significant concerns about accountability, review processes, management, oversight and support, and financial viability of Bush Chaplaincy. There continues to be enormous emotional capital invested in Frontier Services and its programs by congregations and individuals within the church. Historically any attempt to modify the approach or the roles of our Bush Chaplains has been met with firm resistance. At the same time we cannot underestimate the transformative work that Frontier Services, very committed Patrol Ministers/Bush Chaplains and volunteers have done over many years. There has always been a strong commitment to seeking models of ministry that would provide high quality service and care to remote areas.

While the roles and responsibilities of each of the stakeholders are reasonably well defined, they have on occasions been misunderstood or difficult to implement.

- The Assembly Standing Committee, has governance responsibilities to approve the FS constitution, appoint members to the FS board, the RAM Working Group and receive regular reports on governance and operational matters.
- The Assembly General Secretary has governance responsibilities to advise and counsel the FS Board, provide a direct link to the ASC, work with the FS National Director and the Chair of FS Board as they prepare to report to the ASC and is the line manager for the National Director.
- The FS National Director is appointed by ASC and reports to the Assembly General Secretary and has overall management responsibility for the work of FS, facilitates meetings of the FS Board, maintains relationships with key Synod staff and the timely receipt of relevant reports.
- The Frontier Services Board is appointed by and reports to the ASC. Within the parameters established by the ASC the board has responsibility to make provision for its governance responsibilities including theological reflection on the life and mission of FS, establish and review strategic goals and directions, ensure the overall performance of FS meets established objectives, ensures the financial integrity of FS meets established objectives and appropriate financial accountabilities are in place, ensure legislative compliance, risk management and high ethical standards are maintained. Further the FS Board will encourage effective communication between FS and all its stakeholders and promote its purpose and vision and assist with fundraising and public relations efforts. The FS Board is also responsible to participate in the selection of the National Director, conduct regular performance reviews, provide support and encouragement for the staff, maintain an overview of the issues in

remote Australia and within the UCA, heed respect and act according to the Assemblies policies and follow their guidance on matters of finance audit, risk and investment.

- The Synods and Presbyteries have responsibility for the oversight and support of ministry and mission in their regions. While there is some variance between Synods, all Bush Chaplains are either a Synod or a Presbytery Placement, largely funded by Frontier Service, in response to the spiritual, pastoral and missional needs identified by Presbyteries in each Synod. Presbyteries have the pastoral, spiritual and supervision oversight of all Bush Chaplains and work collaboratively with their Synod to provide appropriate reports to FS. Matters of discipline and critical care are also managed collaboratively according to the By-Laws of each Synod. The Synod provides reports to FS for those placements funded by FS and negotiate and agree to Heads of Agreements/Memoranda of Understanding with FS for approved funding. This will include appropriate equipment, tools of trade, provision of a suitable vehicle and accommodation within the bounds of the budget.
- Bush Chaplains are called by God and the Church to serve and care for individuals and communities in remote Australia. They are employed by and are members of their local Presbytery and Synod. They are accountable to the Synod or Presbytery for supervision, continuing education, health and wellbeing, continuing education, processes of review and on matters of discipline. They report in accordance with the expectations of their Presbytery and to FS through their Synod and Presbytery in accordance with the agreement. They heed, respect and act in accordance with the polity and ethos of the UCA, are bound by its Code of Ethics and actively promote the Principles of remote area ministry approved by the Assembly in 2015.

As noted previously and in this context the RAM Working Group members are appointed by ASC and report at least annually to the ASC, Synods and Agencies. The Working Group functions as a Task Group. At this time it has the responsibility to provide a place for conversation concerning UCA ministry to remote areas and overarching strategic planning for remote area ministry. It is a mechanism through which voices from across the UCA are heard and considered. Noting the responsibilities of Synods and Presbyteries, UAICC and the agencies including FS and Uniting Care, the RAMWG seek to achieve outcomes through cooperation, collaboration and sustainable ministry approaches including the development of new models of ministry through research and advocacy. At this time they meet at least annually to develop new national frameworks, and determine ways the funds raised by FS are allocated to support remote area ministry.

7. Oversight and Support

The development of this paper provides an opportunity to ask some questions about Bush Chaplaincy as a model of support and care in rural and remote areas. It also asks the Working Group to do some intentional work around how Synods and Presbyteries can improve their oversight and support for Bush Chaplains already in placement. There is a strong desire to create opportunities for Bush Chaplains to gather for professional development, support and to share stories.

A revised Draft Vitality of Call Document has been developed, providing synods and presbyteries with a useful tool to review and assess effectiveness of a Bush Chaplain and the vitality of their placement.

This document is designed to be used in the second half of the 4th and 9th year of a placement, following a series of annual appraisal conversations between the Presbytery and the Bush Chaplain. It would be appropriate for the Presbytery to invite FS to participate in the Vitality of Call process. It would also be appropriate for the RAM Working Group to request some work be done to develop a Bush Chaplaincy Placement Consultation Review document, not unlike a Congregational Consultation process, where the scope and vitality of the ministry, the missional goals and activities of the placement are reviewed.

The RAM Working Group meets to

- *conduct an annual assessment of patrols and their boundaries and to work with Frontier Services, its funding body, to identify sustainable projects* – Who conducts the assessment? Are they conflicted? Recognising there is difference, do we have a list of criteria that assists the Working Group to assess what is sustainable? If yes, does it need reviewing?
- *do strategic planning around remote area ministry*, - Is it time to facilitate a national conversation around the future needs of rural and remote area ministry to explore in greater depth new models of delivery?
- *undertake research and advocacy on issues impacting on UCA members in remote areas*, - Who should be in these conversations?
- *review the National Framework* – Is it sustainable, meeting contemporary needs and equipping the church to resource future needs?
- *determine the way funds from Frontier Services are allocated*. How do Synods and Presbyteries participate in this conversation? Is there need for an education process/package/resource to be prepared for synods and presbyteries to outline the contemporary needs of Bush Chaplaincy and other emerging models of support and care for rural and remote area communities to explore? How are the voices of rural and remote areas heard and included in the planning?