

essentials

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EFAC AUSTRALIA





The 2021 Australian Census revealed a marked decline in Anglican affiliation in the national population, from 3.1 million in 2016 to 2.5 million in 2021. This was the largest drop in number of all religious denominations. The census also revealed the average age of an Anglican in Australia was 56 (verses the average of 47 for all Christian denominations). These statistics brutally illustrate the challenge the Anglican church is facing. If we don't revitalise existing churches as well as plant new churches, we will have an ever-diminishing presence in our community, with a consequent diminished capacity to engage in our mission of proclaiming the gospel and equipping believers to grow in faith and in service. I know from personal experience some of the challenges church leaders face when endeavouring to revitalise their church: overstretched volunteers, budget limits, uncertainty as to which program or strategy to adopt, and ever-increasing administrative and compliance demands on clergy and lay leaders. Despite these obstacles, God is at work renewing his church, and this edition of Essentials brings together wisdom and experience from around Australia to reflect on church revitalisation.

We hear from Bishop Stephen Hale about 'The Great Collapse' – the impending closure of numerous unviable churches across Australia, with some straight-forward

suggestions for diocesan action. Rod Morris, a Church Revitalisation Consultant with City to City Australia, shares his learnings from the first year in that role. We read an encouraging case study of church renewal from Tasmania where the parish of Circular Head, led by Joel Nankervis, has gone from 20 regulars to over 70 regular weekly attenders in six years. Brian Holden shares reflections from a group of youth leaders following their road trip to learn from Queensland churches with vibrant youth and children's ministries. Evan Englezos interviews Jackson King (Robina Anglican Church) to discover how digital technologies enable revitalisation and can expand our ministry reach. Tim Johnson shares a Bible study on Ephesians 2:21-22, highlighting how Paul's description of the church as temple speaks to our identity, God's presence and God's purposes in us. I review a number of books related to church revitalisation – one concerning vision, another on prayer, another that provides an evaluation of which strategies have been most effective in the UK, and a few classic approaches (NCLS, NCD and Mission-Minded). Finally, Graham Stanton recommends two books to strengthen youth and children's ministry. May you find this edition fruitful reading!

MARK SIMON, EDITOR

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What is EFAC?

EFAC is a group of Anglican clergy and lay people who value the evangelical heritage of the Anglican Church, and who endeavour to make a positive, constructive contribution at local, diocesan and national levels. EFAC Australia is part of the world-wide Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Communion.

The purpose of EFAC is to maintain and promote a strong biblical witness in and through the Anglican Church so as to advance the cause of the gospel in Australia.

The aims of EFAC are:

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2. To promote this biblical obedience particularly in the areas of Christian discipleship, servant leadership, church renewal, and mission in the world.
3. To foster support and collaboration among evangelical Anglicans throughout Australia.
4. To function as a resource group to develop and encourage biblically faithful leadership in all spheres of life.
5. To provide a forum, where appropriate: a) for taking counsel together to develop policies and strategies in matters of common concern b) for articulating gospel distinctives in the area of faith, order, life and mission by consultations and publications.
6. To promote evangelism through the local church and planting new congregations.

7. To coordinate and encourage EFAC branches/groups in provinces or dioceses of the Anglican Church in Australia.

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essentials



The Great Collapse

STEPHEN HALE

One of the challenges we are all living with is the reality that many churches will close in the next decade. It gives me no pleasure to say this, but it is a reality that is upon us. Every diocese in Australia has a cohort of churches with very small numbers and mainly elderly parishioners. Sooner or later these churches reach a point of unviability. In saying this I'm not stating anything new. We're all familiar with these situations. The ramp up of multiple compliance requirements in the past decade and the two years of pandemic have accelerated the situation.

The thing that is new will be the scale of the problem. Many of these churches have been clinging on for many years and it's remarkable that they have gone on for as long as they have. Most of these churches are within the Anglo Catholic/Traditional side of the Anglican Church but it isn't confined to this tradition. As a clear sign of the challenge of our reality it was reported at the most recent Melbourne Synod that over 50% of parishes have no children in attendance!

In God's providence the counter to this is that many new churches have started in the past decade and there will be many more new churches in the years ahead. More especially we are being greatly blessed by the birth of many language-specific (non-English speaking) faith communities which often see significant growth. At the most recent ordination in Melbourne the number of ordinands was 10 to 5 in this direction!

I believe that it is easier to start a new church than to renew an existing church. Existing churches have many challenges and ministers who are appointed to them are often seeking to achieve twin outcomes. They are seeking to sustain a traditional service with a group with high pastoral needs, while simultaneously birthing something new. It can be done, but it's a tough gig. While there are lots of great examples where this has led to the birth of something new, there are also many ministers who have been burned along the way in places where it has been too hard, and it hasn't happened.

So, what should we do? Is this a disaster or is it an amazing opportunity? The comments in this article are more applicable to our metropolitan and provincial cities. The challenges in remote rural areas are great and I don't claim to be an expert in that area. I give thanks for and pray for BCA and the remote rural bishops regularly.



Stephen Hale

pictured

The worst-case scenario is that we do nothing intentional and allow church after church to die with nothing to replace them. This would be tragic. There needs to be an intentional diocesan strategy. Without a strategy, more often than not the Assistant Bishops in the larger dioceses are put into an impossible position. They are left to deal with church after church facing similar scenarios and burning huge numbers of hours with no clear framework for addressing it. Bishops are often obligated to find clergy for too many unviable churches and it is proving to be increasingly challenging to find them. A growing number of parishes have had a rolling series of locums for years.

In broad terms I would suggest we are asking too many clergy to go to too many Parishes that are too far gone, and the consequences aren't great for anyone! While church renewals can and do happen, it is unrealistic to expect them to happen in multiple places simultaneously.

Another scenario is the cobbling together of churches that are within some proximity to create a basis for a full-time minister. This model can work, but only if there is clear intentionality about how it might work. Without that this is often a recipe for significant tension and conflict. It's not much fun leading two or three centres all of which are in a similar scenario and all of whom want the minister between 9am and 11am on a Sunday morning.

Another worst-case scenario in all of this is that progressively over time properties are sold and dioceses build up their central reserves to buffer against abuse payouts. The diocese is an organising entity not the church and the role of the diocese is to support the church to grow, not to protect itself.

The closure of churches does free up assets that can be used to:

- create a church planting fund to assist in the planting of new churches.
- more fully support the birth of many more culturally-diverse (non-English speaking) congregations.
- intentionally partner with the medium size and larger churches to invite them to take over dying churches with a view to planting new congregations. The church planter is then a part of a team as well as having the back-up of a stronger church.
- facilitate the closure of a few churches within proximity with a view to the sale of one or more of the sites and the building of a new centre with contemporary facilities. I spoke at a Uniting Church

last year where 5 churches had agreed to close and amalgamate and come together on an existing site with all sorts of allied activities happening with several Sunday congregations.

- buy land for new outer suburban and inner urban plants.

To navigate these and many other changes bishops need to be honest about the reality of where we are at. Alongside of that they need to offer a fresh vision of what is possible and actively support those who are seeking to make that a reality.

Bishop Stephen Hale
Chair, EFAC Australia and EFAC Global.

Some Lessons from Revitalise Australia

ROD MORRIS

In February 2022 I took the step of concluding 13 years of parish leadership and moved into a new role as a Church Revitalisation Consultant with City to City Australia (CTCA). Under God, it seemed like a good way to bring together the various aspects of my ministry over the past 35 years and apply them in a way that would be a blessing to the wider church.

CTCA has been active in supporting church planters in Australia over a number of years. As part of this work they have developed training resources for planting healthy churches and gained expertise in ministry coaching to support church planters as they get established. In 2022, we have had the great privilege of working alongside over 40 church planters as they have established new churches. A number of these are Anglican churches, but we happily work with anyone who can affirm an orthodox confession of faith such as the Westminster confession, the Heidelberg catechism, or our own Thirty Nine Articles and the three historic creeds of our Prayer Book.

In 2021 CTCA took the step of moving into the realm of church revitalisation, and as I write this article in late 2022, we are working alongside over 60 churches across denominations and around the country. This work involves either a full church revitalisation project, or a specific intervention such as coaching, relational evangelism training, or a ministry vision workshop. Our highest profile revitalisation project on the Anglican stage is with Bishop Richard and the Multiply Tas



Rod Morris

pictured

program, but we have also been working with the Diocese of Canberra Goulburn, parishes within Newcastle, Adelaide, Bendigo, the Northern Territory, and Perth, and churches within the Diocese of the Southern Cross. Personally, this year I have had the great privilege of working with twenty different churches across Victoria, Tasmania, NSW, ACT, Queensland, and the Northern Territory. My projects included three specific coaching relationships with other Anglican clergy, eight church vision workshops with Anglican, Presbyterian, Baptist, Brethren, and Independent churches, and thirteen ongoing revitalisation projects with a range of Anglican, Presbyterian, Church of Christ, Wesleyan Methodists and independent churches. It is exciting to see what God's people are doing in so many different contexts to see the gospel of Christ move forward.

Revitalise Australia

The full church revitalisation program with CTCA has three phases. The first is a health check and assessment



of the current state of a church's ministry. We visit the church's Sunday services of public worship, and we assess the church's facilities and their suitability for purpose. We meet with parish leaders to identify the current strengths and weaknesses of the church, as well as the opportunities and threats laying ahead. There is a 360 degree review of the minister's leadership using the Christian Leadership Framework to assess their capacity for leading change, and there is a survey of church members to gain feedback on church health and life. We also gather existing data and reports such as annual meeting reports, NCLS results, vision statements, financial reports, parish publications, ABS census data, and whatever else the church has available that helps us understand their ministry and context.

The second phase is the writing of an extensive report in which we consider the church's mission, vision, and values; their ministry systems for engagement, integration, and maturity; the infrastructure, governance, and operating systems; their church culture; and then we make some recommendations about how the church might move forward in their ministry. Phase three is then a year long journey in which we work alongside the minister and the church to help them implement the initiatives suggested.

Emerging themes

At this stage there are a number of themes clearly emerging across the churches that we are working with. The first is the stark reality of demographics. The churches are each significantly older than the communities they serve, often with a difference of well over 15 years, and there is a clear lack of young families, youth, and children across the churches. This clearly indicates that the churches should focus on developing their ministry to families as a priority. The clock is ticking, and time is running out!

An ageing congregation, often with limited incomes, means there is a real threat of churches becoming unviable, either financially or numerically. However, there is also a common concern that emphasis on recruiting new and younger members may result in existing and older parishioners feeling either overlooked or neglected. There are too few doing too much, with few people having the energy or capacity to step up as volunteers, and as a consequence the churches are offering limited ministry options to their communities. There is a clear risk of the church spreading themselves too thin with a small pool of volunteers struggling with tiredness, ageing, busyness, and post-Covid residual exhaustion. It may be that Covid will prove to be a blessing in that it has enabled churches to stop lots of extraneous activities, and hopefully churches will be wise in what they restart.



Much of the load falls onto the minister, and church members are generally content with the clergy and staff they have serving. Whilst the ministers each have their own strengths and weaknesses, together with their corresponding professional development needs, they are generally suitable for the ministries they lead.

There is an identifiable sense of dissatisfaction with the support offered within most dioceses as it does not seem to clearly facilitate and enable ministry to flourish. People are feeling swamped by the legal and administrative requirements for ministry, and whilst these are recognised as necessary, they seem secondary to core ministry tasks. Whilst the Sunday services conducted in various churches differ according to their liturgical and theological traditions, they are generally appropriate to their context and the existing congregation so there does not seem to be a great need to change existing services. But at the same time, there is the glaring problem that these services fail to engage with younger members of the community. There is a pressing need to initiate new services that are more accessible for families and non-churched people. Consequently, almost every church needs to focus on initiating these new services.

Whilst some churches have specific legacy issues related to historical abuse which clearly undermine their reputation within their community, people are generally cautious about doing church things following the Royal Commission and there needs to be deliberate attention in restoring the church's reputation as a safe place.

A common theme is a lack of vision and the absence of a clear sense of where the church might be in five years and the steps needed to get there. I have already decided that this lack of vision and the consequent sense of being stuck in maintenance mode is actually definitional to church stagnation. Consequently, developing an easily shared vision and defining ministry pathways seems to be a priority with each parish. Churches are in maintenance



mode rather than missional mode and none of the churches have an easily communicated vision of where they believe God is taking them over the next five to ten years. CTCA are addressing this issue using a vision workshop which helps the church identify where they think God is taking them and the steps needed to make that vision a reality. It is an effective tool and I think the power of the workshop is that it gets the key leaders within the church to develop an agreed sense of what they should be doing, and where they are going. Similarly, churches do not have well-developed systems for engagement with the community, integration into the life of the church, or for producing spiritual maturity. They are generally just doing what they always have done, and there is little sense of intentionality within the church's practice. Sadly, amongst the churches needing revitalisation there is real enthusiasm and openness to exploring new ways of using facilities to generate income, but not an equal enthusiasm for exploring new ways to use facilities to initiate ministry. Churches are running midweek ministry programs for families and engaged with community support programs such as op shops, food banks, and emergency relief, but there are few functioning pathways between these ministries and the worshipping community. Consequently, they each need to explore and define the way in which they engage with their community in outreach, integrate contacts and new members into the worshipping life of the church, and to a lesser degree, how they help people grow to spiritual maturity.

There is a general expectation that outsiders need to take the initiative in connecting with the church and there seems to be a degree of spiritual passivity, introversion, introspection, and a cultural cringe about evangelism



across the churches. Most communities would not notice if their local parish closed down. There is a clear opportunity to grow the church's profile within the community by owning our identity and developing clearer strategies for community engagement. CTCA is addressing this specific need with the 'Ripple Effect'.

Julie-Anne Laird, who is a Lay Canon for Church Planting in the Diocese of Melbourne, has developed this material together with Sam Chan and we are seeing churches enthusiastically embracing this combination of whole church training workshop, small group resources, and assistance with developing an understanding of the local community.

Ten steps to help revitalise your church

1. Check the pumping heart of gospel clarity within your church. It doesn't matter how slick your ministry is if you're not proclaiming Christ and helping people grow to Christian maturity.
2. Rally the troops to pray. It is God's church, and He is the one who brings about church revitalisation.
3. Develop clarity of your vision and identify the steps for moving forward over the next 5 years.
4. Audit the existing core ministry systems of your church and check their effectiveness in engaging the community, integrating people into the life of the church, and growing to maturity as disciple making disciples of Jesus. Especially check your Sunday services and their effectiveness as the shop front for your ministry.
5. Conduct a local community study in order to develop a community profile and understand your ministry context and how you might engage meaningfully with those you serve.
6. Create a disciple-making culture and work on equipping people to effectively share the gospel.
7. Mobilise your members for ministry by helping them identify their gifting and find areas for ministry service.
8. Develop a leadership pipeline that helps people be disciple-making disciples.
9. Identify and deal with any specific problems, the skeletons in the cupboards and elephants in the room, which may be having a detrimental impact on your church.
10. Ensure there is ongoing support and encouragement for the Senior Minister.

Rod Morris is a Lead Consultant within the Revitalise Australia program with City to City Australia.

Church revitalisation in Tasmania

JOEL NANKERVIS IS THE MINISTER OF CIRCULAR HEAD ANGLICAN CHURCH, TASMANIA. MARK SIMON SPOKE WITH HIM ABOUT REVITALISING THE CHURCH.



pictured

MARK: HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE STATE OF THE PARISH WHEN YOU COMMENCED?

Joel: The church is based in Smithton, in the far northwest of Tasmania. The town's population is 4000 people. The main industries are farming, fishing and forestry. The town has an 'end-of-the-road' feel to it since there's wilderness to the south and nothing but ocean to the north and the west. Many residents of the town and surrounding areas have historically been part of the Brethren church, and more recently, Pentecostal churches have emerged, as well as those who identify as Anglican. But many of these Christians of whatever background had become disconnected from church life.

Focusing specifically on the Anglican parish, when I began in 2017, it had been 20 years since the previous stipendiary minister. Circular Head was an Enabler Supported Ministry for those 20 years. Under this model, a local team was raised up of leaders, including 1-2 locally ordained people, and this team was supported by a trained member of clergy called an Enabler, who covered 3-4 parishes. This model operated for around 20 years in Tasmania but has now ceased across the parishes that were using it. The local leaders had become quite tired after the years of doing ministry this way. The congregation had dwindled to around 20 people.

MARK: WHAT WERE THE FOUNDATIONS LAID FOR REVITALISATION AT CIRCULAR HEAD?

Joel: Among the church members when I arrived were 6-8 core people who were still enthusiastic and eager to try new things. They were happy to do the safe ministry training for children's ministry and get clearances for that. Revitalisation started with children's ministry. The Diocese also provided new ministry development funding to the parish for 3 years at the beginning of my time there.

MARK: CAN YOU GIVE SOME KEY DECISIONS OR TURNING POINTS THAT HELPED REVITALISATION GET OFF THE GROUND?

Joel: Right from the start, we emphasised children's ministry. My wife Lyn led this, drawing on her own theological training and experience as a Scripture teacher in the NSW school context. At the start it was just our own 2 year old daughter as the sole participant, but then through visitation by a member of the enabler team, another family with young children came to check out the church. There were no other churches in the town offering anything for families with young children. Word started to spread.

We also kept the framework of an Anglican Prayer Book service, but included some more contemporary elements that connected with non-Anglican visitors. Some of the trappings of a high church Anglican heritage were gradually removed to make physical space for the music group, the projector screen and for greater congregational participation in the Sunday service. For music we used a couple of hymns and introduced contemporary Christian songs, so there were both at every service.

I preach expositively, and emphasised personal, living faith. Tasmanian Anglican churches were not historically evangelical, so word got around that something new was happening and Christians in the area were attracted.

We introduced small groups (while other churches in the area had previously had groups, there had been no history of small groups for the Anglican church here). Each year we aimed to start a new group for a new demographic. There are half a dozen groups now.

I was intentional about investing time and care in new people, and with those who are willing to be involved. A key Scripture passage is the Ephesians 3 prayer – 'God who is able to do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine.' This has been emphasised in preaching and in setting the vision for the church. God can make it work. We prayed for this promise to become reality.

MARK: WHAT FACTORS DO YOU THINK HAVE BEEN



MOST IMPORTANT IN THE PARISH'S REVITALISATION TO DATE?

Joel: Rural and small town ministry is more relational than urban ministry. Everyone knows each other. Giving time to nurture relationships was vital. There aren't many young adults in the area (they move away for work or university), so we've got inter-generational ministry by necessity all the time.

We've tried some outreach activities like a Lego club (which had about 30 kids coming, but then covid happened, and it hasn't yet resumed). In the early years (pre-covid) we took every opportunity to be present at community events (e.g. parades, festivals, public holidays) – and this raised our visibility. Most outreach is now



relational and personal rather than programs. Still, we have run Alpha courses and are planning to do Christianity Explored in 2023.

MARK: WHAT HAS BEEN THE FINANCIAL COSTS TO REVITALISE THE PARISH AND HOW HAS THIS BEEN FUNDED?

The major help was the New Ministry Development funding of \$30,000 per year for 3 years. The Anglican parish of Burnie gave some occasional gifts. The local offertory had picked up enough by the end of the 3 years that my position is now funded at the local level.

MARK: WHAT TRAINING AND SUPPORT HAS BEEN SIGNIFICANT FOR YOU PERSONALLY TO LEAD THIS PARISH REVITALISATION?

Joel: The normal formative stuff: Bachelor of Divinity from Moore College, and some professional development through Ridley College. 2 years as an assistant curate in Burnie before moving to Smithton. Bishop Richard has divided all clergy into training cohorts. New rectors are all trying to do revitalisation of some kind, and so we're all able to support each other and share ideas. The diocese has regular training sessions. The Diocese also has a Development officer, who coordinates this training and mentors me as well as others doing this style of ministry.

MARK: WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO THOSE WHO WANT TO PURSUE REVITALISATION IN THEIR OWN PARISH?

Joel: Mostly the ministry in Circular Head is bread and butter, everyday gospel ministry, centring on prayer and ministry of the word. A consistent prayer is asking the lord of the harvest to send more workers.

I've learned that it is wise to pick the battles I fight.

Prayerfully and wisely seek to discern what is worthwhile changing (if resistance is likely), and where the key thing is to love people (and therefore take a slower or different approach to change).

Making the most of growth. When we see initial signs of growth, then become even more intentional about investing time in those people, helping them grow, and find and use their spiritual gifts.

MARK: THANK YOU FOR SHARING THIS GOOD NEWS STORY OF REVITALISATION. HAVING REGULAR ATTENDANCE NOW IN THE CHURCH OF OVER 70 PEOPLE MOST WEEKS IS A WONDERFUL TESTIMONY TO GOD'S KINDNESS AND YOUR HARD AND FAITHFUL GOSPEL WORK.

Revitalising Youth Ministry

BRIAN HOLDEN

In 2022, Brian led a group of children's, family and youth ministers on a tour of Queensland churches with growing children's and youth ministries. This trip took place as part of a 'community of practice' - intentionally exploring different approaches to working with young people. They attended some of the youth events and meetings, and met with the youth leaders, staff and clergy in each church. The following is a collation of thoughts from the team as they reflect on what we learnt.

INVESTMENT IS KEY

If you prioritise children's ministry it will grow ... Some churches did this by investing in modern buildings, spaces and resources. Others had everyone in the leadership read and discuss books like *Growing Young: Six Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church* (by Kara Powell, Brad Griffin and Jake Mulder, Baker Academic, 2016) to better understand how to grow children and youth ministry and why it is important."

"The churches we visited had children and youth as a strong part of the church's culture and DNA. This was clear when we talked to the senior leaders – they had taken the time to invest in the ministries to young people."

"What stood out for me across all the churches we visited was the core commitment to ministry with young people. This played out in various ways. Across buildings, promotion, funding, and genuine leadership roles for young people, amongst other things."

"I learnt that sustained change in ministry takes time and dedication. The most successful ministries had full time children and youth staff, who had theological training, and some also had teacher training."

CHILDREN AND YOUTH ARE MEMBERS OF THE BODY OF CHRIST

"Our children and young people are full members of the church today and involving them in the life of the church helps them not only feel a part of the family but helps them in their own faith formation journey."

"The importance of finding or creating meaningful ways that our young people can be serving and contributing towards the life of our churches is key."

"Where young people are serving, they are staying in the church."

One church had a desire that a young person should have a ministry by age 12 (Grade 7). They could of course



Brian Holden

pictured

change, or try other ministries, but they were enabled to do this from before the age of 12.

"I think my greatest learning is the role of the leaders in shaping a culture that cultivates a focus on ministry to young people. Where the leaders of churches tell stories about, and celebrate ministry to and with young people, the church as a whole values young people. Not as an added extra, or a burden, but instead as a group vital to the life of the body of Christ."

DIVERSITY IN EXPRESSION

"I also learnt that ministry can be very diverse depending on the context in which you minister. Being able to identify and meet the needs of the young people to whom you minister, is crucial in helping them to develop their relationship with God."

"I learnt that I love learning more about God, and the different ways to minister to young people. It isn't one size fits all."

"I loved seeing how the churches set up different spaces. One church we went to had a real emphasis on prayer which was evident as a priority in the children's spaces of the building. The prayer space encouraged people to write 'prayers asked' and 'prayers answered' as a reminder of how God is listening and answering prayers."





COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE IN LEARNING

“It was a really engaging process of learning – I loved being able to freely ask questions to dig deep into the ‘whys’ of their particular ministry model and see how that was reflected in their practice.”

“Every ministry we visited had aspects to them what we could all learn from, but the most effective learning came from the debrief discussions we had together. We were able to learn from what we saw that we wanted to emulate, as well as from what we saw that we wanted to do differently. There was so much value in being together in these ministry visits.”

“There was a moment on day three when we were back in the bus driving up to Toowoomba when every row of the minibus was hosting a conversation about practical elements of children’s and youth ministry. Quantity time seemed to be a doorway to quality time. Tiresome as hours in a minibus may sound, the time together opened for us the kind of mutual learning that comes from being partners in ministry.”

“Not only did we have a great time meeting new people, we also had a great time getting to know each other. The bus rides up to Toowoomba were littered with conversations about ministry practice with young people, reflections on the churches we’d been to, our journeys into vocational ministry, and how to build up this vital ministry in Melbourne.”

FINAL COMMENTS

Revitalising children’s and youth ministry is essential for the future of the church. The trip and reflections highlight that as we invest in and prioritise this ministry, and as we create networks for children’s, families and youth ministers and leaders to learn together, the possibilities for renewal and growth also increase.

A version of this article was previously published in TMA in September 2022.

Brian is the Youth Ministry Consultant for the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne.



Church Revitalisation through Digital Technology

EVAN ENGLEZOS (DIGITAL TEAM COACH AND DIGITAL MINISTRY HUB) INTERVIEWS JACKSON KING (DIGITAL AND MUSIC MINISTRY SUPPORT, ROBINA ANGLICAN CHURCH)

The COVID-19 pandemic, with its associated lockdowns and meeting limits, accelerated the use of digital technology in many churches. Many of these changes were hastily implemented during 2020-2021. The challenge and focus now is to make the most of new digital technologies to invigorate the church toward revitalisation.

Jackson King from Robina Anglican Church has generously shared his experience and observations of the role of digital technology as an encouragement to his brothers and sisters in ministry.

EVAN: WHAT DID THE DIGITAL SPACE LOOK LIKE WHEN YOU JOINED IN 2020?

Jackson: The digital space for Robina Anglican was nowhere near as imperative as it is now and during Covid-19 lockdowns. Pre-Covid, we had a functioning website, a social media presence, printed bulletins and online communications with members. During Covid we needed to redesign our whole communication strategy. We also needed a live streaming system that was easy to use and produce content with. We've made progress through trial and error, experimenting with both software and hardware solutions. We see a need for continual change in the year ahead.

EVAN: WHAT DOES DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY LOOK LIKE NOW?

Jackson: We now have a more integrated system where Planning Center Online provides a central, online hub for member data, events, check-ins, calendar, and service planning. We have a live streaming system that is smooth and easy to run on a limited budget. We've settled on The Church Co to create a new look for our church's website and integrate with Planning Center Online. All our digital functions are more integrated and streamlined.

EVAN: WHY IS DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY IMPORTANT FOR THE REVITALISATION OF THE CHURCH?

Jackson: In one sense, Covid-19 was a blessing since it helped us understand how digital ministry can serve a lot of people. We have a lot of parishioners in our



Evan Englezos

Jackson King

pictured

community who are immuno-compromised. Travelling out in a Covid-rampant world wasn't ideal for them and they still needed to be part of a spiritual community. With the revitalisation of digital space, we found that we were able to connect with people in all stages and could meet them where they were comfortable.

From a staff point of view, although it's nice to think that everyone can come here, through an online platform we can go to them where they are comfortable in their own homes. There are people in places all around the world who are wanting to receive content and find something that suits them. The digital space allows them to do that more quickly and efficiently, and do it from the comfort of their own home with their families. Digital platforms enable us to spread the good news to people who physically can't come to us. Churches that revitalise their digital space are going to help more people. It's going to help more people feel connected to God, to the community, and to their families and it's absolutely imperative.

EVAN: HOW DO YOU MEANINGFULLY ENGAGE AND CONNECT WITH THEM AND HELP THEM HAVE A COMMUNITY WHEN THEY CAN'T PHYSICALLY CONNECT WITH YOU? HOW DO YOU OFFER THAT SENSE OF COMMUNITY WITH THEM?

Jackson: We have tried a multitude of approaches! At the moment, our key tool is called Church Online Platform which we use to livestream our services. It has chat functions, private prayer, online giving and many more features. The best thing is that it's absolutely free.

Zoom was great during Covid-19. It helped to maintain community but there were limitations with reaching new people and moderating so many people with cameras and microphones. Church Online Platform helps to extend



our reach and improves the quality of interaction by offering small and big steps for wherever people are at. Some people tune in from half an hour's drive away, others are an hour and a half's drive away, and even a few from other continents. We're thrilled at how this system brings people together and creates community.

Our previous experiences with Facebook Live and YouTube were okay. We found that there was limited communication and connection with those who joined online. By making the Church Online Platform our primary livestream platform, we could make better connections with this online community.

EVAN: HOW DO YOU HELP PEOPLE TO FIND AND ACCESS YOUR CONTENT?

Jackson: We're continually trying to improve our communication. At the moment we're posting a lot of bible study resources on our websites. All of our sermons get edited and trimmed and republished as videos (hosted through Vimeo) on our website. We also have podcasts so content can reach people in a way that suits them. They feel spiritually connected by hearing the word and some commentary on it.

Social media is useful too. We do a lot of cross-platform promotion. We upload a sermon as a podcast or video, share that on Facebook, post an image on Instagram with all the links that they need. We promote this during the service for people and point them towards our website Resource page. On average, I spend 10 hours per week adding and monitoring content on all our social platforms. We don't want multiple people posting content and so overwhelming viewers with mixed priorities, overlapping content or inconsistent quality. The goal is to make it as simple as possible for our viewers.

It's all about creating the simplest pathways for people to access those resources and promote it well so they can see them.

It takes time to set up the pathways and the workflows but when we make it easier they're more inclined to come back and continue to connect and that's all we want.

EVAN: HOW CAN YOU MEASURE THE EFFECTIVENESS AND THE FRUITFULNESS OF ALL THIS DIGITAL TECH WORK?

Jackson: Raw numbers can be disappointing, but individual stories encourage us. We recently had a woman watch our service on Facebook, then she joined us on Church Online Platform and started chatting with us

there, but left before the end of the service. She tuned in a couple more times then actually started to attend in person.

The digital space has largely replaced church foyers. People use online search engines to find churches near them, and preview the church experience through their online content.

Last week, a young woman from Canada moved here to study. She searched Anglican churches in our area and found us and three other churches within a 20 minutes drive. We met at our office and she is now interested in being a part of our church. That's all because we had an effective digital presence in online ministry.

We may not get the same numbers online as we do in-person. We care about fostering connection with individuals, or two or three people.

Evan: Can other churches start to replicate some of these simple pathways and workflows that you've been setting up?

Jackson: Definitely! Social media is a great tool for reaching people because that's where many people are



today. Most churches have websites. They can create resource pages and link a Word document or PDF with some reflection questions. These resources can be promoted on a Facebook page, which expands their reach.

We produce a weekly email newsletter and blog article. There's a big button in the newsletter that takes subscribers straight to the blog. Again, we share that on Facebook, and through our website. It's two clicks to get to the blog. For all our content, we aim to make it as easy as possible for different groups to access it. For example, how can Linda, who lives in a retirement home and gets access to the computer once a week, access the sermon? Or how do we make it easy for Ben who is a Year 12 student, who loves listening to podcasts while he goes to the gym? Two different people in two very different scenarios, can both access our content in two clicks.

An easy and effective way for many churches to expand their digital reach is through links on social media platforms and promotion in email newsletters. Intentionally target the types of communities you want to reach.

EVAN: IT TAKES TIME AND INTENTIONALITY TO SET UP AND MAINTAIN THESE SYSTEMS AND WORKFLOW. REALISTICALLY, WHAT IS REQUIRED TO GET THE DIGITAL MINISTRY OFF THE GROUND AND RUNNING EFFECTIVELY?

Jackson: Given the limited skills and time resources you have from both staff and volunteers, it makes sense to pay specialists for things like building and maintaining a website. We are now using a company called The Church Co for our website design and maintenance. It is tailored for churches and has features including sermons, podcasts, age-specific groups, weddings, baptisms and so on. Almost all of our media (photos and videos) for our website is taken by staff and parishioners.

The best websites I've seen are the ones that have fewer words on their homepages. Most people won't read multiple paragraphs about everything that goes on. We like to use lots of images and big bold titles. For example, "our services are at these times, here's the directions to our church, watch the livestream here, if you have any questions call this number or contact us here."

If you spend the time creating the communication and being available to answer questions based on that, the best church websites are simple, easy to navigate and easy to find.

EVAN: MOST CHURCHES DON'T HAVE A PAID STAFF MEMBER WITH DIGITAL SKILLS AND EXPERTISE LIKE YOU. IF A CHURCH HAD A VOLUNTEER WITH ONLY A FEW HOURS EACH WEEK TO FOCUS ON DIGITAL OUTREACH, HOW CAN THEY HAVE THE MOST IMPACT?

Jackson: The most impact comes from good communication with your congregation. Newsletter emails, social media, and letting people know directly what is going on is a great start. When people know what's going on, they feel like they are welcome to participate and contribute. For example, small groups and Bible studies, and communicating that across multiple platforms: Facebook, Instagram, and newsletter emails. The social media platforms help to increase participation and enthusiasm, and spreads into the wider community in person and online.

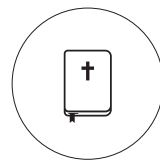
To save time for posting and moderating, we use Meta Business Suite (which is free) to simultaneously work on Facebook and Instagram. There are lots of email newsletter tools. We have used subscription services including Mailchimp and Campaign Monitor and they're both really good.

With all this, persistence and consistency is really important. We've had lots of roadblocks and made mistakes, but we are driven by our mission to reach people for Jesus. The digital space is a great opportunity to reach and engage people wherever they are. Work at understanding who you are trying to reach. Take the steps to make it easy for them to find you and access your content and create workflows that will make it easy for you to produce and share your content.

Evan Englezos
Director of Digital Team Coach and Digital Ministry Hub - digitalteamcoach.com, digitalministryhub.com

Jackson King
Digital and Music Ministry Support, Robina Anglican Church - robinaanglican.com

Resources mentioned -
There is no affiliation to any of these resources;
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www.planningcenter.com
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www.campaignmonitor.com



Ephesians 2:21-22

TIM JOHNSON

Rev Dr Tim Johnson is the Senior Minister of St John's Anglican Church, Diamond Creek. The following Bible reflection was given at the start of the church's Annual Meeting in 2022.

21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

The Bible uses a number of images to describe the church. We are probably most familiar with the image of the body of Christ, where each of us is a part of the body and we work together for the good of the whole. In Ephesians 2:21-22 the church is described as a temple. It's a good reminder for us as we come to our annual meeting of our core identity as the church. There are three things that it is good for us to remember.

Firstly, remember that everything we have as a church comes from Jesus. Each verse starts with the words 'in him', that is, 'in Jesus':

In him, Jesus, the whole building is joined together...

In him, Jesus, you too are being built together...

Our basis, status and existence as a church is in Jesus. We exist because of Jesus and we exist for Jesus. Jesus unites us together and makes us a holy temple. If I am in Jesus and you are in Jesus then, guess what friends, we are in Jesus together. This is a powerful reminder of what unites us together as a church and our whole reason for being.

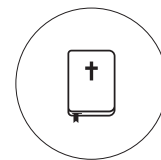
Secondly, remember that God's Spirit is present and at work in us as a church. The key characteristic of the temple of God is that it is where God dwells by his Spirit. In the Old Testament that was in a physical building in Jerusalem, but no longer. God now lives in his people. We are the fulfilment of the temple. Notice the Trinitarian nature of what God has done in us as his Holy Temple:

in him – Jesus the Son, you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God – the Father – lives by his Spirit.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit fulfilling his plans to have his very presence living within his people. The church is not a building; the church is the people. And ironically, the people are a building: a temple together where God dwells. We are the place of God's presence and that is true not only when we are gathered together in a building like tonight or on any given Sunday. We are God's temple, the place of his presence, and the carriers of his Holy Spirit in our schools and our workplaces, in our homes and our neighbourhoods, in our sports clubs and community groups. We are a temple on the move taking the presence of God with us as we go.

And thirdly, remember that the church is a work in progress. The image of the temple we have here is both dynamic and organic. The temple, that is God's people, is not a finished work. In verse 22 it is *being built together*. There is constant building work going on as new people are added, as we grow deeper in relationships with each other, as we strengthen our unity, confess our sins and forgive each other, as we understand more of what God is calling us to do and change accordingly. We are a dynamic work in progress. In verse 21 the language of the building





being 'joined together' speaks of an organic connection and the word translated 'rises' is more literally 'grows'. We are organically connected together and grow together as the temple of God. This is almost mixing metaphors of the temple with the body but the point is that this is not something that is static but growing and changing. We are a work in progress and God is doing work in us, and through us, constantly.

Our church has recently set a new vision as we recover from the effects of covid and the associated lockdowns. In this vision we use the language of 'reconnect and build' and this reflects well the organic and dynamic nature of this verse. And as we come to this AGM we want to commit ourselves to the ongoing building work of the church. We are a work in progress and we come seeking God's help to grow us and to build us. We do that on the firm foundation of Jesus to whom we owe our very existence. And we do it in the confident knowledge that God's Spirit dwells within us. So let me pray as we begin our meeting together:

Thank you heavenly Father

That we gather tonight in Christ Jesus

We exist because of Jesus and for Jesus

We are united together in Jesus

May Jesus be the centre of all our deliberations tonight

May Jesus unite us together in this meeting

Thank you Heavenly Father

That your Spirit lives within us

That we are your temple

The bearers of your presence in the world and to the world

May your Spirit lead us and guide us

May your Spirit be on display in our listening and speaking

Thank you Heavenly Father

That we are a dynamic and organic work in progress

You haven't finished with us yet

Build us together and grow us

Use tonight, even tonight, and even this meeting, to

continue your renovation work.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.



God Dreams: 12 Vision Templates for Finding and Focusing Your Church's Future

WILL MANCINI AND WARREN BIRD
Nashville: B & H Publishing, 2016

REVIEWED BY MARK SIMON

Many evangelical churches adopt a mission statement that is a variation on the theme of the Great Commission (go, preach, make disciples), or one that highlights discipleship and evangelism “growing in Christ and proclaiming Christ.” These mission statements are certainly true (they express why the local church exists) and are clear and memorable.

Many churches, however, come unstuck when crafting their vision statements. Revitalised churches will need a memorable, inspiring and measurable vision that creates synergy, enables distractions to be avoided and attracts buy-in. Will Mancini and Warren Bird aim to provide a process of discerning and refining a unique local church vision, that assists churches achieve their mission.

Mancini and Bird start with four broad categories of vision: advance, rescue, become and overflow. These convey, respectively: movement, rejuvenation/renovation, wholeness/maturity, and a wave. The authors then refine three templates to make the categories more particular. The ‘advance’ vision category breaks down into 1. geographic saturation, 2. targeted transformation, or 3. people-group



penetration. The ‘rescue’ category templates are: 4. institutional renovation, 5. crisis mobilisation, or 6. need adoption. The ‘become’ templates are: 7. obedient anticipation, 8. presence manifestation, or 9. spiritual formation. Finally, the ‘overflow’ templates are: 10. cultural replication, 11. anointing amplification, or 12. leadership multiplication.

Mancini and Bird provide stories and examples for each of these vision templates, which church leadership groups are meant to read with a view to identifying which one resonates most strongly with their situation. The second half of the book elaborates on long-term to short-term time horizons and how to translate vision into strategy and actions in each situation. There are many helpful and practical ideas for vision-setting in the book. The diversity of templates is especially useful in encouraging thinking outside the inherited (and tired) categories that may have contributed to a church being in need of revitalisation.



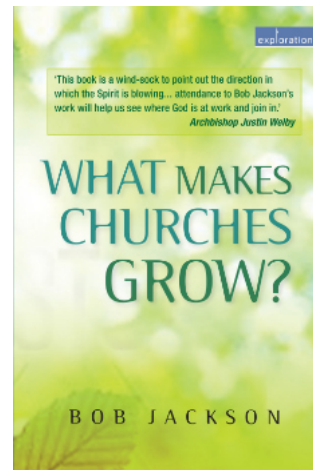


Five Things to Pray for Your Church

RACHEL JONES
Good Book Company, 2016

REVIEWED BY MARK SIMON

Too often church revitalisation books, programs and processes focus so much on strategy and the human side of change, that God and the spiritual dimension to renewal is neglected. There are many good books to foster one's personal prayer life and spiritual formation, but not as many that teach and model how to pray for our churches. Rachel Jones' 5 Things to Pray for Your Church addresses this space in a simple and biblically-rich way. Each chapter provides a prayer focus, a Bible passage and prayer points/starters. The topics include: praying that my church would be devoted to one another/hold to the truth/give generously; praying that I would use my gifts well/persevere; praying for my church leader/children in my church/not-yet-Christians; praying for the wider church. The Good Book Company's 5 Things to Pray for... series is a treasure trove of prayer fodder, in an easy-to-use format suitable for leaders and all church members.



What Makes Churches Grow?

BOB JACKSON
London: Church House Publishing, 2015

REVIEWED BY MARK SIMON

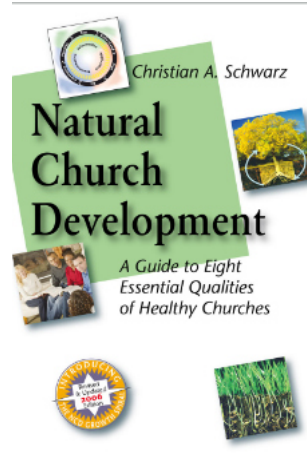
I am including this book because (a) it is from the UK rather than America, and the majority of Australian Anglican churches are closer to British culture and church forms than to American culture and church forms, which are presupposed by most American church growth and renewal books; and (b) it provides an overview of the history of church growth and revitalisation trends, tools and themes seen in the UK over the last four decades, most of which have influenced Australian churches. It charts the church growth movement, the decade of evangelism, Alpha, Mission Action Planning, Mission-Shaped Church, Fresh expressions, missional church, messy church, Natural Church Development, church planting, amalgamations and ministry teams. It provides detailed discussion of what is working in the UK at the time of writing (2015) including families ministry, leadership-centred approaches, church planting, and shared ministry models. This is useful reading to set the scene for a church growth/revitalisation project before diving into one particular consultation or product. Jackson provides numerous case studies and some solid data from UK about the effectiveness of various approaches.



National Church Life Survey

Many Anglican churches in Australia have participated in the NCLS (most recently undertaken in 2021). NCLS has 9 core qualities that measure church vitality: 1 alive and growing faith, 2 vital and nurturing worship, 3 strong and growing sense of belonging (these three are grouped as internal qualities); 4 a clear and owned vision, 5 inspiring and empowering leadership, 6 openness to imaginative and flexible innovation (grouped as inspirational qualities); 7 practical and diverse service, 8 willing and effective faith-sharing, and 9 intentional and welcoming inclusion (grouped as outward qualities). Completing the NCLS gives a church leadership team some quantified measures of health in each of the core qualities.

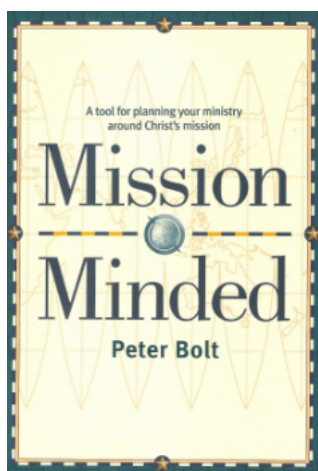
NCLS provides notes and a suggested planning process for addressing weak core qualities at <https://www.ncls.org.au/articles/act/>. This process is based on ‘appreciative inquiry’ and assumes that reflection on the church’s past, combined with a shared new vision, followed by strategy and implementation steps, will yield positive change. I’m not convinced. The NCLS planning materials are fairly thin on biblical priorities for church life and mission, and in trying to appeal to any Australian church from any tradition and any denomination, they feel too open-ended and theologically vague. Evangelical Anglican churches would likely seek a stronger ecclesiology and missiology (such as that found in Tim Keller’s Center Church, and which is incorporated into City to City Australia’s Church Revitalisation consultancy process).



Natural Church Development

Like NCLS, Christian Schwarz’s Natural Church Development (ncd-australia.org) uses a survey tool filled in by church attenders to produce a report on a church’s health. NCD has eight quality areas: empowering leadership, gift-oriented ministry, passionate spirituality, functional structures, inspiring worship services, holistic small groups, need-oriented evangelism, and loving relationships. NCD is better than NCLS at providing resources and strategies to address a church’s ‘minimum factor’ – that is, the area which scores lowest on the 8 health characteristics. There is a series of books with titles beginning ‘The 3 Colors of...’ which each address gifts, community, spirituality, ministry, etc and provide tools to improve church health in that domain. NCD presupposes a pattern of Sunday services and mid-week small groups as the engine room of church life, and this would be familiar to most evangelical churches. Therefore, it won’t yield revolutionary change in ministry shape or priorities. Notwithstanding its conventionality, NCD has established itself as a reliable tool for church revitalisation.





Mission-Minded

PETER BOLT
Kingsford: Matthias Media, 2000

This brief book (70 pages) is short enough for every parish council member and ministry leader in the church to read and act on in one week. It provides a simple tool (a one page table) that leaders can quickly fill in to evaluate the extent to which the church's current activities are contributing to evangelism or edification (with 3-4 stages specified under each broad goal). The tool enables a church to quickly see why it is not growing through conversions or not growing in spiritual maturity or in ministry impact. Mission-minded can help a leader start a revitalisation process with some straight-forward analysis and a clear strategy for improving churches stuck in maintenance mode.



Autumn 2023



Sustainable Youth Ministry

MARK DEVRIES
IVP, 2008

Sustainable Children's Ministry

MARK DEVRIES AND ANNETTE SAFSTROM
IVP, 2018

REVIEWED BY GRAHAM STANTON

Good strategies for children's and youth ministry often fail due to ineffective systems. Mark De Vries uses the metaphor of a dancefloor: it doesn't matter how good a dancer is, if they have to dance on a rotten stage, their performance is going to end in disaster. In *Sustainable Youth Ministry* and *Sustainable Children's Ministry*, DeVries (together with Annette Safstrom for the children's ministry version) helps churches 'attend to the dance floor . . . ensuring that the right systems, priorities and infrastructure are in place before beginning the dance'. Though written from a North American perspective and requiring some 'transposing' into an Australian context (and a small church context), there are valuable ideas in these books that will help churches think carefully about the systems that can enable children's and youth ministries to thrive.

Graham Stanton is Director of the Ridley Centre for Children's and Youth Ministry. He teaches *Introduction to Children's Ministry* and *Introduction to Youth Ministry* in the Ridley Certificate program: (certificate.ridley.edu.au)

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