

# Northern Light



October 2015 ~ Far North Coast Uniting  
Presbytery Synod of NSW & ACT

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## **NORTHERN LIGHT SPECIAL EDITION ~ October 2015**

**We not them!** Across the NSW-ACT synod there is a call to change our language. Too often we join the world in the blame game. We do so even at times without thinking about it. Our delegates might return from a presbytery meeting and will tell people – publicly or privately – ‘The Presbytery made a decision to ...’ or ‘They decided ..’

We have a disappointing habit of disconnecting ourselves from things that in fact we said ‘yes’ to in a meeting or conversation but now choose to make it something separate from us.

The presbytery agreed to change its language and turn our ‘they’ and ‘them’ into a WE!

**PRESBYTERY PLACEMENTS.** The world has changed and the church no longer holds a place of privilege and priority in our various communities. As local congregations we have to be seeking ways of being a faith community that is actively ‘worshipping, witnessing and serving.’

A question that is often asked these days is: ***‘If your church closed its doors tomorrow would the community notice your absence?’***

*It is a very good question.*

Recognising that things are very different from the time of church union in 1977, the presbytery, at our August meeting decided to make all future ministry placements Presbytery Placements. It also called upon congregations with existing placements to consider changing those placements into Presbytery placements.

WHY? Over time we have developed a thinking that says we live in a period of lacking the resources that we used to have in those mythical golden days of yore. This has come about because we have failed to adjust quickly enough to the new emerging scenario.

Reality is that we have an abundance of resources but up until now we have held on to them and contained them in congregation silos. What we lack is an intention to change and take advantage of the many gifts and graces across our region.



**To keep this important means of communicating across the presbytery alive and well, why not send some of your good news stories and photos to Joá in the office and that way we can all better share in our various journeying.**

**MISSION STRATEGY FUND.** For many years the local church has been able to look after itself through the support of the local flock or, when a special project or challenge arose they were able to go wider – to the presbytery or Synod – for support. In our much changed scenario this is no longer an option.

***We need a Plan B!***

The August meeting of presbytery approved the establishing of a presbytery **‘Mission Strategy Fund’** designed to give long term support to mission across our region. Our hope is that all congregations will see the potential in building a local financial resource base that will allow us to continue encouraging and supporting local mission.

To seed this fund another proposal coming out of the August meeting was that those congregations holding Sales Proceeds funds be encouraged to offer at least 10% of these funds to kick start the **‘Mission Strategy Fund’**. This was affirmed unanimously by every ‘WE’ at the meeting!

**PROPERTY AUDIT.** Across the NSWACT Synod there is a move to assess all of our property assets and make decisions regarding their future. In these times we cannot afford the luxury of simply sitting on property that is not serving any kind of missional purpose.

It was agreed to urgently begin a Property Audit of all properties across the FNC presbytery. This will in the first instance give us a good understanding of just what property resources we do have, thus allowing an informed conversation to take place.



***Is this a giant Fire Sale?! Not at all.***

It is an opportunity for us to be clear about what we do have and then make informed decisions about a way forward. While we do not dismiss the emotional connection many people have to property we are reminded that the church is in the first instance about the kingdom work of God. Does this property further the work of God in our community? Could we cooperate with another group to further its impact? Could we offer it for God’s work on a wider scale?

**LAY LEADERSHIP.** With diminishing resources available to fund paid ministry we recognise the importance of building up leadership at a local level. Increasingly we need to see lay people in lead positions in and across our presbytery. We have done fairly well in this endeavour over recent years by offering a variety of training opportunities and we wish to build up even more momentum in this important area.

**POTTSVILLE.** The presbytery recognised the strategic importance of the new growth area across the Pottsville region and affirmed its desire to establish a strong Uniting Church presence in the area.

Craig and Janette Blackburn have done good work through their positive profile at the Pottsville Markets and also through Craig’s great work across local schools. However we have not been able up to this time to establish a worshipping community.



## Rev John ready for take- off on his next adventure

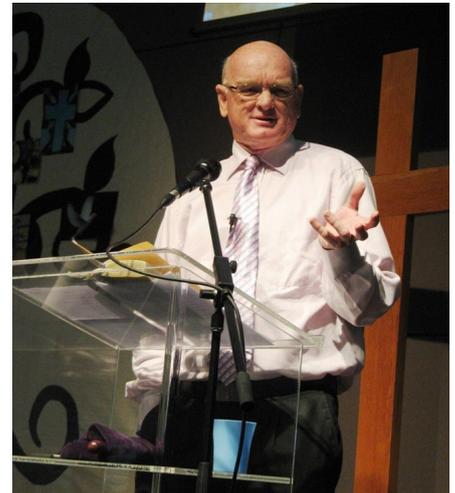
*10 questions put to Rev John Thornton, Pastor, Mentor, Facilitator, Raconteur, Sports nut and friend. Age....ageing gracefully.*

**Q1** I notice from your bio that you came to full-time ministry after a successful career in the textile trade, and a great street preaching ministry. You also worked with street kids. Do you think it is better to have lived the talk rather than entering ministry at tertiary level?

***I think that it is a great advantage to have had life experience before entering ministry. I look upon my work with street kids in Victoria as some of the most theologically formative years of my life. Having said that I do enjoy study and don't want to decry the importance of formal training; it's just that I missed a great deal of it!***

**Q2** You say that you reached the top of the ladder in your trade and God rattled your cage. How did this happen?

***Hmm, too long a story for one page. Over a period of six months several significant and traumatic things hit me and left me asking very big life questions. Two of my close friends had died suddenly as had my father-in-law and I was at a loss for answers. The final part of this part of my story was the Ash Wednesday bushfires of 1983. It was here that I made a deal with the God I wasn't sure even existed. Lesson in life: Don't make deals with God unless you mean it.***



**Q3** You went from street preaching and working with street kids to local church ministry. How hard was the transition?

***It had its moments! God was really good to us in that we were landed in beautiful Coffs Harbour and specifically Sawtell and were rewarded with enough brave and grace-filled people to get us through those early months.***

***Being as naïve as I was it was only looking back that I now notice some people did oppose my thinking, I was just too dumb to notice. I recall sharing my vision for ministry with the Adult Fellowship group and when I finished a lady said, 'well John we will have to think about this.' My pastoral skills were still pretty raw and I replied, 'I am not here asking your permission, but telling you what I believe God has called me to do.'***

**Q4** Do you think there is a place for the traditional church, or does the paradigm have to change?

***I think there is definitely a place for the traditional church, but that church has to acknowledge that the world has changed significantly. The old style of church can continue but be brave enough to give permission for the new to be given space and even precedence.***



**Q5** You planted a new congregation in a new housing area of Rouse Hill and Kellyville. From your experience – good or bad – do you have wisdom you can pass on as we are about to plant a church/worship centre at Pottsville?

***It is imperative to get the right person who will hopefully take time to discern what will work in the Pottsville context and then act positively and boldly. Please presbytery be the best cheer squad and permission giver you can be! Be very careful about the team that you might gather around the church planter. You are not planting a church to look like the church we remember, but something NEW!***

**Q6** In team sports – which you are keenly interested in – it is true that when a team plays as a team, great things can happen. Do you agree that the opposite is also true?

***Way back I played basketball for the Ballarat Saints.***

***They were a strong club and we ended up with an A and B team in the top division, of course I was in the B team. Our A side was full of top players and it was the greatest joy that both teams made the Grand Final that year. Through the year we B teamers had great fun, while the A team seemed to take life very seriously. What a night it was when our champion team beat the team of champions!***

***A great team is all about 'WE', while too often a team of champions – or ministers perhaps – tends to focus on 'I'.***



**Q7** What has been the best part of your time at the Lismore Mission and Presbytery and what are you most proud of?

***The best has been what I have been given not what I gave. I have been blessed by the wisdom and faith of some great people who just needed someone to believe in them. Years ago a dear friend gave me the best compliment: 'You allowed me to find that you can be a Christian and still have fun.'***

***Maybe I helped the Mission and the Presbytery loosen up a little?***

**Q8** If you had a magic wand what would you like the Far North Coast Presbytery to look like in 2025?

***Wow!? My dream remains that we as a group of churches put aside (aside not forgotten!) our history, traditions and various 'stuff' that binds us and put all that we think we own on the table and ask how can we serve God today TOGETHER. I would hope that leaders can be models of Spirit lead ministry and inspire others to join the journey.***

**Q9** You might think that you are all washed up and worn out. What is your strategy if God comes 'a-knocking'?

***I have been convinced of God's call on my life for a long time now and have no sense that has diminished. I do know that I am tired and need to recharge the batteries, but am open to what might lie ahead. I would like to finish a book I have dreamed of completing.***

**Q10** What will your golf handicap be next year, or what would you like it to be?

***I was never any good at Maths at school. I would love to get my handicap to 18 – a stroke a hole – that way I won't get confused as easily as I do now.***

**Peter Boughey  
Chair Presbytery**



# Farwell to Rev Ken Day

We will miss you, but realize that exciting opportunities and challenges await you. It has been an honour to have gotten to know you over these last few years.

We have all benefited from your grace, wit and wisdom and wish you every success on your new career path. You will leave a legacy that will have long term benefit across our Presbytery!



That smile!



Dressed to impress!



Sue and Ken



Listening to every word said....we think!



Cooler Rev.....always!



Ever the snappy dresser!



Ken at his best!



Even Tiger will miss you!