



Baptist Churches
of NSW & ACT

Consultancy Engagement Report
&
Recommendations

Anonymous Baptist Church

March 2021

Consultants:

Rev. Tim Burns & Rev. Phil Grebert

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Introduction

Dear Leadership Team,

Thank you for the invitation to partner with you and the Anonymous Baptist Church in a Church Health Consultancy. We have been made to feel very welcome and are grateful for the cooperation you have provided, along with that of the congregation.

We are both Accredited Ministers with over 60 years of pastoral experience between us. Tim has completed the Association's Consultancy Training course and conducted other church consultancies. Phil is currently undertaking the Association's Consultancy Training course and looks forward to conducting many more consultancies in the future. We have been supervised by Rev. Ian Altman, the Associate Director for Church Health and are grateful to him for the advice he has given.

We are pleased to provide this Consultancy Engagement Report and Recommendations, trusting that the Lord will use it to further bless the life, ministry, and witness of Anonymous Baptist Church. In producing it we have tried to take account of the broad data that were collected while also maintaining appropriate confidentiality.

Rev. Tim Burns & Rev. Phil Grebert

Objectives

The objectives of the consultancy were set at a meeting of the Church Health Consultants (CHCs) and the Anonymous Baptist Church Leadership Team on 12 October 2020. Present were, Rev. Tim Burns (CHC), Rev. Phil Grebert (CHC), Rev. (Pastor), Deacon 1, Deacon 2, Deacon 3, Deacon 4/Treasurer, and Deacon5/Church Secretary

We used a simple S.C.O.T – strengths, concerns, opportunities, and threats - analysis to identify potential objectives for the consultancy. An objective prioritization exercise was then employed to narrow these down to the three that were accepted as the most important and urgent.

It was agreed by the Leadership Team that:

This consultancy will involve a general church health review, and give particular attention to:

- encouraging a more deliberate culture of prayerfulness
- identifying strategies for introducing people to Christ and integrating them into the fellowship of ABC
- nurturing godly leadership in the life of the church

Executive Summary

Anonymous Baptist Church (ABC) is a family-size church with approximately 35 members. Pre-COVID, the average Sunday attendance was 50-60 people, with at least 50% of these active in ministry. Those who make up the current congregation display a high level of devotion towards Christ and His Church and are committed to supporting ABC's life and witness.

The church's Mission Statement, which was formalized about three years ago, says that ABC exists "to bring glory to God by making disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ".

The church's Values, which were identified and adopted at the same time, are:

1. Biblical preaching and teaching.
2. Corporate worship and fellowship.
3. Godly leadership.
4. Gospel-centredness.
5. Growing as disciples.
6. Local evangelism.
7. Ministry to the whole family.
8. Overseas mission.
9. Persistent prayer.
10. Welcoming and integrating newcomers

The church's Vision Statement, which again was adopted at the same time, is "to bring people to saving faith in Jesus and into the fellowship of His church, and as God's family to grow towards spiritual maturity, equipped for service and witness in the church and in the world."

The Leadership Team does not currently have a strategic plan.

Pre-COVID, the regular ministries of the church included:

- a weekly Sunday service, including provision for children and youth
- the Friendship Group
- a Friday night Youth Group
- a company of the Girls' Brigade
- 4 Growth Groups
- a Model Train Club
- a Playtime Group
- a regular food stall at the Revesby Craft Fair

The Sunday services are perceived to be a major element of church life and there is much appreciation for both the preaching/teaching ministry and the music ministry. The warmth of fellowship was also frequently mentioned as a strong point of church life.

At the same time, however, ABC, like other churches of its size, is contending with the problems of lack of critical mass and generational gap. Over many years it has struggled to grow from family-size (60-80) to pastoral-size (100-160), much to the frustration of the pastor, deacons, and many of the congregants.

One of the results of the church's size, is that visitors who may be looking for a new spiritual home will attend Sunday services once, or twice, but then look elsewhere because they do not find enough to satisfy them and their families. This, in turn, generates disappointment in all those who long for the church to flourish.

In making this observation about church size, we are not suggesting that a small church cannot be healthy. However, the second objective of this consultancy concerns growth, and our engagement with the congregation has made clear that the majority want this.

We believe that growth is possible and that the challenges presented by a lack of critical mass and generational gap can be overcome. However, if ABC is to grow from family-size to pastoral-size, then a deliberate strategy is needed to generate the momentum that will help the church seem more attractive to visitors looking for a spiritual home.

One strategic move could be the intentional development of the church's ministry to families with young children. Building on its Sunday School and Playtime ministries, the church could add regular all-age worship services to the existing rhythm of Sunday services. This was a suggestion made by several people who completed the survey and is something that many other churches do. Other moves could involve the introduction of a regular lunch, dinner, picnic, or BBQ to which families who attend Playtime would be welcome.

We believe that a deliberate investment in ministry to families with young children could well produce a dividend but may require hard work and sacrifice. Also, the dividend may not be immediate and, in our experience, will occur over the long term. Given this, we would recommend that any decisions around such an investment be made as part of an overall strategic plan that takes account of the best use of ABC's limited resources, including volunteers.

A further example of a strategic move that could help address both the lack of critical mass and generational gap, is a partnership, or collaboration, with a larger Baptist church. This idea also featured in the survey submissions and, while it would be contingent on the willingness of a larger church and need to be carefully negotiated, could result in an injection of much needed resources that would help create momentum. One of the catchcries of our Association is, "Greater together", and we believe this would be true of such a partnership.

The above are just examples, and only two of many we could have used. Our point is that ABC needs to develop a deliberate strategy to help it fulfil its mission and vision.

Objective 1 – Encouraging a more deliberate culture of prayerfulness

Evidence suggests that a healthy attitude towards prayer already exists at ABC. The majority of those who completed the survey indicated that they have a daily time of personal prayer and Bible reading. Also, one of the most common suggestions for how to improve the health and capacity of the church was “prayer”. We are encouraged by this and believe that ABC should be too. However, we are also conscious that the demands of work, family, and other commitments will prevent some, and perhaps even many, from attending set prayer meetings. This does not mean that they are not praying, nor that they do not want to pray with others but may mean that the range of informal opportunities available must be expanded and technology employed to allow for prayer to happen outside of set meeting times. For example, a Facebook group could be formed, where members of the congregation can post prayers and requests for prayer. Such a group would also allow others to ‘like’ those posts, an indication that they are praying. It would also allow people to share answers to prayer, which would serve as an encouragement to others. We noted comments at the forum about the value of such stories and would encourage ABC to create space for them at various points in the life of the church. Prayer Buddies could also be revisited, and Prayer Triplets encouraged, so enabling smaller groups of people to meet at times that are more convenient to them.

In reflecting on the feedback provided in relation to this objective, we also noted the commitment of some to their Growth Group. We were heartened by this and would encourage all those who do not participate in Growth Groups to join one. Amongst other things, such groups provide the perfect environment for persistent prayer. The leaders of all groups could be provided with relevant prayer points so that all who meet remember the same matters in prayer, as well as praying for anything that is particular to their own group. We would add that group leaders should be trained in how to encourage those who attend to pray. There may be some people in groups who have never prayed out loud before, or who are anxious about praying incorrectly, and so never join in. Such people could be helped to overcome their reservations through a group exercise like writing out a simple prayer and reading it, or pairing up with another person to write a joint prayer that both then read out together.

Objective 2 - identifying strategies for introducing people to Christ and integrating them into the fellowship of ABC

We detected a widespread desire that ABC should reach out with the gospel and welcome people into the fellowship. Again, this is heartening. However, once again, there appears to be no deliberate strategy. We believe that the Leadership Team should work on developing a strategic plan that identifies and facilitates key goals to this end. Such a strategy should be S.M.A.R.T - strategic, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-specific - be in keeping with the Mission Statement and help the church progress towards the fulfilment of its Vision. It should also clearly articulate key enablers, including resources, and key accountabilities.

The development of such a plan would help ABC focus on key activities and opportunities that will introduce people to Christ and help them integrate into the fellowship. These might include an annual Alpha Course/Christianity Explained Course, the running of the Parenting Children Course and the Parenting Teenagers Course; termly invitation services at which the gospel is clearly presented, evangelistic men's and women's events, and so on. The list of possibilities is practically endless, which is why a deliberate strategy is needed to identify and facilitate key ones. ABC must be mindful of its limited resources and seek to deploy them in as effective a way as possible.

The development of a strategic plan would also present ABC with the opportunity to review its existing ministries, including the Train Club, Girls' Brigade, and the Craft Fair. We highlight the first two because there appears to be no consensus over their value to the church. Girls' Brigade is run by leaders who attend other churches, for girls who do not attend ABC; and Train Club is mainly run by and for people who do not attend ABC either. The question of whether they should continue to be viewed as ministries of the church is a relevant one. Is the church willing to make a strategic commitment to engage with these ministries and set goals for those engagements? The alternative would be for both Girls' Brigade and Train Club to be viewed as outside groups that merely use the premises on a basis that is agreeable to ABC.

We also highlight the Craft Fair because comments received suggest that some people view this as an opportunity that could be further developed, pointing out that it allows for members of the congregation to engage with members of the public, share their faith and promote the activities of the church "in the marketplace".

Further to this objective, we recognize the place that Growth Groups could, and should, play in helping newcomers integrate into the life of the fellowship. While it can be difficult for a newcomer to make a significant connection over Sunday morning tea, an invitation to participate in a group can help them to better engage. While it would not be appropriate to bombard a newcomer with too much attention or too many invitations, it is important to include up to date information about all Growth Groups in any Welcome Pack, and for the pastor to follow up with visitors about these groups after three Sundays in attendance. Existing members of Growth Groups should also be quick to extend gentle invitations to those who are new to the life of the church. Such people should be invited to 'try' as many Growth Groups as they like without feeling obliged to return to any that they do not feel is a good fit. Likewise, group members should temper their expectations of anyone who 'tries' their group and not feel disappointed if they do not continue.

Objective 3 – nurturing godly leadership in the life of the church

It is apparent that ABC values godly leadership and much appreciation was expressed for the current Leadership Team. They are to be thanked for the service they have given and continue to give. However, it is noteworthy that most of the deacons have occupied their roles for a long time. A problem, which can attach to this, is that they then come to be

viewed as incumbents for life. We are not suggesting that this is how the deacons themselves view things, but rather how others may, and believe that this could militate against emerging leaders aspiring to occupy those roles.

Of course, ABC's human resources pool is small, and one concern might be that if the current deacons do not continue then no-one will take on the roles. This is understandable, but in our experience no leader is indispensable, and God, Himself, will provide. We are aware that many churches include a clause in their constitutions that require deacons to take a sabbatical after two or three terms of service. We think this is a good clause because it allows those serving to be refreshed and others to step gradually into leadership roles.

Once again, we recognise the role that Growth Groups could, and should, play here. All group leaders should be equipped to lead their group and to mentor emerging leaders who attend their group. Support and training for both emerging and existing group leaders should be an ongoing part of ABC's life.

Further to the developing of godly leadership in the church, we would call attention to how Transform Southern Sydney employs a Facilitator for Leadership Development, who can advise churches on this matter. We are confident that a conversation with the Facilitator will prove beneficial to the Leadership Team.

In drawing this Executive Summary to a close we would want to acknowledge that various people expressed concerns about perceived tensions in the Leadership Team. We have addressed this in a Confidential Report to the Leadership Team, including recommendations that we hope they will follow.

Summary Recommendations

Note: An amplified version of the Recommendations can be found on pages 37-40.

General Recommendations

1. That this report be released to the church
2. That an Implementation Group be appointed to oversee the implementation of the Specific Recommendations on a mutually agreed timeframe
3. That the Implementation Group meet with the Church Health Consultants 12 months after it is established to review its progress

Specific Recommendations

A. Church Health Review

1. That the church recognises the importance of Growth Groups as an environment that is conducive to:
 - encouraging a culture of prayer
 - integrating people into the life of the church
 - developing godly leadership
2. That the church revisits its Mission Statement, Values Statement, and Vision Statement with a view to developing Vision Pictures/Dreams and the first in a series of 3-year strategic plans
3. That as part of the development of a strategic plan the church revisits all existing activities to determine their viability and usefulness going forward
4. That as part of the development of a strategic plan the church further invests in ministry to families with young children to generate long term growth; and that as part of this investment the church review of its Sunday services and the place afforded to children and their families therein.
5. That as part of the development of a strategic plan the church explores the possibility of a partnership with a larger Baptist church

B. Objective 1 – encouraging a more deliberate culture of prayerfulness

6. That as part of the development of a strategic plan the church actively encourages new, and more informal, opportunities for members of the congregation to join in prayer

7. That as part of the development of a strategic plan the church revisits its Prayer Buddies scheme or introduces a Prayer Triplet scheme

C. Objective 2 - identifying strategies for introducing people to Christ and integrating them into the fellowship of ABC

8. That as part of the development of a strategic plan the church explores a small number of key evangelistic initiatives that allow it to engage with, and present the gospel to, the wider community
9. That the church continues to follow its process for welcoming visitors to Sunday services and other activities, including the provision of relevant information in the form of a Welcome Pack; and that it continues its arrangements for follow-up, adding a periodic Newcomers' Morning Tea/Lunch

D. Objective 3 – nurturing godly leadership in the life of the church

10. That the church consults with Transform Southern Sydney's Facilitator for Leadership Development about how to further encourage godly leadership in the life of the church
11. That the church agrees to limit deacons to 3 consecutive terms of service, after which a sabbatical, of at least 12 months, must be taken
12. That the church explores the place of women in leadership, most especially with regard to serving on the deaconate

Process Tools

- **Survey**

All members of the congregation were invited to complete a Church Health Survey

26 Surveys were returned

- **Forums**

All members of the congregation were invited to participate in a Forum

18 people attended a Forum on the afternoon of 29 November 2020

- **Interviews**

Interviews were conducted with:

- the pastor and his wife
- 4 deacons, and a written submission received from the fifth
- the former student worker

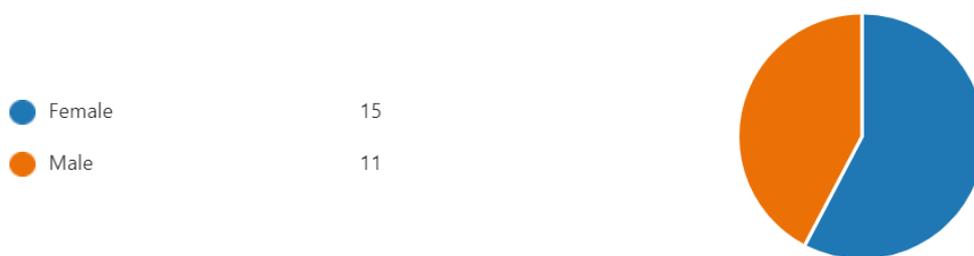
Survey

We used a Survey to collect data relevant to the general church health review

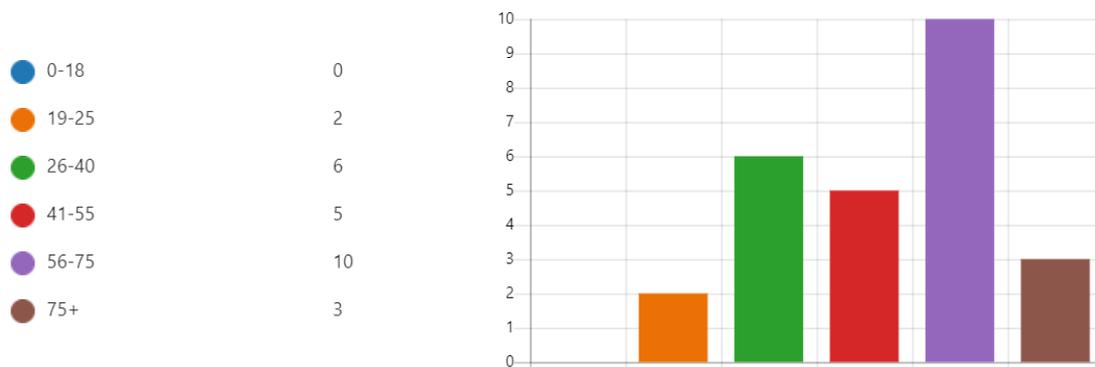
26 surveys were returned

Basic demographical information was gathered by Sections 1-5:

S1. What gender are you?

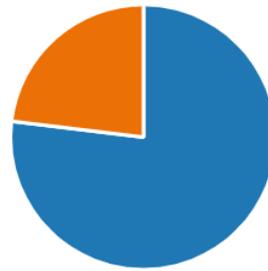


S2. What age group are you in?



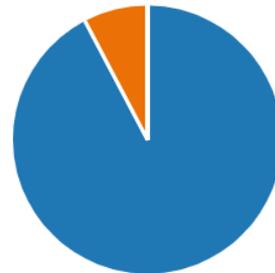
S3. Are you a member of the church?

● Yes	20
● No	6



S4. How often do you attend a Sunday Service?

● Weekly	24
● Fortnightly	2
● Every two to three weeks	0
● Monthly	0
● Less than monthly	0



S7. Does someone else from your family attend the church with you?

● No, I attend by myself	11
● Yes, I attend with my partner	3
● Yes, I attend with my partner a...	10
● Yes, I attend with my children	0
● Yes, I attend with my parent/s	2



Sections 6 & 7 invited participants to identify those elements of church life they most appreciate. This information is important because it represents what ABC does well. These elements should be celebrated, and future strategic planning should leverage off them.

Section 7 invited participants who had been attending the church for less than 3 years to identify the 3 factors they found most attractive about church life.

The factors most frequently identified were:

- The warm fellowship (x5)
- The Bible-based preaching & teaching (x4)
- Opportunities to serve/contribute (x3)
- I had friends who already attended (x3)
- The Sunday school (x2)

Other factors that were indicated include:

- The Bible verses in the church hall
- The noticeboard
- The stability
- The emphasis on prayer
- Good memories of a previous spell at the church
- The outreach
- The genuineness of the Pastor and his wife

Section 8 invited participants who had been attending the church for more than 3 years to identify the 3 main elements they appreciate most about the church.

The factors most frequently indicated were:

- The Bible preaching & teaching (x13)
- The warmth of fellowship and Christian community (x13)
- The public worship life of the church, including the music (x6)
- The welcoming atmosphere (x4)
- Opportunities to serve/be involved (x4)
- Growth Groups (x3)
- Kids' Program/Sunday School (x2)

Other factors that were indicated include:

- The pastor's vision for what could be possible at ABC
- Focus on discipleship & spiritual growth

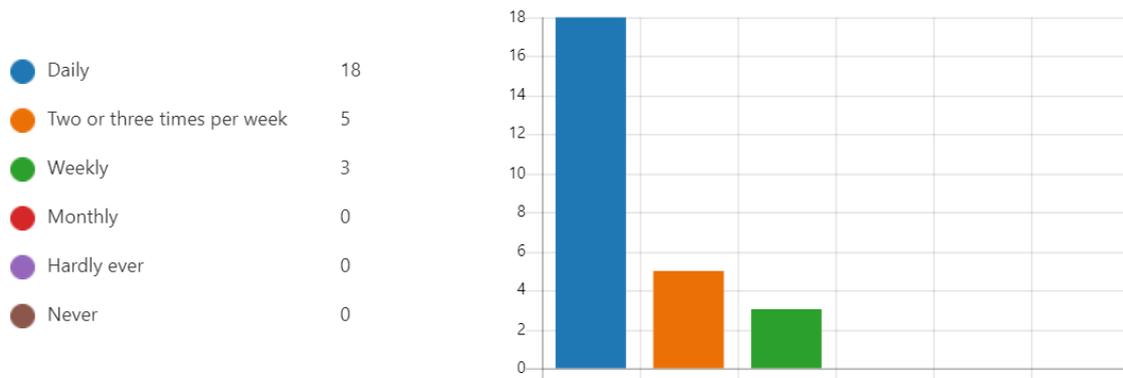
- The leadership of the deacons
- The commitment of the members
- The small church atmosphere
- The facilities
- Playtime
- Prayer

Reflection

The responses in Sections 6 & 7 are encouraging. They highlight various elements in the life of ABC for which members of the congregation are grateful. They indicate that the greatest strengths include the Sunday services, which are characterised by solid preaching/teaching and well-presented music; the welcoming atmosphere and warmth of the fellowship; and the opportunities for service that exist. These strengths should be fostered as the church looks to the future.

Personal Spirituality

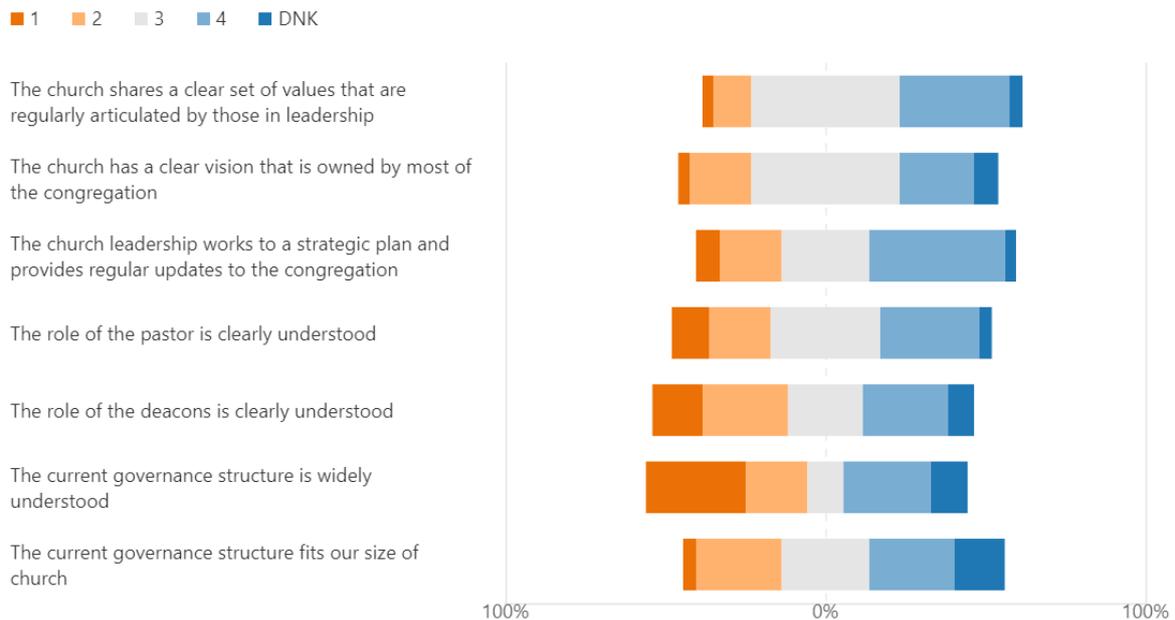
Section 8 explored a participant's personal commitment to Bible reading and prayer.



Reflection

There is no doubt that devotion to one's personal spiritual life is an indicator of spiritual health. It is equally the case that spiritually healthy people help to make for a spiritually healthy church. It is encouraging, therefore, to find that a clear majority of participants enjoy a daily time of personal Bible reading and prayer. ABC should celebrate this and encourage more of it.

Section 9 invited participants to rate a variety of factors associated with providing good governance and direction to the church:



The responses provided indicate that:

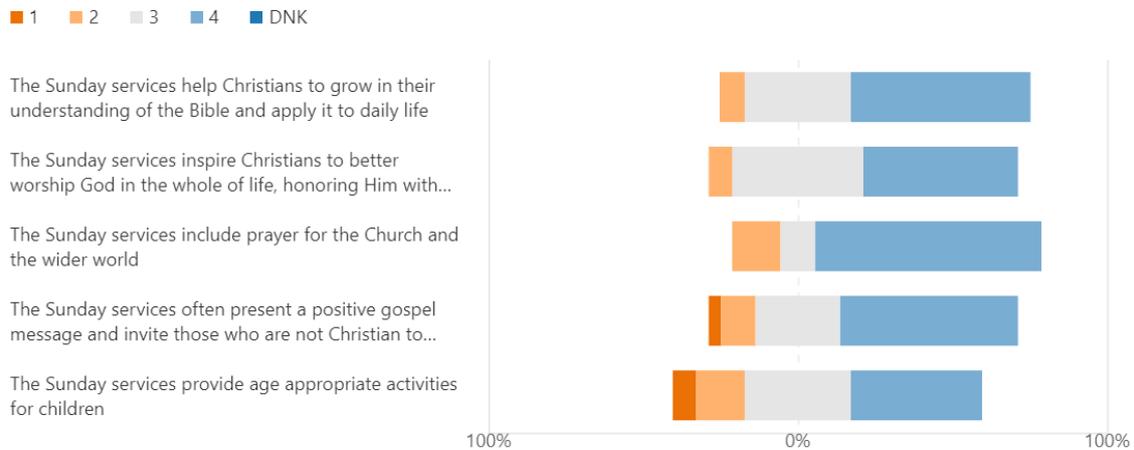
- 80% of participants believe that a clear set of values is regularly articulated by those in leadership
- 69% of participants believe that the church has a clear vision that is owned by most of the congregation
- 69% of participants believe that the church leadership works to a strategic plan and provides regular updates to the congregation
- 65% of participants believe that the role of the Pastor is clearly understood
- 50% of participants believe that the role of the deacons is clearly understood
- 38% believe that the current governance structure is widely understood
- 53% of participants believe that the current governance structure is a good fit for the size of the church

Reflection

The responses to the statements about values and vision are encouraging. However, the response to the statement about a strategic plan being followed is confusing given that no such plan exists!

The responses to the roles of the pastor and deacons reveal a variance that deserves further attention. More people appear to understand the role of the pastor than the role of deacons. It is important that both roles are clarified and clearly articulated to the congregation, not least because other information gathered via the online survey indicates that several participants detect an unhelpful tension between pastor and deacons over the governance of the church. Equally, more attention should be devoted to reviewing, clarifying, and articulating the governance structure, which is not widely understood.

Section 10 invited participants to rate a variety of factors associated with the Sunday services:



The responses provided indicate that:

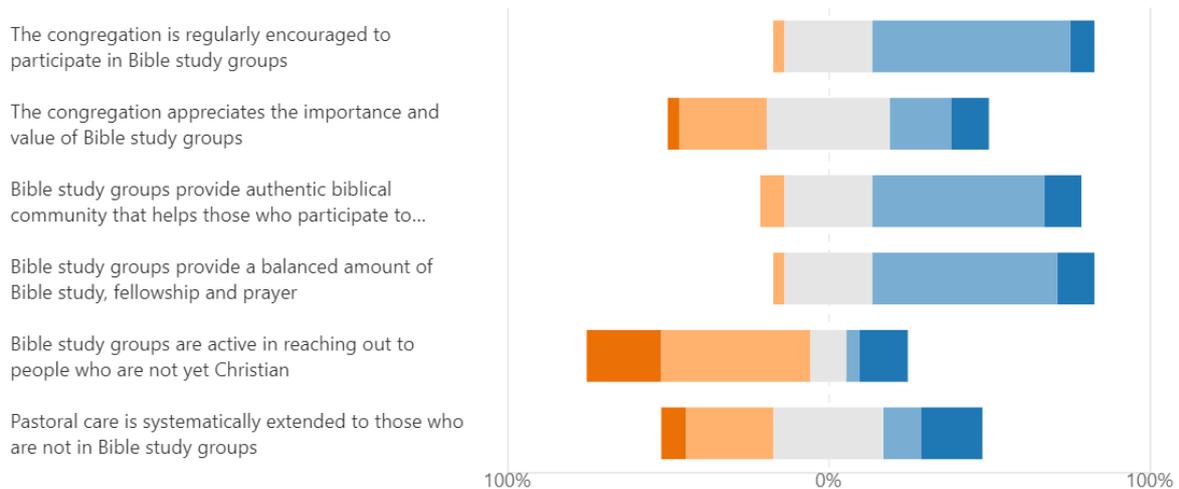
- 92% of participants believe that the Sunday services help Christian to grow in their understanding of the Bible and apply it to daily life
- 92% of participants believe that the Sunday services inspire Christians to better worship God in the whole of life, honouring Him with their relationships, time, talents, and material wealth
- 84% of participants believe the Sunday services include prayer for the church and the wider world
- 84% of participants believe that the Sunday services often present a positive gospel message and invite those who are not Christian to become Christian
- 77% of participants believe that the Sunday services provide age-appropriate activities for children

Reflection

The responses to all the above statements are very encouraging. Evidently, the Sunday services are greatly valued by many. However, while 77% believe that Sunday services provide age-appropriate activities for children, our understanding is that they have Sunday school in mind, and comments received at other points in the survey lead us to believe that ABC should consider expanding its provision to include regular all-age services. Other comments also suggest that some people, who are “visual learners”, would appreciate the use of Power Point and other media during the sermon.

Section 11 invited participants to rate a variety of factors associated with Bible Study Groups:

1 2 3 4 DNK



The responses provided indicate that:

- 88% of participants believe that the congregation is regularly encouraged to participate in Bible Study Groups
- 58% of participants believe that the congregation appreciates the importance and value of Bible Study Groups
- 81% of participants believe that Bible Study Groups provide authentic biblical community that helps those who participate to become more like Jesus in their everyday lives
- 84% of participants believe that Bible Study Groups include a balanced amount of teaching, fellowship, and prayer
- 15% of participants believe that Bible Study Groups are active in reaching out to people who are not Christian
- 46% of participants believe that pastoral care is systematically extended to those who are not in Bible Study Groups

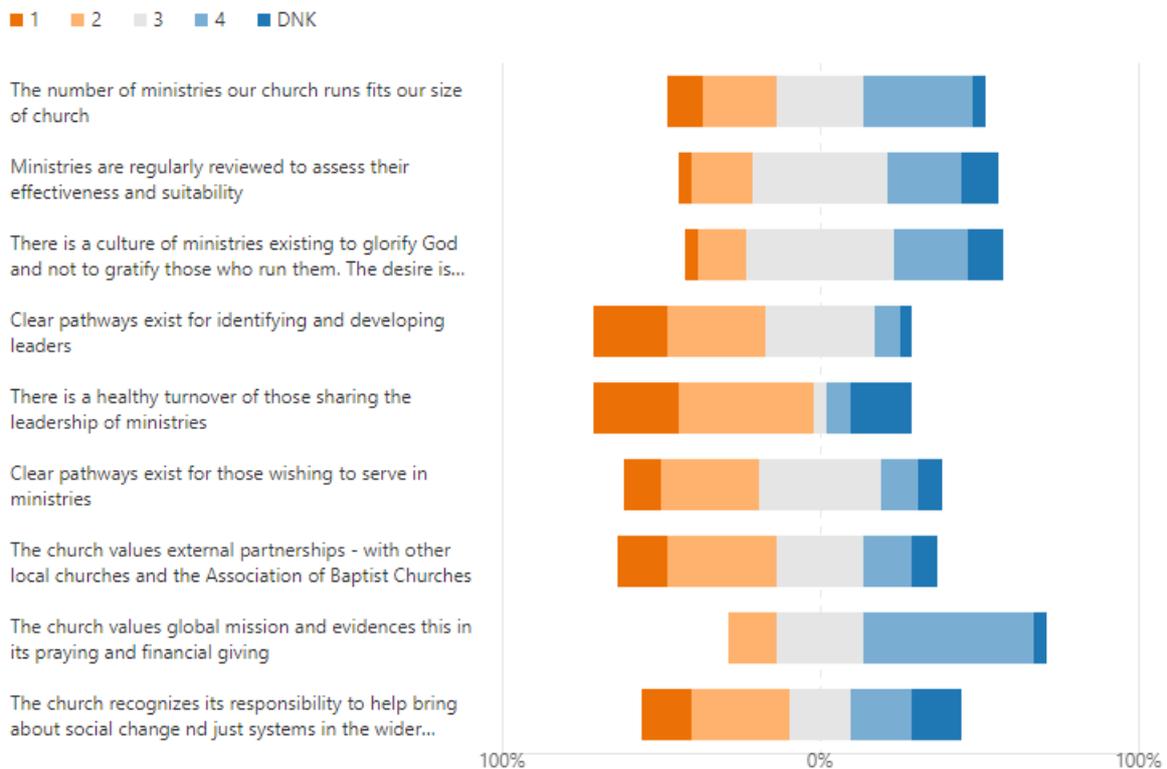
Reflection

The responses to the statements about how participation in Bible Study Groups is encouraged, and how the congregation appreciate the importance and value of these is to be welcomed. However, the perceptions that Bible Study Groups are not active in reaching out to people who are not Christian deserve attention. Such groups can, in fact, be a great way of introducing such people to church life.

Likewise, the perception that pastoral care is not systematically extended to those not in Bible Study Groups. Many churches use their Bible Study Groups as the primary provider of pastoral care for those who attend while ensuring that those who are not in such groups are regularly followed up by either the pastor or a designated volunteer. ABC should revisit its

system of providing pastoral care to ensure that clear structures for its delivery exist and are widely understood.

Section 12 invited participants to rate a variety of factors associated with the church’s ministry life:



The responses provided indicate that:

- 61% of participants believe that the number of ministries of the church fit its size
- 65% of participants believe that ministries are regularly reviewed to assess their effectiveness and suitability
- 69% of participants believe that there is a culture of ministries existing to glorify God and not to gratify those who run them
- 42% of participants believe that clear pathways exist for identifying and developing leaders
- 11% of participants believe that there is a healthy turnover of those sharing the leadership of ministries
- 50% of participants believe clear pathways exist for those wishing to serve in ministries
- 42% of participants believe that the church values external partnerships – with other local churches and the Association of Baptist Churches
- 84% of participants believe that the church values global mission as evidenced by its praying and financial giving
- 38% of participants believe that the church recognises its responsibility to help bring about social change and just systems in the wider world that reflect God’s love for the whole world

Reflection

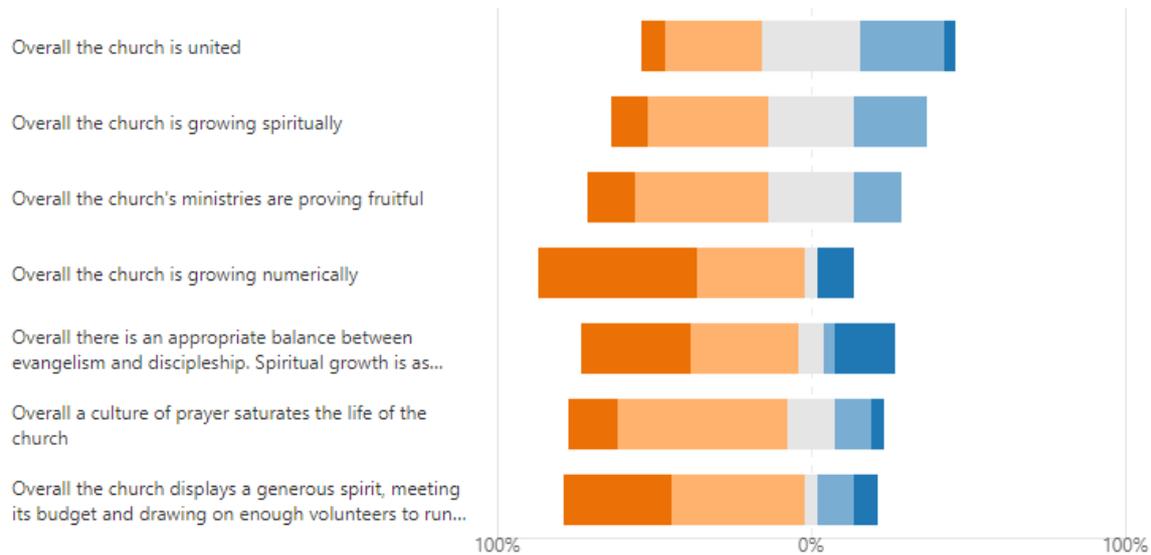
The responses to the statements about the church's ministry life demonstrate that it clearly values global mission but does not recognise its responsibility to bring about social change and just systems in the wider world.

Other responses in this section are alarming and suggest that much work needs to be done around identifying and developing leaders, refreshing the leadership of existing activities and providing clear pathways for those wishing to serve in ministries.

While 65% perceive that ministries are reviewed regularly there seems to be some uncertainty about evaluating effectiveness and suitability.

Based on these responses we would encourage ABC to revisit all these elements with a view to developing a process for regularly reviewing ministries, a strategy for identifying and developing leaders, and encouraging the healthy turnover of those in leadership.

Section 13 invited participants to rate various factors associated with the overall atmosphere of the church:



The responses provided indicate that:

- 58% of participants believe that church is united
- 50% of participants believe that the church is growing spiritually
- 42% of participants believe that the church’s ministries are proving fruitful
- 4% of participants believe that the church is growing numerically
- 11% of participants believe that there is an appropriate balance between evangelism and discipleship
- 27% of participants believe that a culture of prayer saturates the life of the church
- 15% of participants believe that the church displays a generous spirit, meeting its budget and drawing on enough volunteers to run its ministries

Reflection

Together with the previous section the responses to this group of statements reveal opportunities for growth. We would encourage ABC to revisit all these elements in the light of the information, reflections and recommendations contained in this report.

Section 14 'challenged' participants to write down the Mission/Vision of the church as they understood it!

26 participants provided a response.

ABC's Mission Statement says, "We exist to bring glory to God by making disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ"

The Vision Statement says, "Our vision is to bring people to saving faith in Jesus and into the fellowship of His church, and as God's family to grow towards spiritual maturity, equipped for service and witness in the church and in the world."

In responding to this 'challenge':

8 participants clearly referenced either the Mission Statement, or the Vision Statement, or both. Others provided answers that were rich in Bible truth but bore little relation to the Statements that have been adopted by the church.

Reflection

Both ABC's Mission Statement and Vision Statement are Christ-centred. Together they set out why the church exists and what the congregation is seeking to do. However, the broad range of responses to the challenge to write down the Statements, many of which bore little resemblance to the Statements, suggest that they need to be better promoted.

We would also see the value in developing a series of "Vision Pictures" or "Dreams" that flesh out the Vision Statement. For instance, what will it look like over the next ten years if ABC does indeed bring people to saving faith in Jesus and into the fellowship of His church? The answer to that could be encapsulated in a "Dream" along the lines of, "Our dream is of one church family of over 150 people, including 40 children, 20 young people and 10 young adults", and "Our dream is of at least 20 people professing their faith by being baptised", and "Our dream is of 40 people coming into formal membership of the church".

Again, what will it look like over the next ten years if ABC does indeed help God's family grow towards spiritual maturity, equipped for service and witness in the church and in the world? The answer to that could be encapsulated in a series of "Dreams" along the lines of, "Our dream is of 80% of the adult congregation participating in Growth Groups, over at least 10 groups", and "Our dream is of every church member being equipped and released into local Christian service", etc.

Any "Vision Pictures" or "Dreams" that the church adopts should be S.M.A.R.T - specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-specific. These should then form part of a series of strategic plans that help the church get from where it is to a place where its "Dreams" are realised.

Section 15 invited participants to ‘suggest one or two actions that could be taken NOW to help improve the health and capacity of the church’. 22 of 26 participants provided suggestions, with 4 preferring not to comment

A variety of suggestions were made including:

- “It would be good to have a larger music team”
- “More outreach”
- “More open discussion about how people are feeling. People need to feel that their voice is respected, appreciated and worthy of being heard”
- “We need to pray more”
- “A young and enthusiastic Assistant Pastor”
- “Interactive sermons”
- “Deeper Bible study and evangelism”
- “We should practice memorising Bible verses together”
- “Help the members understand the Pastor’s and Deacons’ roles”
- “Partnership/collaboration with other Baptist churches in the area”
- “Ministries should be spread, with one leader per ministry, so as not to burn out leaders”
- “There should be more involvement of children in our church services”
- “Let those who have been given ministry responsibility run with the gifts God has given them”
- “Honest communications...meetings of ministry coordinators, regularly, to pray, plan and encourage”
- “To have special church services, directed to children, youth, families, international, non-Christian, with sermons aimed at the relevant group”
- “Need to have family-oriented services e.g. special services on Mothers’ Day and Fathers’ Day”
- “Family based services designed to interact with Girls’ Brigade Playgroup, and Train Club groups that have non-Christian contacts”
- “The leadership structure and the process for doing things within the church needs to be clearly explained”
- “Have some outdoor services”
- “ABC will grow as we pray and seek our Lord’s face”
- “Encourage prayerfulness and leadership training”
- “Identify God’s gift for each member”
- “More effective and intentional evangelism into our community”
- “Prayer! Prayer! Prayer!”

Special Note:

We noted that no less than nine participants highlighted what they perceive to be longstanding tensions resulting from how the current Leadership Team functions. Some of

these related to how the roles of pastor and deacon interact, others to how decisions are made and communicated, and still others to a perception that strong personalities drive everything, so preventing other voices from being heard.

While none of these perceptions is unique to ABC all of them, if real, constitute inhibitors to health and growth. We propose to discuss these matters in more detail with the Leadership Team and will then provide them with a “Confidential Note” containing recommendations in addition to those in this report.

Reflection

Many of the suggestions made in this section are sensible and sound. However, few address the challenges that ABC faces because of its size, including lack of critical mass, and generational gap.

Two that stand out because they do provide potential solutions to these challenges are that ABC explore collaboration/partnership with larger Baptist Churches, and that the church develops its culture of prayerfulness. The latter is something that a church can work on regardless of its size, and the former is an option that ABC could, and should, explore.

We would encourage the Leadership Team to prayerfully consider all the responses listed above, but also encourage the congregation to recognize that not all suggestions will have merit at this time in the life of the church or can be actioned.

Forums

In addition to the data collected through the online survey, and interviews with those in leadership, a forum was held on the afternoon of Sunday 29th November 2020, to encourage reflection on the objectives that form the basis of the consultancy, namely:

- encouraging a more deliberate culture of prayerfulness
- identifying strategies for introducing people to Christ and integrating them into the fellowship
- nurturing godly leadership in the life of the church

Eighteen members of the congregation attended. This group was made up of eleven females and seven males. Four of the five deacons were present, with one unable to attend because he had recently relocated to Nowra.

Tables were set up in the corners of the room. Each of the three main topics was introduced with an opening question that offered a choice of responses. Each response was linked to one of the tables and participants were asked to gather around the one that most closely reflected their view. Further questions were then discussed, with scribes recording all the feedback that was given. Participants were encouraged to give “honest answers” rather than “right answers”, and once all the questions on a particular topic had been discussed, the various groups were invited to share their feedback with all those present.

Objective 1: Encouraging a more deliberate culture of prayerfulness

Q1. How do you rate the prayer life at ABC?

Participants were asked to move to one of the tables according to whether they believed that the current climate of prayer at ABC is above average, about average or below average, and then to share their reasoning.

Four participants moved to the “Below Average” table, and the remainder to the “Average” table.

“Below Average”

The 4 participants at this table offered observations including:

- “Poor attendance at prayer meetings”
- “Prayer does not appear to be people’s greatest priority”
- “Nothing happens without prayer and yet it isn’t number 1 when considering things”
- “Prayer points aren’t shared as readily as they should be”
- “A church only advances on its knees”

“Average”

These participants offered observations including:

- “Difficult to compare with others but...every activity is opened in prayer”

- “We have allocated prayer times before the service and monthly”
- “There is detailed prayer in the Sunday services”
- “Some people have ‘Prayer Buddies’”
- “Prayer happens in Growth Groups”
- “Answers to prayer are also openly discussed”

Q2. How do you think prayerfulness can be measured in a local church?

This follow-up question seems logical. If we want to assess the climate of prayer, then what measures are available to us? What indicators could be used to evaluate the culture of prayerfulness?

Indicators that came from both groups included the following:

- “Attendance at prayer meetings”
- “Praying at any opportunity available”
- “People feel open to ask others for prayer”
- “Answered prayer”
- “Good communications around prayer points and answered prayer”
- “Regular Sunday service prayer is detailed”
- “We are always encouraged to pray”
- “Revival begins with prayer and so we should see growth”
- “A good number of people being willing to participate in prayer chains”
- “Consistency in prayer”

Reflection

It was noteworthy that participants identified a wide variety of opportunities for prayer already woven into the life and activity of the church. This reflects how the leadership regards prayer as an important priority.

It was also noteworthy that a broad discontentment characterised the conversation around the current level of prayerfulness at ABC, which appeared to justify the concerns expressed by the leadership when settling on this as an objective of the consultancy.

We think it important to acknowledge the naturally occurring biases that were apparent in the responses given by the different groups, which highlight how different people can see the same thing in different ways. One example of this is the tendency to measure the attendance at prayer meetings. The different two groups saw the number of people present at a prayer meeting as both an indicator of “below average commitment to prayer” and as “an indicator of a healthy culture of prayerfulness”! We would suggest that the size of a meeting is not always an accurate measure of prayerfulness, and though it can be significant, it can also be a deceptive measure. A larger number of people at a prayer meeting is no guarantee of either a better attitude of heart or a greater effectiveness in prayer. Also, an inability to attend a mid-week prayer meeting does not necessarily indicate

laziness or disinterest but may simply be the consequence of factors including old-age, poor health, work schedules, and family responsibilities.

Q3. What steps might ABC take to develop its culture of prayerfulness?

Participants were invited to reflect on how a culture of prayerfulness might be further developed. Suggestions included:

- “Encourage spiritual discussion at morning tea – share prayer points before we discuss other things”
- “Remind people of the Prayer Buddy scheme on a regular basis”
- “Encourage people to initiate contact with others who they would not naturally associate with”
- “Call people to pray about developing a culture of prayerfulness; encourage people to pray but don’t lecture them”
- “People being willing to ask for prayer” (this was mentioned several times)
- “Leadership setting an example”
- “Use prayer as an integral part of all programs”
- “Pray for people when they share a prayer point”
- “Teaching on prayer – through sermons and/or seminars and across all age groups”
- “Giving examples of answered prayer”
- “Inform the congregation of prayer points and identify praise points, possibly in written form”
- “Be the answer to our prayers where possible, backing up our prayers with action”
- “Have set times and places for corporate prayer”
- “Confidentiality”

Reflection

Those who participated in the forum voiced a variety of ideas for developing a culture of prayerfulness and seemed aware of many positive steps that could be taken. We think that this is a very positive sign and would encourage the Leadership Team to take account of all the suggestions listed above. While not every suggestion can be implemented some could, and those who suggested them drawn into helping do this.

Of course, there are many areas of church life in which ideas are abundant, but that of itself will not bring about cultural change. We believe that the ABC leadership needs to develop a strategic plan, which leverages off the church’s Mission Statement, Values, and Vision, and which includes clear pathways to greater prayerfulness.

Q4. What barriers do you believe stand in the way of ABC developing and maintaining its culture of prayerfulness?

The final question on this topic invited reflection on barriers to prayerfulness that may exist. In presenting the feedback we have grouped it under either “personal” or “corporate”.

PERSONAL

- “Busy lives”
- “Our commitment level: Is prayer a high priority?”; “Apathy”; “Inexperience”; “Spiritual immaturity”
- “Afraid to pray aloud”
- “Not taking the initiative”; “unwilling to move out of comfort zone”
- “Feel they don’t know enough to pray”

CORPORATE

- “Size of the congregation – workers are few”
- “The age of the congregation”; “not enough young people”
- “Not enough outreach or community involvement is a barrier to people joining the church and so joining in praying”
- “Not everyone works regular hours and can attend prayer meetings”
- “People can’t get to an organised prayer meeting because of lack of transport”
- “Lack of leadership”
- “Turning up to pray but just saying ‘Amen’ should not be a barrier because just attending a prayer meeting can be an encouragement”
- “Location for prayer”

Reflection

The feedback on barriers to prayerfulness reflects the challenges that many Christians and churches face. It highlights the importance of regular teaching on prayer, in the Sunday services, the Growth Groups and the discipleship of new Christians. It further highlights how the demands of work and family schedules will inevitably prevent some from attending set prayer meetings and so more innovative approaches to ‘meeting’ are necessary, including those that employ technologies like Zoom and Facebook.

Objective 2: Identifying strategies for introducing people to Christ and integrating them into the fellowship

When setting this objective, the Leadership Team was mindful of how the number of people who attend Sunday services had plateaued and wanted to explore some more effective ways of engaging the local community in order to introduce people to Jesus Christ and help people integrate into the life of the church.

Q1. What is the most effective outreach activity currently run by ABC?

Each of the tables in the room was linked to one of four categories. These were “Children’s & Youth Ministry”, “Participating in Community Activities”, “Special Focus Groups” and “Something Else”. In response to this question, participants were invited to move to the table which, in their opinion, represented the church’s best connection with the community. The discussion that followed happened in those groups with the responses reflecting those choices.

Children’s & Youth Ministry

This category included all those activities that cater for children and youth. 7 participants chose it. The reason these activities were valued included:

- “Because they are our future and so you need to work with the next generation”
- “Because the children are involved it then allows for the wider families to be involved”
- “Meeting needs in the community”
- “In all of the children’s programs ABC currently runs it connects with those who are not Christian”
- “Communication is needed about these groups. [NB: This comment didn’t specify whether the “communication” was needed within ABC and to inform the congregation of progress and needs in the ministries; or to promote the groups in the community.]

Participating in Community Activities

This category covered involvement in community activities whether organized by ABC or other groups. No-one identified these as the most effective.

Special Focus Groups

This category included the Train Club, the Friendship Group and any other target groups. 3 people identified these activities as most effective. Their thinking was expressed as follows:

- “They allow for one-to-one relationships, witnessing opportunities”
- “It allows ABC to reach out to people through things they are interested in”
- “It’s going out into the world and drawing people to us”

Something Else

This category allowed for people to make observations about other connections, which may not have been fallen into the other categories. 8 people gathered in this group. Their observations included:

- “Individual invitations to people have seen people coming to church and faith – this can build bridges beforehand”
- “Social media, especially since COVID hit”

Q2. Why does it seem so difficult for people to take the next steps from these points of connection to closer links with the Fellowship?

In view of the points of connection that exist this question invited participants to reflect on the challenges associated with encouraging closer connection. Responses were similar across all groups and included:

- “How churches have been portrayed in the media”
- “We ourselves may hesitate to invite them/ fear of rejection”
- “A bad previous experience on the part of those invited”
- “A small church like ours may not cater to their families’ needs”
- “Some may not come because they do not want to face the claims of the gospel”
- “Lack of follow up”
- “Their cultural/religious background”
- “Still observing – people want to watch us before they join”

Q3. Are there intermediate steps you can think of to shorten the gap between these points of connection and integration into the Fellowship?

This question invited participants to brain-storm possibilities which might be used to strengthen links between the various activities and draw people from the “community” into the “crowd”, then the “congregation”, then the committed, and eventually to the “core” of the Fellowship (with thanks to Rick Warren for these “Cs”).

Feedback included:

- “Social or special events held consistently and advertised to all the groups in the church”
- “Look at the needs of the community and respond accordingly”
- “Combine groups e.g. Playtime visit the Senior’s Group”
- “The key is building relationships so that people develop trust”
- “Prayer must undergird every effort”
- “Creating opportunities for the groups to come to church and be involved like a Playtime service or a Girls’ Brigade service or a Trains’ service”
- “Training church members in evangelism”
- Outdoor church once per term.

Q4. Can you suggest other ways that might help introduce people to Jesus and include them into the Fellowship?

This question invited participants to reflect on any additional ways of making or strengthening connections with friends and neighbours. Suggestions included:

- “Open Days”
- “Christmas Carols”
- “Utilise Social Media”

- “Carpark Coffee”
- “Better utilise BBQ, Craft Fair”
- Further responses are also evident in the responses to Q3, above

Reflection

As one might expect, each group pointed out the merits of the ministries that were represented by the category they had selected.

While we would agree that ‘children are our future’, they are also with us in the here and now and must be fully included. ABC’s Safe Church Policy calls for children and young people to be given a voice because they are an integral part of today’s church.

The fact that only one in six participants recognised ‘Trains and Friendship group’ as an effective outreach deserves further reflection from the Leadership Team. Is this activity, or any other like it, truly engaging with the wider community and helping those involved find faith in Christ and integrate with the church? Of course, an activity like this may serve another purpose. If, for example, it contributed income to the church then it might be valuable for this purpose alone. However, all of ABC’s activities should be in keeping with its values and exist to serve its Mission and Vision, and a comprehensive review would be able to confirm this.

If, as seems apparent, participants see little effective outreach through participating in community events, then hard questions need to be faced. Should this continue? Or, at the very least, how can the church’s profile be raised through them continuing? Such questions will need to be discussed because if most people do not value these activities then they will not commit to them with enthusiasm. Any such discussions must take place with great sensitivity and grace, given the long, personal connections that some members may have with such activities.

Discussion of “Q4” flowed from discussion of “Q3” and, as participants thought of these ‘smaller steps’, then they began to see how more effective bridges could be built.

It is worth noting the mention of Social Media. The COVID crisis has forced churches to be more aware of its potential, so could this medium be a fertile point of connection?

The question of whether more can be made of the Sunday services is a pertinent one. This was raised by various participants and deserves further reflection. What are the Sunday services for? Who are they for? Are they for believers only? Should there be regular invitation services that are characterised by a more evangelistic atmosphere? And could the services be easier for those who are not-yet Christian to understand?

Objective 3: Nurturing godly leadership in the life of the church

Q1. Thinking about the Bible, who stands-out as a godly leader and why?

Participants were invited to discuss examples of godly leadership that occur in the Bible and identify the characters who most inspire them.

Q2. What are the main attributes of a godly leader?

Following on from the above the discussion, participants were invited to identify the marks and qualities of godly leaders. Feedback included:

- “Personal relationship with God – including evidence of their faith and a strong prayer life”
- “Inclusive of all members of the congregation, recognising their differences”
- “Characteristics like humility, honesty, compassion, a teachable spirit,
- Leading by example”
- “Not afraid to address hard subjects”
- “Able to assist people and gently correct them”
- “The qualities mentioned by St Paul in 1 Timothy 3”
- “Genuine love for the church”
- “Heart for the unsaved”

Q3. (pt1) How can we identify emerging leaders?

“Q3” was broken down into two parts. We first wanted participants to consider the qualities they should look for in emerging leaders. Feedback included:

- “Look at the person’s character, commitment, potential and gifting”
- “Someone might be shy so need to get to know them, give them opportunity”
- “Do they know God’s calling to lead?”

It was also suggested that when looking for leaders, a church must be alert to potential conflicts over theological issues. Are some things non-negotiable and others just a difference of opinion?

Q3. (pt2) What might obscure emerging leaders from our view?

- “Too busy leading to look for assistance”
- “Set in old ways”
- “Not having a heart for mentoring”
- “Not having enough people in the church and so just involving people who are not appropriate.”

Q4. What are some essential steps for training and supporting emerging leaders?

This question invited participants to reflect on how new leaders could be encouraged and equipped. Comments included:

- “Give them opportunity and allow them to use their own style”
- “Mentoring by outlining their strengths and weaknesses and encouraging them”
- “Let them know that there is no such thing as a stupid question”
- “Work alongside and mentor them, monitoring their progress”
- “Look for appropriate opportunities for them”
- “Don’t overburden them before they are mature”
- “Allow people to make mistakes”
- “Pray for them and with them”
- “Allow them to lead and not be micro-managed”
- “Support them financially if they want to access training”

Q5. What is one change that can help develop further godly leadership for ABC?

Each group was invited to make one suggestion. The feedback given suggests that this proved to be more difficult than it sounds:

Group 1: “Praying about and for leaders”

Group 2: “Ideas considered included, interest in other leaders; improved communication skills; flexibility, organization. However, there was no consensus around ‘one change’.

Group 3: “Nurture emerging leaders through their feelings of inadequacy” Other ideas floated by this group included use recognised training courses; be ready to change depending on congregational demographics; think outside the square.

Reflection

Given that no clear definition of ‘godly leadership’ was provided to those participating in this discussion, the responses reflected how participants perceived leadership was being exercised at ABC. At times, comments seemed to relate to all leaders of all ministries, while at others just the Leadership Team.

We noted that there was no reference to the place of women in leadership. This may be because the church has a settled position on what has proved to be a point of difference between churches. However, it is not lost on us that the current Leadership Team is all-male, and very longstanding. This may be because women are not considered for election to the Deaconate. While the constitution states that “those eligible for Eldership shall be spiritually mature male members”, no such qualification is attached to eligibility for the Deaconate. We think this an important distinction because if the pool from which the church seeks to draw both elders and deacons is strictly limited to males, then many potential leaders will be excluded. We note that of the people who attended the Forum more than 61% were female, and of those who completed the online Survey more than 57% were women. We would also testify to how some of our best leaders have been female and have served our churches well. Therefore, if ABC would allow the election of women to its Deaconate, then we would hope that the current Leadership Team would be proactive in encouraging those who have a leadership gift.

We noted comments made in response to “Q3. (pt 2)”, including the observation that some appear to be ‘set in old ways’, and the problem of some “not looking for assistance”. While we have no way of evaluating these comments, they warrant further investigation and, if found to be characteristic of the prevailing culture, must be addressed if new leaders are to emerge.

Interviews

Face-to-face interviews were held with four of the five deacons. The fifth, who recently relocated to Nowra, provided a written submission. A face-to-face interview was also held with the pastor and his wife, and a Zoom interview was held with the former student worker.

Reflection

We are grateful to all those who took part in interviews and were struck by their commitment to Christ and His Church. ABC is truly blessed to have this team of dedicated leaders and must be careful to pray for them, work with them, and encourage them in all that they do.

All those interviewed independently confirmed the perceptions of several people who completed the on-line survey, namely that there exists a disagreement over the roles and responsibilities of Pastor and Deacons. We wonder if this is more of a misunderstanding than a disagreement and will propose a meeting with the Leadership Team to try and resolve it. We recognise that clarity of roles and responsibilities is essential to the health and growth of any church, as is a united Leadership Team.

General Recommendations

1. That this report be released to the church

It is important for the integrity of the process that this report be released to the church.

2. That an Implementation Group be appointed to oversee the implementation of the Specific Recommendations on a mutually agreed timeframe

Such a group should include the pastor, a deacon, and one or two members of the wider congregation.

3. That the Implementation Group meet with the Church Health Consultants 12 months after it is established to review its progress

The CHCs are available to consult with the Implementation Group throughout the whole period of implementation, although that may not be necessary. However, we do recommend that the CHCs be invited to review the progress of the Implementation Group twelve months after it begins its work.

Specific Recommendations

A. Church Health Review

1. That the church recognises the importance of Growth Groups as an environment that is conducive to:

- **encouraging a culture of prayer**
- **integrating people into the life of the church**
- **developing godly leadership**

This should be undertaken by the pastor in consultation with the Implementation Group, and within 3 months of the acceptance of this report.

A collective recognition of the importance of Growth Groups should happen, soon after this report has been presented, as part of a Sunday morning service. All members of the congregation could be given the opportunity to show their support by standing for a special prayer led by the pastor, or by signing a specially designed pledge card that expresses their commitment to attend Sunday services regularly and participate in a small group.

Both the Sunday services and Growth Groups are appreciated by many. We are pleased by this. The prevailing culture at ABC must be one that recognises the importance of both and how they complement one another. Both are foundational

to long term church health and growth. In his book, *The Second Reformation*, Bill Beckham likens each to the wing of a bird pointing out that a bird needs both its wings to fly. In our experience churches that offer both good Sunday services and good small groups tend to prosper. We would encourage every member of the congregation to make it their priority to attend the Sunday service and participate in a Growth Group.

2. That the church revisits its Mission Statement, Values Statement, and Vision Statement with a view to developing Vision Pictures/Dream and a 3-year strategic plan

This should be undertaken by the Implementation Group in consultation with the Leadership Team. It should be completed within 12 months of this report being accepted. A guide to developing and implementing a strategic plan is appended to this report.

We believe that ABC's Mission Statement, Values Statement and Vision Statement are well thought out and sound. They afford Christ His rightful place, which is at the very centre of Christian life, ministry, and witness. We believe that they should be revisited on a regular basis so that they are ever in the minds of the congregation. This could be done with the help of appropriate preaching series, and Growth Groups studies, and at Church Members' Meetings, and on banners displayed in the church building. We believe that these statements, and what they represent, have the potential to galvanize the congregation in a common purpose. We believe that the addition of Vision Pictures/Dreams and a strategic plan are important steps in achieving the mission and realizing the vision.

3. That as part of the development of a strategic plan the church revisits all existing activities to determine their viability and usefulness going forward

This should be undertaken by the Implementation Group, in consultation with the Leadership Team, and within 12 months of the acceptance of this report.

The evaluation of existing activities is an exercise most churches never undertake. Partly this is because it has never been the accepted culture, and partly because some existing activities are 'owned' by individuals or groups within a church. We believe it is in the best interests of a church to evaluate its activities on a regular basis, and that ABC should revisit all its current activities to determine their viability and usefulness in relation to a strategic plan.

4. That as part of the development of a strategic plan the church further invests in ministry to families with young children to generate long term growth; and that as part of this investment the church review of its Sunday services and the place afforded to children and their families therein

This should be undertaken by the Implementation Group, in consultation with the Leadership Team, and within 12 months of the acceptance of this report.

We are not suggesting that ministry to children and families is any more important than ministry to teenagers, or young adults, or single people, or senior citizens, but rather that an investment in ministry to this demographic will produce long term congregational growth. Children who grow up in the church are more likely to stay in the fellowship as teenagers and young adults. Like attracts like and, as more families join the church, the growth will accelerate. This is not a quick fix but has been proven to produce church growth.

5. That as part of the development of a strategic plan the church explores the possibility of a partnership with a larger Baptist church

This should be undertaken by the Implementation Group, in consultation with Transform Southern Sydney, and an initial conversation with Transform Southern Sydney should occur within 6 months of acceptance of this report.

Conscious that ABC lacks personnel we believe that a partnership with a larger Baptist church could deliver growth more quickly than if ABC goes it alone. However, we are also conscious that any such partnership must be carefully negotiated and would further recommend that either the Transform Southern Sydney Regional Minister or the Transform Southern Sydney Church Health Facilitator be included in any planning and negotiation.

B. Objective 1 – encouraging a more deliberate culture of prayerfulness

6. That as part of the development of a strategic plan the church actively encourages new, and more informal, opportunities for members of the congregation to join in prayer

This should be undertaken by the Implementation Group, in consultation with the Leadership Team, and within 12 months of the acceptance of this report.

Our reflections on the survey and forum refer to the encouraging attitude towards prayerfulness that many of the congregation already display. We believe that people are praying but also recognise that the busyness of 21st century life may preclude some from joining in the already established prayer meetings. Consequently, we believe that further innovative ways of helping people to pray together should be promoted.

7. That as part of the development of a strategic plan the church revisits its Prayer Buddies scheme and introduces a Prayer Triplet scheme

This should be undertaken by the Implementation Group, and within 12 months of the acceptance of this report.

Given that existing set times for prayer may not suit everyone we recommend that more flexible opportunities for prayer be promoted. It seems obvious that it will be easier for smaller groups of people to get together than it will for larger groups. Feedback about the now defunct Prayer Buddies scheme was positive, and we believe this should be revisited or something similar, like a Prayer Triplet scheme introduced.

C. Objective 3 – identifying strategies for introducing people to Christ and integrating them into the fellowship of ABC

8. That as part of the development of a strategic plan the church explores a small number of key evangelistic initiatives that allow it to engage with, and present the gospel to, the wider community

This should be undertaken by the Implementation Group in consultation with the Leadership Team, and within 12 months of this report.

Given that ABC has limited resources we believe that a small number of evangelistic initiatives will allow the congregation to focus its resources while reaching out with the good news of Jesus Christ. We recognise that different members of the congregation will wish to champion different initiatives but believe that the church must unite in support of some key ones. Arriving at the final list of those initiatives must involve broad consultation and be swathed in prayer.

9. That the church continues to follow its process for welcoming visitors to Sunday services and other activities, including the provision of relevant information in the form of a Welcome Pack; and that it continues its arrangements for follow-up, adding a periodic Newcomers' Morning Tea/Lunch

This should be undertaken by the Leadership Team and within 6 months of the acceptance of this report.

ABC, like many churches, has a clearly articulated process for welcoming visitors and offers a Welcome Pack to those who attend a Sunday service or activity for the first time.

The ABC Welcome Pack includes a short letter from the pastor, a pamphlet describing the various ministries, an evangelistic leaflet, a small evangelistic booklet, and a response form so that anyone who wishes can provide their contact information.

We believe the Welcome Pack should also include a leaflet dedicated to Growth Groups, information about the church's mission, values and vision, and an invitation to attend a "Newcomers' Morning Tea/Lunch". Such Newcomers' events should be

held periodically with the date of the next one included on the invitation that goes in the Welcome Pack. They should also be widely promoted in the month leading up to each one.

We do not believe that visitors should be inundated with too much information, too quickly, but provided with something they can take away and reflect on at their leisure. Helping them to understand the church's mission, values and vision is very important.

We also believe that newcomers should be followed up by the pastor or other designated person after they have visited three times and recognise the diligence ABC's current pastor has shown in doing this. While such follow-up might occur by letter or email it is our opinion that where possible a phone call is best.

Periodic Newcomers' Morning Teas/Lunches should be held at which newcomers have opportunity to meet the church's Leadership Team, hear more about the church's Vision Pictures & Dreams, and be provided with information about membership, the Safe Church policy, and opportunities for service.

We believe that a newcomer should be expected to attend the church for at least 6 months before being invited to serve, and that leaders of all activities should respect this.

D. Objective 3 – nurturing godly leadership in the life of the church

10. That the church consults with Transform Southern Sydney's Facilitator for Leadership Development about how to further encourage godly leadership in the life of the church

This to be undertaken by the Implementation Group, in consultation with the Leadership Team, within 3 months of the acceptance of this report.

Transform Southern Sydney offers a large number of resources to churches. Leanne Smith is the Facilitator for Leadership Development and would be delighted to meet with the pastor or Leadership Team.

11. That the church agrees to limit deacons to 3 consecutive terms of service, after which a sabbatical, of at least 12 months, must be taken

This is to be undertaken by the Leadership Team, in consultation with the Implementation Group, and within 6 months of the acceptance of this report.

The principle of sabbath rest is firmly located in the Old Testament Scriptures, and for good reason. Similarly, the concept of a sabbatical is located there too. We believe that a church should expect those in leadership to take sabbaticals, for their own good and that of the church.

12. That the church explores the place of women in leadership, most especially with regards to the deaconate

This is to be undertaken by the Implementation Groups, in consultation with the Leadership Team, within 6 months of acceptance of this report.

We would wish to tread carefully here because we do not know the church's position on women in ministry. However, the constitution appears to allow for women to serve as deacons and if this is the case then we would encourage ABC to allow those women who have the gift of leadership to lead. Even our brief contact with the congregation has left us with the impression that there are several capable female leaders, and we think it would be a waste to overlook them when nominating for the Deaconate come around.



Baptist Churches
of NSW & ACT

Developing and Implementing a Strategic Plan

1. What is a strategic plan and why is it important?

A strategic plan is simply a series of goals, and the order in which they will be undertaken, to help a church get from where it is to where it believes God would have it be.

It is important because:

- Without it...a vision may seem too big and unachievable.
 - A strategic plan breaks a vision down into key steps that enable it to be achieved.
- Without it...a congregation may be diverted by things that are not relevant to the vision.
 - A strategic plan will guide day to day decisions and the formulation of the annual budget.
 - It is a lens for the analysis of possible new initiatives, helping to highlight any that do not serve the vision.
- Without it...there is no substantive reference point for the evaluation of progress.
 - A strategic plan will help with the measurement of forward movement. In so doing it will help identify when the plan itself may need to be adapted.

One could think of it in terms of planning a road trip. Someone making a long car journey may break the trip into more manageable sections. They will identify places to stop for breakfast, lunch, dinner, and any overnight stays. Doing this allows them to rest, eat and refuel the car. The plan may even include dropping in on friends en route. The goal, of course, is to reach the destination, but this is achieved with the help of a set of more manageable objectives.

One could also think of it like a boat tacking in the wind. When a boat tries to sail to a certain point it is unable to do that in a straight line if the wind is blowing against it. So, the method it uses is to tack from one point to another, zig zagging its way forward. This series of small steps allows it to negotiate the wind and reach its destination. It was with this analogy in mind that someone said, "The pessimist complains about the wind. The optimist expects the wind to change. Good leadership adjusts the sails". A strategic plan is a way of "adjusting the sails". It is good leadership to work to such a plan.

2. What are the vital components of a strategic plan?

No single strategic plan fits all churches, or all contexts, but when composing one the following are important to consider:

a) Context Matters

Given that a strategic plan is a tool that helps a church get from where it is to where it believes God would have it be, a church must first understand “where it is”. To this end it should conduct a realistic assessment of:

- **Its current demography.**

Who is the church?

How many people are there?

What is the spread of ages?

What is the ethnic mix?

How long have people been members of the congregation?

What first attracted people to the church?

What do people value most about the church as it currently is?

What church ministries are people involved in?

What is the level of involvement in the wider Christian sphere?

What is the level of involvement in the wider community?

Etc.

Such an assessment can be carried out using a simple survey

- **Its current practical resources.**

What assets and resources are currently available to the church?

What about its people?

What are their academic and professional qualifications?

What are their work backgrounds?

What are their natural talents and spiritual gifts?

What are their interests and passions – both Christian and not?

What is people’s current availability, in terms of their time?

What about its finances?

What savings and investments does it have?

How has weekly giving been tracking?

Is this a realistic reflection of its people’s capacity to give?

What about its land and property?

What facilities are available to it?

What is the condition of any property it has?

Is there opportunity to leverage off existing assets?

An assessment of its people resources can be carried out using a survey
An assessment of its financial resources can be carried out by its treasurer and/or others with a background in finance
An assessment of its property can be carried out with the help of a surveyor and/or architect and may include the development of a Property Masterplan to complement the Strategic Plan.

- **The demography of its wider community.**

Who lives in its neighbourhood?

What is the current, social, cultural and economic profile?

How has this changed over recent years?

How is it projected to change in the future?

This can be carried out by analysing the relevant Census data and/or purchasing a report from NCLS

- **The demography of the wider Christian community.**

What other churches and Christian organisations operate in the local neighbourhood?

What services and activities do they offer?

What partnerships, if any, currently exist?

What has God been doing, and what is He doing, in this wider Christian sphere?

b) Mission, Values & Vision Matter

Given that a strategic plan is a tool that helps a church get from where it is to where it believes God would have it be then having understood where it currently is, a congregation must then come to a clear consensus around where it believes God would have it be. To this end, it will be helpful for a congregation to have a widely shared understanding of the church's mission, values and vision.

- What is a Mission Statement?

A Mission Statement explains why the church exists.

A good mission statement is usually short and sharp. It clearly encapsulates what the church does in as few words as possible. It is easy to understand and memorable.

If a church has not already done so, then a process to agree a Mission Statement should be undertaken.

A congregation needs to be clear about its collective mission, and supportive of it, in order for the church to get from where it is to where God would have it be, and a good strategic plan will be clearly relevant to that mission.

- What are "Values" and why are they significant?

Values are those things that a congregation treasure.

Values are significant because they represent what is important to a congregation and will influence how people behave, how things are done and what people support.

If a church has not already done so, then an exercise to identify its key values should be undertaken. If it has identified its values, then these should be revisited to underline them in the thinking of the church.

Values inspire people to action and so are more easily leveraged.

A good strategic plan will be clearly related to a church's values. If this is so, then there is a greater likelihood that people will embrace its priorities and work towards their achievement. It will help people to engage emotionally with the plan.

- What is a Vision Statement and why is it significant?

A Vision Statement is a picture, painted with words, of what a church will look like if it is fulfilling its Mission Statement. It is usually longer and more descriptive than a mission statement. It is significant because it helps a congregation see

where God is leading them.

A well written Vision Statement can captivate people's hearts and inspire them to make the journey and a good strategic plan is framed in such a way that it helps a church make tangible progress towards the realization of its vision.

Many vision statements also include vision pictures, which break the vision down into bite-sized pieces, which together make up the whole meal.

c) A good Strategic Plan is S.M.A.R.T

A good strategic plan will break the “journey” towards achieving the Vision into attainable legs by outlining:

- the strategic priorities for the period of the plan
- key objectives/ministry initiatives – what is the plan seeking to achieve?
- key enablers – which people and resources will be important to achieving the objectives/ministry initiatives?
- key accountabilities – who will “run point” on each and who will assess their progress?

The objectives contained within a strategic plan are usually Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-specific (S.M.A.R.T).

- **A good strategic plan will be Specific**

It will clearly describe:

- Objectives/ministry initiatives
- how these relate to the priorities
- the key accountabilities
- what enablers will be required

- **A good strategic plan will be Measurable**

It will allow those managing it (usually the key governance group) to evaluate progress.

- **A good strategic plan will be Achievable**

While it may well be ambitious, it will not be unrealistic!

- **A good strategic plan will be Relevant to the Vision**

It will help the church towards fulfilling its Vision rather than distracting from it.

- **A good strategic plan will be Time specific**

It will cover a set period - 3 years is a good timespan for a church’s strategic plan.

It may also include timeframes for the key objectives/ministry initiatives.

It may prioritise objectives, so denoting the order in which they are to be undertaken.

It may well form part of a series of strategic plans that eventually result in the realisation of the Vision/ Vision Pictures.

3. What are the key steps necessary for developing and implementing a strategic plan?

Step 1

Conduct a comprehensive audit of the current context including the church's own demography, its current assets and resources, the demography of the local community, and that of the wider Christian community

Step 2

Clarify, and if necessary, review or develop, a Mission Statement, Values Statement, and Vision Statement

Step 3

Create a three-years strategic plan, that enunciates key priorities, sets out a range of S.M.A.R.T objectives, and identifies relevant accountabilities and enablers.

Step 4

Publish the strategic plan for discussion and adoption by the church

Step 5

Include the strategic plan as a recurring agenda item at Eldership meetings so that progress is subject to regular review

Step 6

Hold an annual half-day retreat to evaluate progress in more detail, adapt where necessary, and discuss the next strategic plan!