

REVELATION 7 NETWORK

History, Principles and Practices



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INTRODUCTION: Why read this booklet and who is it for?

Over the past few years we have been trialling some new things in multi-ethnic ministry. Through this we have created a network of small churches called *Revelation 7*. Recently, quite a few people started asking us what *Revelation 7* actually is. It's a good question! Often people want to know what ministry model the network follows. For example, is it affiliated with *T4T* or *missional communities* or *homogenous churches*? We usually fumble around trying to answer them but it's hard to be clear because we don't follow any model. Instead we've tried to go back to first principles, read lots of different approaches and put it all together eclectically as apply it in our unique **multi-ethnic urban** context (which is complex).¹ All this meant that people found it hard to know what to think of our practice or how to engage with it. Therefore, this booklet was written as a way to explain why we do the things we do.

However, we want to achieve more than that. We're pretty sure not everyone wants to hear about our little group of churches plugging away in South West Sydney, but we have repeatedly heard that many people wrestle with the same things we do. Therefore, this booklet aims to try and create some frameworks to collaborate with others about how to best minister in an urban multi-ethnic context. Also, we're looking for people who would like to partner with our network in some capacity. The final chapter talks about ways you can do this.

So, who is this book for? It's for leaders and lay people alike who:

- are passionate about growing healthy churches in multi-ethnic urban context
- have pondered why many churches are predominately Anglo Celtic in non-Anglo Celtic areas
- have asked how they might be able to reach their Muslim neighbour who will probably never come to a Christianity explained course (or have enough English to understand it).
- have asked how ministers can raise more leaders from other nations

We would love you to engage in these issues with us as we think about what it means to be faithful in urban contexts as they rapidly become more culturally diverse.

¹ We're a western country with a community of non-westerners. We are urban and represent an incredibly complex web of cultural and social networks all bumping around against each other continually forming new networks.

CHAPTER ONE The challenges of multi-ethnic ministry

In 2016, we were part of a small team that moved into the multi-ethnic suburb of Chester Hill that lay in the heart of southwest Sydney. At that time, the suburb was truly diverse without any one dominant nationality. In fact, we started a playgroup that year and at one point every person who attended represented a different nationality!

Our team's aim (under God of course) was to revitalise an Anglican church there. Initially things went better than expected. The suburb was rich in religious and hospitable people. It was easy to meet new friends and we somehow managed to create a little multicultural community that people were drawn to. And it was beautiful. A little taste of heaven. We tried to celebrate culture where we could. We translated sermons with headsets. We used easy English. And we ate. And we ate. From kibbeh to dahl to pho. We ate so much food.

But soon growth began to plateau. As we got more of a critical mass representing a few bigger groups, the minority groups got smaller. And some people groups like Muslims hadn't been reached at all. Their cultural and religious ties were so strong it would be unlikely they would ever set foot in a church. We also became concerned about if people were truly accessing God's word in a way they could understand it.

For example, in the beginning we would run Christianity courses for those who were unchurched or exploring Christianity. We'd advertise the course and then invite everyone we possibly could. But unlike less diverse areas, the downsides of this approach became more pronounced. Basically, we'd have an African animist, a Vietnamese Buddhist and Lebanese Catholic show up. No Muslims would be present even though many lived among us, because 99% of the time, they'd never go to something like that.² We soon realised that even those with relatively proficient English, struggled to convey theological ideas with any sense of clarity and that's without the issue of how different their worldview and religious convictions were. In our context, inviting people into centralised courses didn't seem to help them access God's word intelligibly.

Over those first few years, we began to understand the problems we faced more clearly. We whittled it down into four big ones:

1) People need help to access God's word

The church is a group of people who are gathered by God's word. They hear it and then respond to it through all of life worship. In short, understanding God's word is foundational to being a church.

Since our groups are so multicultural, in big groups, our experience was that many people struggled to learn. We assumed those with good conversational English could cope without translation. But they started feeding back to us that they were only able to engage with 20-30% of a sermon. Even with translation headsets (which we could only provide in Arabic and Mandarin), much was still lost in translation. Language is more complex than transliterating everything week in and week out. One week we ran the service in Chinese with English translation. It wasn't easy to sit through and for many of us,

² Most the Muslims we were meeting were often those who felt they had been rejected from their community. Often this was because they were divorced women which is often seen as shameful.

it helped us understand what church is like for many brothers and sisters every week (the lucky ones who actually have access to translation headsets). Many people didn't have good conversational English or translation.

2) We need more leaders from other cultures

The need for new leaders is not unique to multicultural areas or the 21st century. Even the NT focused on how raising leaders to pass on the gospel was critical to the church's health and survival (2 Tim 1:2). This has remained just as crucial in every age since the first century. However, the multi-cultural context adds an extra, unique complexity. That is, people learn more from those who speak their language (this is related to the point above). Sadly, we don't have many Christian leaders who speak Dari, Tok Pisin or Vietnamese.

Language is a significant barrier. Over a third of the population in Sydney are born overseas and speak a language other than English at home.³ Obviously, that percentage is much higher in our suburb. In fact, 89% of the children in the school across the street from our church speak a language other than English at home.⁴

This has big implications. As we said, a third of the population was born overseas and need leaders who speak their language, but for the majority of first-generation migrants, it is very hard to commit to going to a theological college for four years to become an ordained minister. The financial, educational, language and cultural barriers are significant. This also carries over to the second generation where many migrant parents persuade their children to get stable jobs rather than going into full time ministry. By the third generation, much of the culture and language is often lost. So how can we reach the third of the population whose heart language is not English and raise up leaders from them?

3) We need both multi-cultural gatherings and homogenous gatherings

Homogenous churches are those who only have one culture in them. Like a Chinese church or a Vietnamese one. Points one and two above show the need for homogenous gatherings in language so that people can understand God's word intelligibly. However, those churches often struggle with keeping the second generation and mixed-race marriages. They also struggle to reach cultures different to their own and since our society is so multi-ethnic, this means they can become very limited in who they can reach. The more we focus on making the word of God accessible and raising leaders from other cultures, the more danger we have of inheriting these issues. This is not only because of the practical issues, but also because the shape of the eschatological church from Revelation 7 which drives us in this direction.

³ .id community, "Greater Sydney Birthplace", available May 4, 2021 at <https://profile.id.com.au/australia/birthplace?WebID=250>, .id community, "City of Sydney: Language spoken at home", available May 4, 2021 at <https://profile.id.com.au/sydney/language>.

⁴ Education HQ, "Chester Hill Public School", available May 4, 2021 at <https://educationhq.com/directory/chester-hill-public-school-1144/>

Therefore, we need to keep an emphasis on multi-cultural gatherings. When we have multicultural gatherings, we are stronger together. For example, If I meet a Vietnamese woman who speaks little English, I can befriend her and begin to share Jesus with her. However, at a multicultural gathering I can then connect her with someone who speaks her language so she can dig deeper into God's word. An example of this was at our multicultural playgroup. In that group we were able to connect people to those who spoke their language to run discovery bible studies in Chinese and Vietnamese while all gathering together. Also, multicultural gatherings allow us to serve the next generation by providing less homogenous kids and youth gatherings. As children grow they benefit from a critical mass of their peers (in conjunction with intergenerational relationships) and language is usually less of a barrier.

4) We need to be more missional

As we said, while there are religious people who feel relatively comfortable talking about religion or even coming to church, there are many demographics who would never enter an Anglican building. For them, this would be shameful and they would face possible rejection from their cultural community. This observation fits with the overall declining trend in newcomers visiting existing churches (newcomers are projected to only account for 6.4% of attendees in 2021 versus 12.4% in 2001).⁵ If we want to reach these groups, we need to think more like missionaries and grapple with how to reach unreached people groups.

In our experience however, the bigger we got, the easier it was to ignore these unreached groups. People got busier on rosters and committees and more comfortable with each other. Our evangelistic default was just to invite people to events even though this wasn't effective with large portions of the population. We started wondering if there was a different way to structure things so we could be more missional.

In response to these issues, we decided to do some research. Even though the urban multi-ethnic context is different to the cross cultural one, we believed learning more about missiology would be a good, logical first step.

⁵ John Bellamy, "Newcomers Study Report", (Strategy and Research Group, 2019), 6.

CHAPTER TWO Researching missional church growth

It's not easy to speak about the church growing because church growth is God's work alone. Jesus is building his church and God is the only one who can change hearts. In saying this, if we want to reach the unreached, we need to grapple with these questions at a human level. There are a few reasons for this:

- Firstly, God's sovereignty doesn't act fatalistically to our cancel out our mandate to obediently make disciples. Therefore, we should put in every effort to do this effectively to the best of ability.
- Secondly, there is an urgency to the great commission since many people face eternity without hope. If we love others, this should move us to do all we can to offer them words of eternal life.
- Thirdly, many of us have uncritically held beliefs about how churches grow (or don't grow) and without exploring the history of church growth we cannot understand our own or other people's biases.

A good place to start to understand our history is with the father of modern church growth, Donald McGavran (born 1917). This is because his influence has been significant and ongoing. McGavran's definition of church growth was this:

'Church growth... delves into how persons and people become genuinely Christian and revolutionize and bless the cultures and populations in the midst of which God has placed them. Church growth arises in theology and biblical faithfulness. It draws heavily on the social sciences because it always occurs in societies. It continually seeks for instances in which God has granted growth and then asks what are the real factors he has blessed to such increase.'⁶



Figure 1: taken from https://www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/31_2_PDFs/IJFM_31_2-McGavranForum.pdf

This emphasis on social sciences had a long legacy on many models of church that we will trace in the following pages. McGavran observed how people 'work' and then based practice around it. This began when he grew up as a missionary kid. He observed the traditional missionary model of his day which was quite *extractionist*. That is, it would set up a hospital or school as a *mission station* and then all the missionaries would congregate and live in a compound on the station. Slowly through their work they would meet individuals and bring them into their station and convert them one by one. These individuals would then by and large be extracted from their community and culture. It was slow and didn't utilise the existing relationships those individuals had to share Christ with others.

So McGavran observed this through his sociological lens, and when he began his own missionary career he experimented with a different approach. The classic McGavran observation was that 'men like to become

⁶ Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970), reprinted 3rd ed., revised and ed. by C. Peter Wagner, 1991, xiv.

Christians without crossing racial, linguistic, or class barriers'.⁷ Thus, McGavran started going out and working with people in their existing networks keeping like people together. Much of this came to be known as the *homogenous unit principle* (HUP). It was never meant to be an end point in itself but a way to reach people effectively.⁸

Before moving into McGavran's practice of HUP, it is important to address some issues with this principle. It is problematic when McGavran lumps class, language and race in one category.⁹ This is because the Bible treats each of these differently. In his excellent talk on the HUP, David Williams helpfully points out that the Bible works against class and socio-economic divisions and it would be wrong to structure churches around these divisions.¹⁰ However, language is different. The fact that the Bible can be translated in real contexts and even the fact it is written in three languages shows language sensitive ministry has a theologically legitimate place. The third category however is complex. That is, race. Racism has no place in the church, yet since race is tied so deeply to language, it is not simple to reach a language group separate to reaching their race. When McGavran lumps these together, it makes it difficult to use the term in a way that honours Scripture. Going forward, it would help to find new language to describe contextualised and language specific ministries. Appendix one reflects further on this. However, the rest of this chapter explores how you can trace these growth ideas through McGavran's ministry and beyond. It helps to see how the term has become loaded with meaning throughout history.

Through experimenting with the HUP in India, McGavran saw around 1000 Indians come to the Lord, but then his life took a different direction. In 1965, he became dean of the school of world missions at *Fuller theological seminary*. Here he decided to try and Americanise his scientific observations from India to help the church in America. Through his vision, but also significantly through those who came after him, like C. Peter Wager, the *American Church growth movement* (CGM) was born. McGavran's *The Bridges of God* (1955) became the magna carta of this movement.¹¹

The CGM saw the rise of the mega church (sometimes also known as attractional models or seeker-sensitive churches) and a rapid output of 'how-to' growth books. Before this, very little had been written about 'organising churches for growth, welcoming guests, or planning an outreach campaign'.¹² Wagner in particular, was the mastermind behind many evangelical pastors like Bill Hybels, Rick Warren and John Maxwell¹³ and walking in the footsteps of its founding father, the CGM was unafraid to apply *social science* to see growth. In particular, they relied heavily on the sociology gleaned from business models. Things became professionalised and churches did everything they could to be attractive and pleasant experiences. They were centralised around professionals, especially for evangelism where individuals were instilled with an 'invite' mentality. People were encouraged to invite people in and then leave the rest to those who were more qualified.

⁷ Donald Anderson McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, 198.

⁸ David Williams, "Reflecting on the Homogenous Unit Principle" (2016) <https://genevapush.com/resources/reflecting-on-the-homogenous-unit-principle/>

⁹ Williams, "Reflecting"

¹⁰ Williams, "Reflecting"

¹¹ Gary L. McIntosh, "The life and ministry of Donald A. McGavran" (2015)

<https://www.churchgrowthnetwork.com/freebies2/2015/3/13/the-life-and-ministry-of-donald-a-mcgavran>.

¹² Stetzer, Ed "The evolution of Church growth, church health and the Missional church: An overview of the church growth movement from its missional roots", available May 4, 2021 from <https://www.christianitytoday.com/assets/10231.pdf>

¹³ Soong-Chan Rah, "New forms of evangelical leadership" in *Religious Leadership: a reference handbook*. (ed. Sharon Henderson Callahan. California: Sage, 2013), 727.

Over time, the criticisms grew. The focus on sociological and business models led to a fatigue over a 'methodological mania' that over-promised and under-delivered.¹⁴ Another criticism was that they were *too homogenous*. In essence, as America became more culturally diverse, people felt the CGM used McGavran's HUP in a way that didn't reach those outside a quite specific demographic. The criticism was that they only reached white, middle-class Americans. One article summarises,

'The gurus of the megachurch explosion were church-growth consultants, who endorsed the "homogenous unit principles": people like to worship with people who are similar to them – in age, wealth and race. Hybels, while denying intentional exclusivity, says that "in the early days, we were all young, white, affluent, college-educated suburbanised, and we all understood each other. When we reached out to our friends, it became self-reinforcing.'¹⁵

It's very difficult to be culturally diverse if there is a critical mass that represents one dominant group. It's also very hard to be culturally diverse if you want church to be a pleasant consumer experience because different cultures have different ideas of what is 'pleasant'. That's why if you use HUP with an attractional, centralised model you tend to be limited to reaching a narrower demographic.

Today many churches and church plants in Australia are influenced (although with their own distinct flavour) by the CGM. Examples of this include, structuring and staffing churches based on the 5Ms from Rick Warren, fostering an invite culture, creating different services for specific demographics, being centralised and relying on highly trained professionals rather than lay preachers, teachers or evangelists. This is a little ironic, since homogenous church plants are quite out of vogue, yet the HUP is still influencing many of our frameworks through CGM influences. The two approaches may have more inherited similarities than we realise.

Interestingly, although the CGM used McGavran's HUP and love of sociology, in other ways it was radically different from its founding father's approach. Some argue this was because Wagner took the CGM in a different direction by emphasising megachurches.¹⁶ Mega churches are centralised and extractionist missional models. This was precisely what McGavran reacted against to begin with. He worked against people coming in to a centralised body and being disconnected from their social networks. New growth models picked up on this and decided to try a more decentralised approach where people went out into communities rather than drawing individuals in to one centralised body. One example is missional communities. Many postmodern young evangelicals jumped into this new approach and some well-known examples are *The Austin Stone* and *Soma Communities*.¹⁷ Many missional community resources can be found at the *Verge* network.¹⁸

This approach often utilises small groups or churches coupled with a more decentralised approach that aims to go out and meet people in common spaces they shared. They are less professionalised and emphasize more *all member* ministry. Like the CGM they are also influenced by McGavran in terms of HUP but they use this to go out in smaller groups to reach more smaller minority communities that would otherwise be left out.

¹⁴ Ed Stezter, 'What's the deal with the church growth movement? Part 3: Don't forget the good.' *Christianity today*, 2012, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2012/october/whats-deal-with-church-growth-movement--part-3-dont.html>

¹⁵ David Van Biema, "Can Megachurches Bridge the racial divide?" *Time* Jan 11, 2010, <http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,1950943-2,00.html>

¹⁶ Frank Walter Schattner, "Sustainability within Church planting movements in East Asia" (doctorate for partial fulfilment of missiology doctorate presented to Biola University, 2013), Available May 4, 2021 at <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/588ada483a0411af1ab3e7ca/t/58b5aace8419c2e130b45b6d/1488300765470/Schattner%2C%C2%A0Frank+Walter%2C+Sustainability+within+Church+Planting+Movements+in+East+Asia.pdf>, 50.

¹⁷ Matt Gladd, "Missional Church vs. Church Growth", 2010, <https://thatshouldgain.wordpress.com/2010/08/19/missional-church-vs-church-growth/>

¹⁸ <https://www.vergenetwork.org>

These churches are more intentional about getting to know communities, engaging with those communities and growing churches that 'look different from community to community'.¹⁹ The criticism against reaching people relationally through small groups from bigger churches is that they are not effective in growing because they are small and have fewer resources. Larger churches look at all member ministry as a part of an ecosystem. Most people serve in more specialised ministries as part of a bigger organism that they argue is more effective overall. Both have their benefits, but it's much harder to pull the latter off if your community doesn't speak the same language.

While all this has been going on in the western context, in the global south, an approach that is similar in some ways (and different in others) to missional communities had started to take off in global south. It is often known as *disciple making movements* (DMM). The term DMM is related to and overlaps with *church planting movements* (CPMs) and *T4T*.

Like missional communities DMMs are decentralised and utilise existing networks. However, the main difference is that while missional communities usually grow and split (like cells), DMMs focus on starting new generations of groups (sometimes called generational growth or multiplication). This type of growth can be exponential and 'explosive'.²⁰

To explain how it works, look at the diagram to the right. The first generation on top is called *generation zero* or the *catalyst group*. They seek to reach a specific community. They aim to look for *gatekeepers* or *people of peace* who they do *discovery bible studies* with. They do not invite this person into the catalyst group but gather the

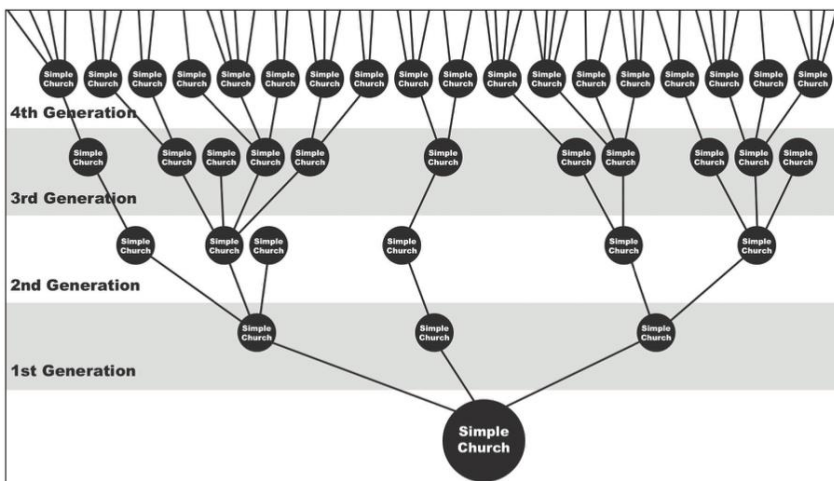
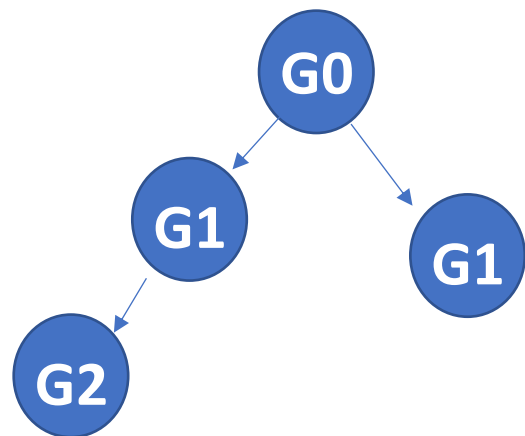


Figure 1.2 — (Derived from Act Beyond - beyond.org) — Illustration of the multiplication of Discovery Groups or Simple Churches to the fourth Generation.

friends and family from the person of peace's network and coach that person to begin a new church (generation one). They train the leader to go and create new churches in the same way, resulting in a second generation of churches.

Technically, a movement is defined as getting to the *fourth* generation of churches *quickly* and *consistently*. You can see how the rapid growth is achieved (see diagram).

¹⁹ Stetzer, "evolution of Church growth", 30-31.

²⁰ Dave DeVries, "Disciplemaking: Addition vs. Multiplication", available May 4, 2021 at <https://missionalchallenge.com/disciplemaking-addition-vs-multiplication/>

The key element is that leadership is indigenous to the demographic that they catalyst group is reaching. Being simple churches, they are easily contextualised and after the second generation tend to take the cultural form of that demographic.

The rapid growth is also promoted by the fact they don't rely on professional clergy, buildings or budgets. Leaders are usually indigenous, bi-vocational lay leaders and simple churches meet in homes.

The DMM phenomenon (in the technical sense of the definition) is relatively new but there have been hundreds them of documented in a short period of time. Garrison was one of the first to research and articulate it clearly in his book *Church Planting Movements* in 1999.²¹ He was assigned to profile the 'growing number of Church Planting Movements that are appearing' and like McGavran, he began with sociological research.²² He visited many movements and observed ten elements²³ and ten common factors²⁴ shared by CPMs (see text box to the right). These can be boiled down to the following key elements:

- 1) rapid reproduction
- 2) growth by multiplication
- 3) indigenous leadership
- 4) churches planting churches (that are indigenous and self-propagating, self-supporting and self-governing from inception)
- 5) occurrences within a people group or interrelated population segment.²⁵

Like McGavran, Garrison utilised sociology to understand DMM church growth. This has implications for those who want to try and think about the movements theologically. Since Garrison, many have worked to explain it theologically and many proponents today argue DMMs are more consistent with a NT church than the traditional western one. However, much of their theological rationales are not developed at length.

Sociologically, it was evident that these movements produce many indigenous leaders which is exactly what we need to thrive as a church in the multi-ethnic community. We need to raise leaders from other cultures and as quickly as we can (responsibly and sustainably). However, because of the key emphasis on utilising networks, DMMs used HUP in ways that could be unhelpful in a multi-ethnic context. That is, in less culturally

Garrison's ten elements:

1. Prayer
2. Abundant gospel sowing
3. Intentional church planting
4. Scriptural authority (even in nonliterate groups)
5. Local leadership
6. Lay leadership
7. Cell or house churches (no church buildings, most cell churches are 10-30 members)
8. Churches planting churches (rather than by missionaries who plant the first ones)
9. Rapid reproduction
10. Healthy churches

Garrison's ten common factors:

1. worship in the heart language
2. evangelism has communal implications (follow family networks – many churches are family units)
3. rapid incorporation of new converts into the life and ministry of the church (they start new churches not join existing ones)
4. passion and fearlessness
5. a price to pay for becoming a Christian (often in difficult settings with persecution)
6. perceived leadership crisis of spiritual vacuum in society
7. on the job training for church leadership
8. leadership authority is decentralised
9. outsiders keep a low profile (missionaries initiate and nurture from a distance to encourage indigeneity)
10. missionaries suffer

²¹ David Garrison, *Church Planting Movements* (Richmond, VA: International Missions Board, 1999).

²² Garrison, *Church Planting Movements*, 1.

²³ Garrison, *Church Planting Movements*, 33-36.

²⁴ Garrison, *Church Planting Movements*, 37-40

²⁵ Schattner, "Sustainability within Church planting movements in East Asia", 306.

diverse places (e.g. rural Africa) as a movement grew generationally it would generally draw from a smaller and smaller network pools resulting in churches becoming very homogenous. This may work (whether it is desirable is another question)²⁶ in a more homogenous community but what about a multi-ethnic context? In a multi-ethnic community the concept of social networks is not neat. While cultural ties are strong, as people live together they can be forced to form networks that cross language and culture (e.g. when their kids go to school or at their workplace). Additionally, in diaspora ministry many people are disconnected from traditional communities. In recent times, DMM missionaries became interested in how DMM's might work in these more complex contexts. They expanded their focus into diaspora ministries and multi-ethnic urban cities. That is, cities like Sydney. While their approach is generally quite negative towards existing church structures in these cities,²⁷ they also realise that it is not as simple as cutting and pasting the type of DMM that works in other contexts. While these missionaries have seen some fruit,²⁸ this is generally seen as new territory.

While DMMs have been critical of the CGM and the global north in general, they also have been the recipients of many criticisms. The main criticism being that they move *too fast* to be sustainable. One study found a significant percentage of churches that were planted were not found after 10 years.²⁹ The heart of the issue of sustainability hinges on DMM's approach to leadership and their formation. Many argue that their leadership doesn't have sufficient theological formation and training to protect the church from heresy and keep churches healthy. DMM agree that everything hinges on good leadership.³⁰ However, in response to these criticisms they argue that it is in fact, western leadership that isn't healthy or sustainable. They believe this is most evidently seen in the general decline of the church in the global north while their movements are growing. DMM's are critical of traditional western theological training. They argue their training focuses too much on knowledge and not enough on obedience. In its place they develop training structures that are more 'just in time', 'obedience-based' and where leaders are chosen 'from their fruit' (that is, evangelistic fruit).

Where does all this lead us? Here are a few concluding reflections to bring this survey of church growth together.

We need more theological reflection

When we talk about church growth, much of the research is heavily based on sociology and anthropology. This means we need more significant theological reflection. However, we also need to realise that the Bible only gives principles and doesn't hold one secret method.

We need to engage with models critically if we want to try and apply them in our context

²⁶ While this seems to be quite a pure version of McGavran's non-extractionist HUP, he didn't intend for churches to stay homogenous over time.

²⁷ For example, one author writes: 'The existing paradigm for the church, for missions, and for evangelism in the Global North was held up for quite a while and has had some great successes, but serious problems are beginning to accumulate. The slow decline of American and European cultures into humanistic worldviews, the inability to make obedient and replicating disciples, business-driven models of community and leadership – all these factors combine to make the task of completing the Great Commission unattainable.' Jerry Trousdale and Glenn S. Sunshine, *The Kingdom Unleashed*, (Murfeesboro, Tennessee: DMM Library, 2018), 363.

²⁸ Some examples include David Brookdryk's work in South Africa (<https://davidbroodryk.org>) and International Project in New York (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hx9O2KSakXM&t=39s>)

²⁹ Schattner, "Sustainability within Church planting movements in East Asia", 9-10.

³⁰ For example, one author says: 'If you want to evaluate a so-called DMM, examine the discipleship and leadership-equipping process. Real and lasting DMMs invest heavily in leadership and training.' David Watson and Paul Watson, *Contagious Disciple Making*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 7.

Related to the above, there is no silver bullet when it comes to church growth. However, that doesn't mean all models and methods are equal and it doesn't matter what you choose. We have to develop the one that best fits the Biblical principles and our sociological context. That process will take both deep theological reflection and in practice, some trial and error.

We need to think harder about HUP in a multi-ethnic urban context

All models engage with HUP in some way. This is probably because, the HUP describes the way people tend to connect relationally. Decentralised approaches (like missional communities or DMMs) seem to allow more room to reach diverse communities rather than centralised churches but in a multi-ethnic society we still need organisations that can cross cultural ties. We need systems that bring different people together but also have language sensitive ministries. This will require some creativity and intentionality.

Leadership formation is the engine room of growth

Leadership and leadership formation are the engine room to church growth. We've seen leadership appointment and development is an area of disagreement. Thus, it is an essential area to explore further. For our context we're particularly interested in raising leaders indigenous to different people groups so we can raise leaders who speak different languages (see p7-8). This is something DMM approaches appear to do rapidly. Additionally, they do this primarily in the context of the global south. Even though Australia is counted as the 'global north' (that is, we have a western heritage), most of our community have global south roots. It is important we learn from what happens in their home contexts. For these reasons, the next chapter will explore leadership in conversation with DMM practitioners.

CHAPTER THREE Big questions: leadership and ecclesiology

The previous chapter argued that the central issue in creating healthy and sustainable churches is leadership and leadership formation. This chapter will explore this further in conversation with DMM practitioners. However, before reaching this, we need to focus first on ecclesiology or what church is. The reasons for starting with ecclesiology are:

- Leadership is a large part of church order, which means it's deeply related to ecclesiology.
- in a multicultural context we need to work with people from different cultures and different forms of church. Therefore, we need to go back to first principles so we can discern what elements of church are just a matter of preference and what are not.
- Critics of the CGM argue that centralised churches don't promote raising indigenous leaders or rapid growth as well as simple churches do. This begs the question of what a church is at its 'simplest' and if in fact it does raise more leaders and lead to more growth.

Ecclesiology

The question of ecclesiology often arises when looking at DMMs. This is because most DMM churches are simple, small house churches. This raises the question of if simple lay lead churches are indeed 'real' churches. In response to this, many DMM authors defend their ecclesiology as both biblical and furthermore, superior to the hierarchical and institutionalised church.

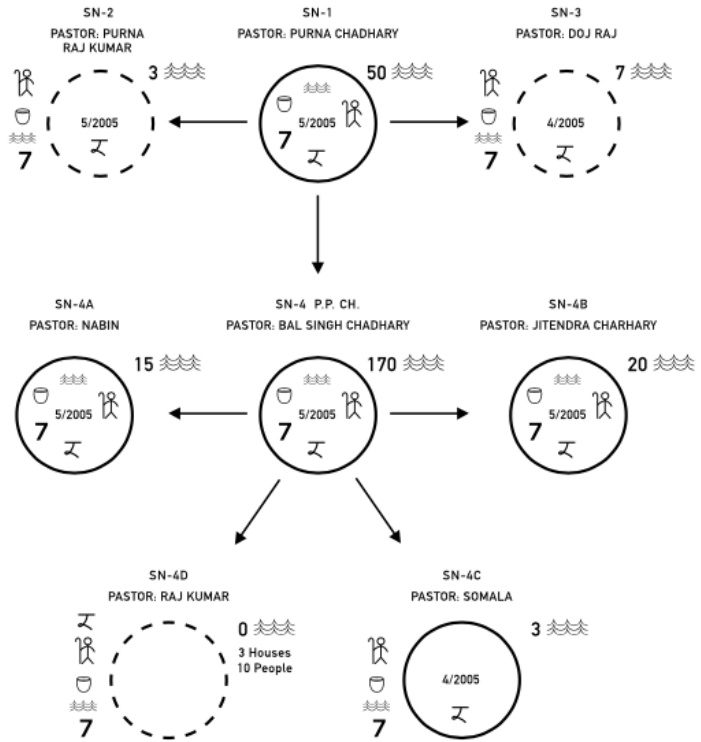
One example of their ecclesiology comes from the well-known book *T4T*. In this book, the authors argue that you need to start with a clear biblical definition of church.³¹ In the attempt to keep their definition and approach simple, they focus on one passage (Acts 2:36-47). They identify a number of characteristics of the church in this passage and argue that they are a good biblical summary of the church. These are:

- Baptism
- Lord's supper
- Worship
- Fellowship
- Prayer
- The Word
- Ministering to others
- Recognised leaders (which they add in from Titus 1:5-9 because it's not really in Acts 2)

They then deduce that any group that does all of these can be identified as a Biblical church that is obedient to the commands of Christ (a big theme in DMMs). That means, even if three people met in a house as long as they do these things it is a legitimate church.

³¹ Ying Kai and Steve Smith, *T4T: a discipleship re-revolution* (Monument, CO: WIGTake Resources, 2011), location 3742.

To represent this reality visually, many churches use *generation mapping*. Each of the above elements are assigned a symbol and over time, leaders guide groups to adopt each of the symbols as they begin to practice each function. When they are regularly practicing all eight functions, they are then classified as a church. The diagram to the left is an example of generational mapping.³² The symbols outside the circle are those a church is yet to adopt and those inside are the ones they are already practicing.



This is a good list of things churches do, but there are a few problems. Firstly, the T4T authors had to import things in from other passages to fill out the picture (leadership) which makes us wonder if anything else important has been missed (does it account for the whole canon of Scripture?). Secondly, it focuses on functions without explaining the story of *why* the church does these things. Knowing the *why* takes us back to first principles and can help us understand why we do each practice and ways to creatively express these truths. Because of this, it's difficult to engage with many DMM definitions of ecclesiology. Their hermeneutic is largely imitative.

A more fruitful approach would be to use the big picture story to try and answer the question, 'what is the church'. Below is an attempt at a big picture approach. The Greek word that is translated as 'church' in the NT is *ekklesia*. *Ekklesia* was just a common first century word used to describe when people got together for a common purpose in an assembly or gathering (for example, Acts 19:32 uses *ekklesia* to describe a community gathering in the city).³³ While the word gathering just has a generic meaning, the Bible fills it out with Christian content to explain what a Biblical gathering is. It does this through a rich story of gathering that you can trace from the OT in the NT. The biblical ideal of *gathering* didn't just appear out of nowhere at Pentecost or in Jesus teaching about 'my church'.³⁴ It starts from the very beginning of the Bible.

In Genesis, God dwelt with Adam and Eve and spoke to them. After the fall, they were scattered as exiles from the garden of Eden. Scattering in judgement is the opposite of gathering and is a repeated pattern in Scripture. However, God chose to rescue humanity and gather them once again. He does this through promises to Abraham to gather to himself a great nation through whom all nations would be blessed. This great nation (Israel) began to grow, but then it fell into slavery in a foreign land (Egypt). Israel called out to God to remember his promises to Abraham. God was faithful to these promises and redeemed them (a pattern to be repeated by

³² Nathan Shank, "Generational Mapping", *Mission Frontiers* (Nov/ Dec, 2012) Available May 4, 2021 at: <https://www.missionfrontiers.org/pdfs/34-6-generational-mapping.pdf>

³³ Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 465.

³⁴ Christopher Green, *The Message of the Church: Assemble the People before Me*. (The Bible speaks today: Bible themes series; Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 19.

Jesus in the NT). After this redemptive event he gathered his people as a great nation at Sinai to make a covenant together. This special gathering was like the very first church and shows us a pattern of gatherings that come after it. That is:

- God is present
- God's people are gathered through God's redemptive work, not their own works
- God's people gathered to hear God's word (Sinai is where he gave Moses the law and entered a covenant with Israel).
- God's people are gathered to respond to God's word with *all of life worship*. The law showed them how they were to follow the law in every aspect of life and live as God's special people set apart from all the nations

In the rest of the OT, this gathering at Sinai was remembered as the 'day of the assembly'. Similar descriptions are used of later OT meetings which showed they shared continuity with this one (e.g. Deut 10:4, Deut 18:16).³⁵ However, over time Israel reduced it's *all of life worship* to simple temple activities (and they didn't even do temple worship very well). They didn't worship God with all their lives or act as his holy people. God repeatedly warned them that he would scatter them in judgement if they kept on this trajectory (Lev 26:33, Deut 4:27, 28:64-65). Israel didn't heed the warning and God scattered them in the exile. As we saw in Genesis, gathering and scattering shows the contrast between drawing people around himself to live for him in worship or casting them away.

As God's people were scattered into exile and the historical kingdom is in decline, God raised up prophets to explain that he hadn't forgotten his promises. He would gather his people to himself once again. Ezekiel 37:21-28 says God will bring his people out of exile and gather them around his king to dwell with God once again. Ezekiel 36:24-32 also promises to gather them and cleanse them with new hearts and spirits so they will follow the law perfectly. This is a beautiful vision of gathering people who will no longer sin and face being scattered, but will dwell securely in God's gathering forever.

Against this rich OT backdrop, Jesus arrives and claims that he will build his church or gathering (Matt 16:18). Just like with the OT pattern, Jesus (God) will be present when people gather in his name (Matt 18:20). But how will Jesus build his church? Just like the OT pattern it is built from a redemptive event. Jesus died and rises to life to defeat sin. He is raised king over everything and people gather to worship him in response.

This redemptive event has many similarities to the OT exodus. However, this is a greater redemptive event because it doesn't just free people from slavery, but from an even bigger problem. The OT showed, that the biggest problem God's people had was sin. Sin was the reason they were scattered and unable to gather around God. Jesus has defeated sin so they no longer will be scattered in judgement. The prophecy of Ezekiel was fulfilled in Him.

In the NT, the pattern set at Sinai remains the same, but we now have a fuller story because we can see how Jesus fulfilled this pattern. For example, in the NT:

- God is present when we gather as Jesus promised. We are united to Christ and have the Holy Spirit.
- We gather in response to redemption. Jesus has freed us from sin so we don't fear being scattered and lost but gather securely around God. This is why the church depends on God's grace.

³⁵ Green, *The Message of the Church*, 66.

- We gather to hear his word. Hebrews 1:1-2 says in the past God spoke through the prophets but in these days through his Son. Jesus, the word of God and we listen to him by carefully reading and obeying the Bible as it is fulfilled in him.
- God's people respond with all of life worship. In the OT people were redeemed for all of life worship but they failed. However, where they failed, Jesus succeeded. In Hebrews 10 it explains that Jesus fulfils the OT sacrificial system through his perfect, once-and-for-all sacrifice. He was the perfect worshipper. And those gathered to him are called to live a life of worship (Rom 12:1-2).

In Revelation it also tells us about the future of this gathering. This significantly shapes what we do now. We see a picture of people from all nations gathered around God in a heavenly temple. There will be no sin or suffering and they will worship God forever. This reality drastically shapes what we do now. When we meet now it is in anticipation or as a taste of that reality. Even the most mundane gathering is part of this glorious reality (Eph 2:5-6, Heb 12:22-24).

In this story we see 'church' is actually God's plan for the whole world. You could say we were created to 'church' (gather). We were created to gather around God and this fulfils the purpose of which we and all of creation was designed for. Who would have thought our humble gathering on a Sunday was a taste of eternity and the fulfilment of all of history?

So then, if that is the reality, what do we need to do?

- **Be gospel people.** We must defend the gospel against any legalism, moralism or mystical reading that strips the story of God of its key message. The church is only gathered as the church through God's work alone. Being able to discern methods of reading the Bible or concepts that erode the gospel is not always simple. More often than not, they are often subtle differences that creep into our vocabulary but end up having significant implications long term. It takes some training and wisdom to be able to protect and lead the church to remain firmly gospel people.
- **Gather around the word.** Teachers must preach and teach and all of us must let the message of Christ dwell richly among us as we teach each other (Col 3:16). We must have a very high view of Scripture and be trained to handle it faithfully and pass it on to others who can do the same.
- **Live in all of life worship.** Worship is not just singing songs. It is submission, obedience and service to Jesus in every aspect of our life. In our churches we need to help one another and provide accountability to each other.
- **Fellowship** is expressing that the gospel has gathered us into one body with one goal. In the NT this gathering is from many nations and our gathering should express this. We create communities where we express all the NT commands to love one another as Christ loved us.
- **Build one another up.** A major NT theme is that we all have different gifts to build each other up towards transformation and maturity in Christ.
- **Seeking to gather to love to Jesus.** The church is the result of the nation's being gathered to God to worship him. This brings glory to God.

This is how following the story of the church can give us a fuller picture of the question 'what is church'. In the example from T4T where it focused on one passage, we might see people devoting themselves to the

apostles teaching and living in community, but we don't really know why we should do this until we look at the big picture. When we start a new church or gathering, we can go back to these first principles to measure what our practice against biblical practices.

This raises the question of what is the best way to express these principles in our context? Could small or simple churches express these biblical principles better? To answer this, we will go through each of the purposes of church above and reflect on how the way we structure ourselves may help or hinder us in doing these.

Be gospel people.

This comes from a sound understanding of biblical theology and doctrine. This is connected to having discerning leadership (see point below).

Gather around the word.

For this to happen we need teachers who teach well and for this to flow on to 'one-another' teaching.

Positively, small churches allow for more interactive and can offer more applied teaching. When we have run small churches, leaders will prepare the passage together during the week. Then at their church they will give a short 10-minute context and talk, followed by a more interactive time explaining the passage and asking questions. Finally, they will land the application and get the group to think about how they will apply it. People have given the feedback that they understand more in this setting and learn more deeply. This is particularly the case with those who have English as a second language. This setting also allows for more 'one-another' type teaching.

The challenge is that it is virtually impossible for all small church leaders to have four-year theological degrees. This raises the question of leadership formation in a small church system and their ability to teach faithfully and protect against false doctrines. A possible way forward in grappling with this is to consider how a few decades ago in Sydney, it was not uncommon for churches to have a group of lay preachers. Many parishes oversaw a group of churches and lay preachers would go and preach at joint churches on a Sunday and the theologically trained pastor would visit each congregation monthly to do communion and teach. This pastor oversaw the training of the preachers. Perhaps a model similar to this would support smaller gatherings. However, small gathering do rely on lay leadership more which has both positive aspects and challenges when it comes to teaching.

Live in all of life worship

A key argument small churches and DMMs make is that small groups provide a better forum to promote all of life obedience. Many DMM groups will spend the last part of their time together making concrete plans to obey the passage and share this with others. They often utilise this for practicing and training too (e.g. how you could share this story with someone). The next week they hold each other accountable to what they committed to doing the week before. Because of these rhythms, in our experience, more people are likely to do evangelism and live more radically for Jesus in these groups rather than larger groups.

Fellowship

Small churches are really like a family. They promote deeper relationships. The danger is that they are to inward looking and can be a little insular. Therefore, you need to think about how to connect people to events with a critical mass. However, overall, it provides the opportunities to go past superficial interactions and help people mature in Christ.

Build one another up

We want people to use their different gifts to build each other up. Small gatherings promote every member ministry. Our experience is everyone is involved in lots of things and develop their gifts faster than in larger structures. In larger structures people tend to be specialised in how they serve (on the kids roster or sound desk) where smaller churches more people involved in more diverse word ministries.

Seeking to gather to lost to Jesus.

Positively, they help people live more missionally. This is mainly through the accountability and training seen above.

Negatively, the challenge is that for religious people, it can be more difficult to come to a church or start a new church in the home setting. Many religious people have the expectation of a priest running a gathering with more formal rituals. While they benefit from interactive gatherings, they can also be quite intimidating and strange.

Returning to the question of if small churches are better at expressing these biblical principles, there isn't a neat answer to this, since different models do different things well. However, there seems to be particular advantages that would be especially beneficial in a multi-ethnic setting. These include helping people with English as a second language to grow deeper in God's word and be better equipped to be obedient in life and mission. However, for this to work the benefits must outweigh the negatives (e.g. the potential to be strange for newcomers).

We should however add that there are also other sociological reasons that small churches might be beneficial. That is, they help raise more leaders by going out to communities and seeking to raise leaders in their networks. For example, if we meet a Vietnamese person and disciple them to share Jesus with their Vietnamese family and friends and then build a small church around this network, we're more likely to raise up leaders who speak Vietnamese. The decentralised nature of DMMs and how they follow networks enables this. Another example, is if we started trying to reach a housing commission area where many people would possibly find other church services difficult to engage with, there are the support structures in place to create a small church in the precinct and begin to raise up leaders who are part of that community. We will look more closely at this in the next section.

So why then not just use small groups (like bible study groups) alongside a large church service? We can use these to raise bible teachers, run training, accountability and do mission together, while pastors oversee the main preaching at the main weekly gathering. This is also a valid option that has worked for places like the Austin stone. It's the approach we began working with (see more in the next chapter). However, many DMM practitioners' frown upon this. They argue that small churches create identity and ownership that small groups

do not. Small groups still have a consumer mentality and rely on the professional minister. Two authors share their experience, saying,

'we made a mistake by calling the new churches "groups". That decision causes most new groups to only last about nine months. But when you call them a church there is a different identity and higher expectations. In our case, the attrition rate went from ninety percent to only about twenty-five percent, when they self-identified as a church. Before, in one year we lost almost 1,000 groups in North America.'³⁶

Additionally, for many people in our community the idea of small groups in addition to church is quite foreign. We struggled to get people to attend and they generally wanted the pastor to come and lead them. That doesn't mean we necessarily need to give up on the idea of small groups, only that if we are to rely on them for maturity there are complexities with that also.

In the end, we believed that there was enough biblical and sociological merit that simple churches were worth trying in our context. However, we had also learnt that the biblical principles push us towards a high quality of teaching and leadership. Therefore, this led to questions like if every simple church leader needed a degree in theology? We will address this in the next section. Furthermore, this was not the only reservations that we had. What about age-appropriate teaching for kids? What about youth who need a critical mass of peers? We will also need to come back to these questions.

Case study: From big to small

In 2010, Francis Chan announced that he was leaving his thriving mega church.³⁷ Criticism and confusion followed but Chan couldn't shake his dissatisfaction.³⁸ He was troubled that everyone depended on one person in a way that didn't reflect every member ministry. He believed that 'we had structured church in a way that stunted people's growth, and the whole body was weaker for it.'³⁹ So Chan left to work in India, Thailand, and China.⁴⁰ There he witnessed things that profoundly changed him. He recounts this story of an underground gathering in China,

'As they shared stories of persecution, I sat in amazement (...) After a while, they asked me why I was so intrigued. I told them the church in America was nothing like this. I can't tell you how embarrassing it was to explain to them that people attend a ninety-minute service once a week in building and that what we call "church." I told them about how people switch churches if they find better teaching, more exciting music, or more robust programs for their kids. As I described church in America, they began to laugh. Not just small chuckles; they were laughing hysterically.'⁴¹

Chan recounts how happy his family was overseas, but he felt the pull to return to the US with a sense of wanting to see change. This time was different. This time he decided to 'go small'. *We Are Church* began in 2013 with a gathering of 20 people in Chan's house with no idea what they would do. From this church a network of simple gatherings in homes began to grow. They decided that each church would have two pastors, who train future pastors for the next church plant.⁴² Each church aims to 'multiply annually to maintain a healthy pressure toward developing leaders and reaching more people'.⁴³

He concludes 'I don't believe we have found *the* solution for the future church, only *a* solution. But the changes we've made have felt more like the New Testament Church than anything I've ever encountered in the

³⁶ Trousdale and Sunshine, *The Kingdom Unleashed*, 199.

³⁷ Jardine Malado "Francis Chan explains decision to leave his thriving megachurch", *The Christian Times* (2017), Available May 4, 2021 at: <http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:sKer2Lb0CaMj;https://www.christiantimes.com/article/francis-chan-explains-decision-to-leave-his-thriving-megachurch/72434.htm&client=safari&hl=en&gl=au&strip=0&vwsrc=0>

³⁸ Kwon, Lillian "Pastors challenge Francis Chan's decision to leave megachurch" *The Christian Post*, (2010), Available May 4 at: <https://www.christianpost.com/news/pastors-question-francis-chans-decision-to-leave-megachurch.html>

³⁹ Francis, Chan, *Letters to the church*, (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2018), 14-15.

⁴⁰ Chan, *Letters to the church*, 18.

⁴¹ Chan, *Letters to the church*, 154.

⁴² Chan, *Letters to the church*, 178.

⁴³ Chan, *Letters to the church*, 179.

States.⁴⁴ He believes that there is a movement gaining greater traction towards simple, smaller gatherings and calls others to think of fresh expressions that God wants to see in our settings that are more biblical and less the norms of culture.⁴⁵

Chan poses the question 'Is it time for change?'⁴⁶ He likens the small church movement to the reformation saying, 'There's part of me that fears becoming overly dramatic, comparing ourselves to Moravians or Reformers. But they were just people! Why not us?'⁴⁷ In response, even with his caveats, it does seem a little grandiose to see yourself as beginning a new reformation and additionally, unfair to paint the protestant church as being in the same theological state as the catholic church 500 years ago. But his experience certainly gives food for thought. Chan has learnt from those in the global south and questioned if perhaps our CGM churches have some blind spots.

We recently spoke to an elder from *We Are Church*. They have grown from 20 in 2013 to around 400 today (2021) which is not as big as many American mega churches grow. They also don't grow generationally but rather like cells splitting which is a slower type of growth. In fact, they don't really value fast growth but rather emphasize on bringing people into small family like communities to evangelise them. When we asked why they haven't grown more in eight years, they said the main thing holding them back is the lack of being able to raise up leaders. While they don't train their leaders in traditional institutions, they still have quite involved processes to recognise and train leaders. And of course, being small, they need more leaders. They haven't found a perfect model but are attempting to try new things and think biblically at the same time.

To return to Chan's question, 'it is time for change?' We feel it is definitely time to address some of the unhelpful baggage from the CGM such as professionalising ministry in way that is detrimental to all member ministry or to challenge consumer mentalities. But is it time to jump into small churches? We don't want to just act in a reactionary way in response thinking small will fix all the things that big created. But coupled with the changing demographic in urban settings, there is slowly mounting evidence that smaller churches could have benefits that bigger churches lack. We need to weigh these up carefully to see if they help to express biblical first principles better. Probably the only way to do that is if people try it while deeply thinking through theology and practice simultaneously. Under God this seems like the right time to experiment with new ideas.

Leadership

Who should lead the church? How do we identify those leaders and what formation do they need? DMMs utilise grass-roots, lay leadership.⁴⁸ Their books are permeated with the stories of illiterate farmers or cleaners who went on to baptise multiple people and grow new churches. This is different to saying all people should just be evangelists. DMMs say they should be church planters and leaders also.

Besides the fact that this multiplies their leadership base rapidly, they have a more specific rationale behind it. As one practitioner explains, 'A new insider is more effective than a highly trained *mature* outsider'.⁴⁹ What does this mean? Firstly, utilising a version of the homogenous unit principle, they argue ordinary people can share Jesus with ordinary people better than professionals.⁵⁰ Secondly, they argue that an *insider* has a whole network of people that they can naturally share Jesus with unlike a professional coming from outside. This is important to grasp if you really want to understand DMMs: networks are key. In fact, this is the key that leads to the rapid generational growth and raising up indigenous leaders. People share Jesus with friends and family and naturally create new churches around them instead of extracting them out to join existing gatherings.

⁴⁴ Chan, *Letters to the church*, 180.

⁴⁵ Chan, *Letters to the church*, 181

⁴⁶ Chan, *Letters to the church*, 189

⁴⁷ Chan, *Letters to the church*, 190

⁴⁸ Verses such as Ephesians 4:11-12 and I Peter 2:4-9 are often used. Ying Kai argues Matthew 28 is for all believers. Most church planters are bi-vocational, unpaid and have no traditional theological education.

⁴⁹ James A. Lilly, *Great commission Disciple making: Growing Disciple rooted in God's word* (USA: Xulon Press, 2017), 51.

⁵⁰ Not everyone agrees with this key DMM principle. In fact, it's the opposite of what CGM churches argue. They argue the professional is better equipped to share Jesus with ordinary people. Therefore, they invite people into church events and leave the rest to the professional.

This then shapes how they train people. It would be against their DNA to then extract people from their church network to go train somewhere for years at a time and then pop them back in somewhere new.⁵¹ Not only does this upset the original network, they also claim that whenever “professionals” are brought in somewhere new it kills momentum. People begin to depend on them and invite their friends to be converted by the professional thus taking ‘power and responsibility away from the common believer.’⁵² They believe this contradicts Ephesians 4:11-16 which says leadership is empowering common believers not taking power away from them. Ephesians 4 says leaders must use gifts to equip others to do ministry, not to do the work for them.

This protection of grass root lay ministry has created a very anti-institution, anti-doctrine, anti-denomination and anti-professional posture in DMMs. However, this posture doesn’t simply mean (as some suggest) they have ‘lowered the bar’ for leadership. Ironically, they have a stringently high view of leadership. In fact, as we said in chapter two, heavy leadership investment is seen as the key way to sustain a DMM.⁵³ Rather they train people in a *different way* to do *different* things. The emphasis is continuous, on-the-job, just-in-time training that is decentralised and easy to replicate. Leaders will regularly meet to train together in a larger network ongoingly. However, the content of their programs is difficult to find so it’s hard to know exactly what kinds of syllabus are used, but we have been told it is part practical and part theological.

How can we engage with all this? Especially considering the rather awkward reality that we are in one of those western countries who are quite unpopular with DMM practitioners. We are one of the countries that have many established churches, denominations, training institutions and the like.

Perhaps a good place to start is with the place of laity in church leadership structures. Then we can move into the question of who should run churches and what kind of training would support this.

The role of laity in Scripture and church history

The reformation grappled with the place of the laity in the church. Due to this, some DMM authors use the reformation as their starting point to highlight the issues they faced. Lily is an example. He says,

‘During the Reformation we got the priesthood of the believer half right, and we seem to be still working on the other half. The half we got right is that we do not need a priest to talk to God. The half we are still working on is that we also do not need a priest in order for God to speak to us.’⁵⁴

That is, they are thankful that the reformation affirmed that we don’t need a priest to *talk to God* which means to mediate for our sins. It affirmed that only Jesus mediates for us, not a system of priests and sacraments. However, DMMs wanted them to go further and argue that it also means we don’t need a priest to *talk to God* but also to *hear God*. That is, to teach us God’s word.

Trousdale and Sunshine look at the example of Luther to highlight this fact. Before Luther, the Roman Catholic church was very institutionalised and clergy dependant. You needed a priest to explain Scripture to you.⁵⁵ However, Luther ‘cherished’ the idea of the priesthood of believers and began to push against this assumption. In terms of understanding the Bible, he said Scripture was clear and you didn’t need a priest to explain it. In fact, he translated it out of Latin into German for common day people to understand and read. This

⁵¹ Lilly, *Great commission disciple making*, 51.

⁵² Trousdale and Sunshine, *The Kingdom Unleashed*, 212.

⁵³ For examples of this see, Watson and Watson, *Contagious disciple making*, Chapter one and Ying Kai and Steve Smith, *T4T*, location 3861.

⁵⁴ Lilly, *Great commission Disciple making*, 37.

⁵⁵ Trousdale and Sunshine, *The Kingdom Unleashed*, chapter 4.

was very radical for his day. However, Luther still thought we needed trained experts to guide people so they didn't go "off-track".⁵⁶ For Lily, Trousdale and Sunshine, this is where he didn't go far enough. They argue that Luther needed to go further by saying we don't need experts to understand Scripture.

This is not because they believe that we don't need teaching. It's because they believe the Holy Spirit working through the Bible is our teacher rather than other human teachers. Lily writes,

'the Holy Spirit working through the Bible is the teacher – not the leader, pastor, or even the participant. That translates into "no teaching or preaching allowed" when a group is studying and discussing the scripture in the Disciple-Making process".⁵⁷

Many DMM's emphasise *Discovery Bible Study* (DBS) for this reason. They promote biblical self-discovery through the Spirit alone. Part of the arguments for using DBS is theological (as seen here) and part pragmatic. That is, it's much easier to rapidly replicate than preaching.

The idea that the Holy Spirit alone being our teacher is not new. In fact, a version of it existed around during the reformation with radical reformers and the 18th century Americans.⁵⁸ Like many DMM proponents, they also wanted the reformation to go further. To explain, we need to take a brief historical survey.

In the past, the early church fathers had a fairly consistent view of scriptures authority. They only held the Bible as the true source of authority but stated that it was to be 'interpreted in and by the church within the context of the *regula fidei* (rule of faith), yet neither the church or the *regula fidei* were considered a second supplementary sources of revelation.⁵⁹ This is in contrast to the two-source concept of tradition that took hold in the middle ages. That is that where tradition is held as a supplementary source of authority. This was the stance of the Roman Catholic church. The reformation returned to tradition I. To summarise:

Tradition 2: both church tradition and scripture are authoritative (catholic church)

Tradition 1: only Scripture is authoritative but read in the context of the *regula fidei* (early church and reformation)

The radical reformers wanted to go further and said there is no real sense in which tradition has any authority. An individual believer only needs the Holy Spirit and Bible. They held a very individualistic view where the bible is read individually not corporately. It moves from *sola scriptura* (tradition 1) to *solo scriptura* (tradition 0).

Tradition 0 has had many reincarnations since. And DMMs are an example of one.

So, should the reformation have gone further in its view of tradition? Should have it have led people to a *tradition 0* position? If so, can we say that we don't need teachers or doctrine (past or present), just the Holy Spirit? Is this what the NT priesthood of believers means? We will do a survey of the biblical material firstly, on the priesthood of believers and secondly, on teaching to try and answer this.

In the OT, Israel needed priests as mediators between them and God. Priests would offer sacrifices on their behalf to atone for their sins to make them right with God. However, this idea develops dramatically in the NT. In the NT, Jesus fulfilled the mediating work of the OT priests. Hebrews 10:11-12 says:

⁵⁶ Trousdale and Sunshine, *The Kingdom Unleashed*, chapter 4.

⁵⁷ Lily, *Great commission Disciple making*, 13.

⁵⁸ Justin Taylor, "Three views in Church history on the relationship between tradition and scripture" *The Gospel Coalition* (2016): Available May 10, 2021 at <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/sola-scripture-three-views-in-church-history-on-the-relationship-between-tradition-and-scripture/>

⁵⁹ Taylor, "Three views"

¹¹And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.¹² But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God'

This passage explains that the OT sacrifices were limited in effectiveness and had to be offered constantly. In reality, their purpose was actually to foreshadow (point to) Jesus and show the fullness and finality of his priestly work in his death and resurrection. Sin was fully dealt with. Therefore, he is our mediator now because we don't need the ongoing mediation of priests.

Hebrews 10:19-21 then draws out an important implication of Jesus priestly work. It says that now we can enter the holy places in the temple. These were places only priests could go in the Old Testament. Since we now all have God's Spirit in us we don't need someone to mediate with God on our behalf. 1 Peter 2:4-9 beautifully describes God's people as a royal and holy priesthood.

We can see that the bible affirms the priesthood of all believers in the sense that we don't need priests (other than Jesus) to mediate for our sins. This is what Lily means by not needing a priest to talk to God *from us*, but what about from God *to us*? That is, not needing one to teach and explain the word? The main NT concept of priesthood of believers focuses on mediation, not teaching. It seems Trousdale, Sunshine and Lily have perhaps packed too much into the concept of the priesthood of believers than the Bible does. However, it is a related concept. To engage with it, we need to look a little wider and ask where and how the Bible talks about teaching. We have to start by looking for NT categories that address teaching and teaching models.

T4T gives a different example of how DMM approach the topic of teaching to the one above. They use an imitative approach which they derive from examining Paul in Acts.⁶⁰ They argue that Paul didn't just teach a small group for many years but moved quickly from place to place. He trusted the Spirit to be the teacher shown by the fact that he didn't stay anywhere. T4T says Paul taught them how to listen to the Spirit rather than him and then moved on. They point out most models today are not like this, saying,

'Unfortunately, much of the discipleship methodology people use depends heavily on them being the teacher, disciple or trainer. They assume this pattern from looking at the life of Christ who spent much time with the twelve apostles.'⁶¹

That is, T4T believes most teaching models come from imitating Jesus who spent a large amount of time with a small group. But they argue Paul was different. When faced with two competing models (Jesus or Paul) they believe you follow Paul because he is a post-Pentecost model. This is because it was different in Jesus time since the Spirit had not come and therefore, we should follow Paul not Jesus. Now the Spirit is here, our presence is not nearly as essential, in fact, it slows growth because you are always 'doomed to plodding human-dependant growth'.⁶²

There are a few things to say in response. Firstly, most discipleship methods I am familiar with come from the Bible as a whole not an imitative reading of Christ.⁶³ Secondly, T4T seems to be quite selective in their reading of Paul. Paul did move around but when Paul left churches he appointed elders (e.g. Acts 14:23) and his letters show how we sought to develop those leaders by teaching them and reminding them of what he had first

⁶⁰ Ying Kai and Steve Smith, *T4T*, location 1136.

⁶¹ Ying Kai and Steve Smith, *T4T*, location 1136.

⁶² Ying Kai and Steve Smith, *T4T*, location 1165.

⁶³ For example, for a more whole Bible approach see Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, *The Vine Project: Shaping your ministry culture around disciple making*, (Sydney: Matthias media, 2016), p41-141.

taught them. Particularly in the pastoral epistles, leaders are given many teaching responsibilities over others. For example,

- They must have good character (e.g. 1 Tim 3:1-13, Titus 1:5-9)
- They must be able to teach and pass on sound teaching (e.g. 2 Tim 1:14, 2:1-2, 3:15, 4:1-2).
- They must protect the gospel and stop false teachers (e.g. 1 Tim 3-11, 4:6, 2 Tim 2:14-3:9, 4:3-5)

This is most certainly more than simply teaching others to listen to the Spirit. This again relates to the three views of tradition outlined in this chapter.

Furthermore, there was some kind of order to this leadership in God's household. Often people were appointed into special offices. Throughout the NT leaders are often called elders, deacons or bishops. The word *elder* comes from the Greek word *presbu/teroß* (*presbuteros*). *Presbuteros* literally meant an older person or an official such as those in synagogues or local councils. Likewise, *deacon* and *bishop* are also common Greek words that simply mean *servant/minister* or *overseer*. They were not loaded with the technical meanings that they have today but in the early church they very quickly became the structure known as the 'threefold-order.' In this, a presbyter oversaw a church with deacons to assist him and bishops to oversee a group of churches. While the three-fold order was not strictly Biblical, it seemed a good way to order the church to be the kind of church the NT calls it to be by setting people apart for important pastoral responsibilities.

This raises the question of why the NT focuses on raising teachers if we all have the Holy Spirit and Scripture is clear? We need to understand this the way the Bible does. The Bible is clear because God is both powerful and willing to reveal himself to us. Yet, this doesn't seem to mean we don't need others to explain it to us. For example, in Acts 8:30-31, the Ethiopian is found reading Isaiah 53 and asks Philip how he can understand if no one explains it to him. Since scripture is clear, it is logically possible to pick up the Bible with no knowledge of anything and read it and then come to trust Jesus as Lord; but this rarely happens. Humans are relational beings and we learn in community together from each other as we submit to God's word. The regular biblical pattern is that we learn from other Christians how to approach and read the Bible faithfully. These includes both Christians today and those throughout history from whom we can still learn from through their writings that have been preserved. While leaders (at any level) should *never* give the impression that people need them to understand the Bible, they can help and do have some authority.

People are quick to point out that leaders are fallible because they disagree. Again, if we look closely at the Bible we can see it accounts for this reality. One reason might be that we are trying to force the Bible to say something about a topic on which it is actually silent. We can be certain that the Bible is clear on the necessities of salvation and holy living (2 Tim 3:14-17) but beyond this we will not know everything that we wish to know. When the Bible is silent on a topic, we need to allow for different views and Christian freedom. Another reason for disagreements is because of sin. We can read a passage wrongly, but that is not because the Bible is unclear but because of *our* blindness to see its clarity. In short, the problem is with us, not the Bible. This is why even leaders and teachers need humility. Therefore, we can see teachers are necessary but not infallible. We should appoint them to dedicate time and great effort to humbly learn how to faithfully teach the gospel and protect against heresy, yet always hold them accountable to God's word as a community.

So far we've seen Scripture values appointing teachers with special responsibilities. However, it doesn't present these teachers as infallible. Also, and importantly, it doesn't present teachers as being meant to be the only ones who should teach. The congregation are not meant to be passive recipients of teaching. Rather it is

meant to shape and empower their discipling activities. The NT is packed full of *one-another* commands. As they listen to teaching, they are to respond by actively allowing the word of God is means to dwell richly among them (Col 3:16). Our gatherings must support one-another teaching in the way they are structured.

To return to the question, do we need teachers for God to speak *to us*? The biblical evidence fits better with Luther's approach (tradition 1) than the radical reformers or DMM views of teaching here (tradition 0). That is, we fully affirm that only Jesus is our mediator, that Scripture is clear and want to enable people to disciple one another in the word without a priest. However, simultaneously the NT still affirms the need for teachers to be appointed to aid this process. Such leaders are certainly not professionals but we do need to equip and train leaders to teach in a way that is recognised.

This brings us to the next question of who should these leaders and teachers be? They should not be professionals, but can they be anyone? Above we saw they should have the following recognised responsibilities. They must:

- (1) have proven godly character
- (2) understand God words deeply and handle it faithfully
- (3) lead others to disciple others

Many models influenced by the CGM don't focus on this third aspect well which has led to a professionalisation of ministry. In DMMs however, they emphasise the third aspect a lot. That is, those who lead groups to Christ and lead them to lead others to Christ are chosen through their 'fruit' (fruit in this context means evangelistic fruit). However, they are less likely to focus on theological formation apart from reading the Bible on the job because of their view of the priesthood of all believers that we have seen above.

So how can we best raise, identify and recognise leaders who can do all three things? The answer to this is complex. Current research argues that good leadership formation is something that needs many different elements (theological formation, coaching, collaborative think tanks and lots of practice). Furthermore, in our context that formation needs to be accessible in a wide range for different languages and socio-economic demographics. As we said in the first chapter, a third of the population was born overseas and face significant financial, educational, language and cultural barriers to studying at a theological college.

What does leadership training look like in this context? Perhaps we can offer smaller churches connected with larger hubs. These churches can regularly meet together but the bulk of their time is in separate gatherings. The larger hub can have a degree level trained minister who has studied God's word deeply to oversee and train the smaller church elders. Part of that training would be theology and part missional principles. This structure balances out centralised and decentralised elements. There is more flexibility for those who exhibit leadership criteria but cannot access a theological degree, yet also boundaries to help them remain faithful teachers. Furthermore, there is more flexibility to have smaller churches in numerous languages but still have accountability and unity within a multicultural body. In this scenario, not everyone would necessarily need a degree to lead a simple church or congregation. This is different to those churches who have another congregation ran in another language. Often they are led by an assistant minister who works quite autonomously from the rector. This hub structure is one that relies more on collaboration with a shared vision and goal (multiplying small churches) while ensuring there is appropriate ongoing training.

Network

We explored the idea of a hub church and began to think of it like a network. The network would ensure church leaders had the theological training and practical support (coaching and missional training) to try and multiply their church. Other benefits of a network could be that it could offer:

- leadership collaborative think-tanks to learn from one another and empower others well
- more specialised theological training in multi-lingual and lower socio-economic contexts
- a critical mass for kids and youth programs (that is, bigger weekly gatherings in addition to smaller church gatherings)
- regular multicultural gatherings to work against HUP

This would not mean that each of the smaller churches or congregations would not be complete in themselves. Every simple church can be a legitimate church that can fulfil the main purposes of church. However, it means they benefit from sharing resources and partnering with other churches.

This chapter has shown some of our journey grappling with questions of ecclesiology and leadership. With each answer a few more questions popped up but we believed that there were too many beneficial possibilities to turn back. We started grabbing threads and trying to tentatively form a way forward. Before we worked on the practice we formed some core values. These would be the basis of the different types of practice we tried. The next chapter looks at those core values.

CHAPTER FOUR Where we landed: our values

Those first years were quite a journey. It's a bit cliché to say this, but it felt like the further we went, the less we knew. However, despite this slightly unsettling fact (its mighty good that God is in control!), we also began to find rhythms or values that we wanted to commit to as we went forward. We knew we weren't looking for one tried and tested silver bullet method, but rather we wanted to articulate values we were committed to instead. Because we began with focusing on values more than strategy, this meant we could move with a certain flexibility in what we did but also with direction of who we were. We came up with eleven values that we were committed to.

However, before we go through those eleven values, we want to explore something else that has become a large part of who we are. It's not so much a formal value but more a *vibe* that we've tried to nurture. That is, the vibe of innovation. Innovation is how we can take those eleven values and find creative ways to bring them into being. Carving new paths is exciting, but always bumpy. At its most difficult, innovation means cultivating the humility and strength to face obstacles and failures and use them to grow.

Innovation

When we look at the wider context of ministry in Sydney Anglicanism, the topic of raising ministers has been on the agenda in recent times. Two years ago at Synod, the standing committee presented a report to try and encourage ordination.⁶⁴ They noted parishes were becoming harder to fill and that this 'situation is urgent'.⁶⁵ On social media this 'situation' became known as the 'minister drought' and began some fairly vigorous discussions.⁶⁶ Yet all this didn't come as a huge shock to everyone. In fact, back in 2012 the ACR predicted this very situation. They had done research that had predicted a shortage of rectors coming in the next 10-15 years.⁶⁷ Additionally, it followed trends seen in many countries in the global north.

The ACR put out a publication in 2020 to reflecting on this 'recruitment problem'.⁶⁸ It suggested that we need to admit and own the fact we have a recruiting problem and then explore some reasons why.⁶⁹ It also suggested that perhaps we need to 'preach and live out sacrificial discipleship in our churches'⁷⁰ and also change the rhetoric to emphasize the urgency of millions not knowing Jesus. How can we cultivate these things? In an increasingly globalised world and rapidly changing city, we might need to be more innovative in the way we try to raise leaders and sacrificial disciples. This is especially the case when we are faced with the obstacles we explored in chapter one.

Many people realise this. Many people have been praying and looking for groups of what they call 'pioneers' to try new things. For some this raises the question of why you would need pioneers in Christian ministry? What's new about the gospel? What has changed in the Bible? Of course, nothing has changed. We

⁶⁴ Mike Leite, "The recruitment problem and sacrificial discipleship" in *The mission before us: Why Sydney Anglican ministry*, ed. Mike Leite (Camperdown: Australian Church Record, 2020), 31.

⁶⁵ Leite, "The Recruitment problem", 31.

⁶⁶ For example, The Pastors heart, "The ministry drought and what to do about it? – with Phillip Jensen" (July 7, 2020) available May 10, 2021 at: <https://www.thepastorsheart.net/podcast/theministerdrought>

⁶⁷ Leite, "The Recruitment problem", 31.

⁶⁸ Leite, "The Recruitment problem", 32.

⁶⁹ Our big recruiters for ministry are from churches outside Sydney (EV on the central coast and HBC in Newcastle).

⁷⁰ Leite, "The Recruitment problem", 32.

don't need innovation in a new gospel message. But every generation is responsible to bring those truths to bear in their own time.

Sometimes we think we are the first people to face a crisis in the history of the church. But it's been the same since the very first church. Many men and women before us have stood where we are. They have stood, looking for pioneers. A few hundred years ago England sent a bunch of criminals to a hot and dusty continent called Australia. The church in England thought they should probably send a minister with them. The list of applicants probably wasn't too long, but Richard Johnson put his hand up for the job. The church got a board together to approve his appointment. One board member was John Newton, writer of the famous hymn *amazing grace*. Together the board agreed God was calling Johnson and they would send him for this difficult ministry. Soon after another English minister wrote to Newton saying that he was filled 'with a thousand thanks that the Lord did not call him to that cross'.⁷¹ Newton came back with a burn that was brilliant. He replied that some men are called to such things. Those men have a call and spirit of a missionary to give up everything and put themselves in the Lords hands to sink or swim. As for the man who was thankful this wasn't him, Newton said, 'you're appointment is to smoke your pipe quietly at home, to preach, and to lecture your pupils; you are not cut out for a missionary.'⁷²

While some sat back in their comfy home and smoked their pipe, those like Johnson took risks and faced hardship. Through this evangelicalism came to Australia and set the tone for the diocese many of us appreciate today. We should be thankful for those who took risks that we benefit from today.

Every generation needs pioneers in one way or another. This is nothing new. At the same time, our generation needs them even more. Never in history has there been such a big degree of change in a short period of time. Particularly with technology and globalisation. Sydney is nothing like 50 years ago. It's a complex organism made up of many different strands of cultural networks that are all intertwining with each other like a big knot. We need to venture out into those complex networks and equip people to reach them and raise leaders among them. This is our generation and our responsibility. But just like in other generations, being a pioneer is not particularly popular. Its more comfortable to stay where we are. It's understandable. Pioneers are not known for having it easy.

Think of the example of Earnest Shackleton. He was the famous Antarctic explorer. His time there wasn't like some R&R in a snow chalet sipping hot chocolate. It was hard core. First his boat was crushed by ice. They waited for months hoping it would be ok when the ice melted, but it sunk. So they camped on a big piece of ice floating in the ocean hoping it would go the right way. But then the ice broke and they had to get into life boats and after five harrowing days at sea the exhausted, frostbitten men landed on solid ground for the first time in almost 500 days. And that's just the start of the story. It's crazy. That's pioneering.

Pioneers in the Bible aren't much different. Imagine if Acts said Paul took off to Corinth, built a mega church and lived a Roman villa comfortably for the rest of his days being loved and respected by all in the city. It doesn't say that. He was thrown out of every city, stoned, imprisoned and deserted. Pioneers face hardship.

All this might make you want to stay home and smoke your pipe and thank the Lord 1000 times you weren't sent into multi-ethnic urban ministry. But we're convicted that we have been. And to be honest, despite

⁷¹ Ed Loane, "The history of Sydney Diocese and today's responsibility" in *The mission before us: Why Sydney Anglican ministry*, ed. Mike Leite (Camperdown: Australian Church Record, 2020), 45-46.

⁷² Loane, "The history of Sydney Diocese and today's responsibility" 45-46.

challenges, the blessings of multi-ethnic ministry are abundant. We've been blessed by God giving us people from all walks and tongues and experiences to learn from and share the words of eternal life with. It makes life very rich.

We've never claimed to be naturally innovative or pioneering because we're strong. If you know us, you'll know that there isn't much that's impressive about us. We do it because Jesus is our pioneer. Hebrews speaks of Jesus as the pioneer and perfecter of faith (Heb 12:2). In this book, persevering when things are tough is a massive theme and it tells us that you don't persevere by just trying harder, but by fixing your eyes on Jesus. Jesus knows suffering more than any of us. However, he isn't just our model, through his suffering on the cross and resurrection he started something new. He took people from death in sin to new life. He pioneers in us a new life that will be perfected in the final day (Hebrews 12:2). From start to end he is the anchor of our faith.

And it's the object of our faith that makes it strong. I mean you can believe in anything. Have you seen those bumper stickers 'I believe in fairies'? Sadly, it doesn't matter how sincerely you believe in fairies, it's not strategic to put your trust in them because they're not the all-powerful rulers of the universe. But if your faith is in Jesus bringing people to new life and keeping us strong in him to the end, then it doesn't matter what lies ahead. In God's time it will happen. Pioneers don't rise because they are impressive or strong. History is full of flawed missionaries. They rise because of Jesus is the pioneer and perfecter of faith.

This is why we value innovation. We rely on Jesus and try to reach our unique generation under God. Even if this means we end up standing on an iceberg watching our ship sink we'll keep trying. This means being OK with risk (not reckless risk for the sake of risk of course), OK with failure and brave enough to keep trying to learn from mistakes and persevere.

Our 11 values

This all brings us to our 11 values. These are things we try and build regular rhythms around. They have come from a mixture of reflecting on Scripture, our experience and missional models we have researched (basically the first three chapters of this book).

Our values are divided into three sections.

The first section concerns foundational elements that show we depend on God, are faithful to preaching the gospel and emphasize all member ministry. These drive everything.

The second section looks at evangelism. It is a decentralised and relational approach. We begin with catalyst groups who are outsiders trying to connect with a new community. Usually this will be through a community program (e.g. driving lessons, playgroup, food pantry etc.) where we share Jesus widely looking for people who respond. They particularly look for people who are perceived leaders in the networks they are trying to connect with. After this, the strategy is to coach those contacts to work with their existing relationships and networks.

The third section looks at church planting around new churches. It aims for a more decentralised approach that follows networks (where possible) and trains people to train others through accountability and reproducible materials.

There are many different ways to express these values but we try to let them drive the programs or structures we tentatively put in place. We come back to this document often to assess things. The next chapter will tell more of our story of how we tried to structure these values in our practice.

| Our 11 values | |
|--|--|
| Foundations | |
| Prayerful | It's is God's mission and we depend on Him in every way. |
| Gospel-driven | We <i>never assume</i> the gospel. As a rule, we preach the gospel every time we meet. We work hard to explain that truth clearly. |
| The Great Commission is for <i>all</i> believers | It is not the great suggestion, but a command for <i>all</i> Christians to make disciples. We are responsible for equipping <i>all</i> the saints for this task. |
| Share Christ widely | |
| Conspicuous lives | We seek spiritual conversations in everyday life and people can clearly recognise us as followers of Jesus. |
| Find felt needs | As we <i>declare</i> and <i>demonstrate</i> the gospel. We identify and assist creatively with special practical needs various communities have. This is done in a way that leads to a <i>continuous stream</i> of contacts. |
| Search for 'spiritually open' people | We sow seeds <i>widely</i> through gospel presentations or DBS to identify those ready to hear more. |
| Multiplication (generational growth) | |
| Utilizing existing networks | When meeting with a spiritually open person, ask if they have any social or familial groups that might join you. Meeting with an individual is good, but it is preferable where possible, to keep people connected in their networks so we can help them reach them. |
| Faithful and user friendly Bible Study format | All material must be reproducible, transferable and repetitive <i>in any context</i> . It must also equip people to handle God's word faithfully. |
| Accountable obedience to Scripture | We set concrete goals to <i>obey</i> and <i>share</i> God's word with others. We take time to practice and plan how we will do this. Churches offer timely accountability to these goals. |
| Raises indigenous leaders | Leaders are identified by their faithfulness and fruit. They are trained on the job. We don't remove them from their networks but keep them where they are to reach those around them. |
| Gathered together to worship under a network | We want to multiply small churches as leaders are raised with the support of the network. |

CHAPTER FIVE Practice: what ministry looks like for us now

From pre-COVID to post-COVID

We began to dabble with how to create ministry structures around these values in 2018. In the first few years of our time at Chester Hill we had used CGM type models to grow and now had an existing centralised attractational gathering. We left that gathering as it was but added small missional communities who met mid-week and tried to apply the 11 values to them. We saw some exciting things happen. For example, in the first 6 months we went from 2 people reading with non-Christians to 17. We started seeing second generation growth and new leaders began emerging from surprising places. But we still had a foot in both worlds and knew we were just failing to try and work out how to do two different paradigms at once – we were stuck between CGM and DMM paradigms and basically doing both badly.

We became convicted that we should release some more simpler churches from the main gathering to have more freedom to try express the principles in more decentralised model. In particular, to reach Muslims. We began thinking, planning and praying. We had done a bit of thinking but weren't ready to launch anything quite yet. Then something quite unexpected happened. A pandemic.

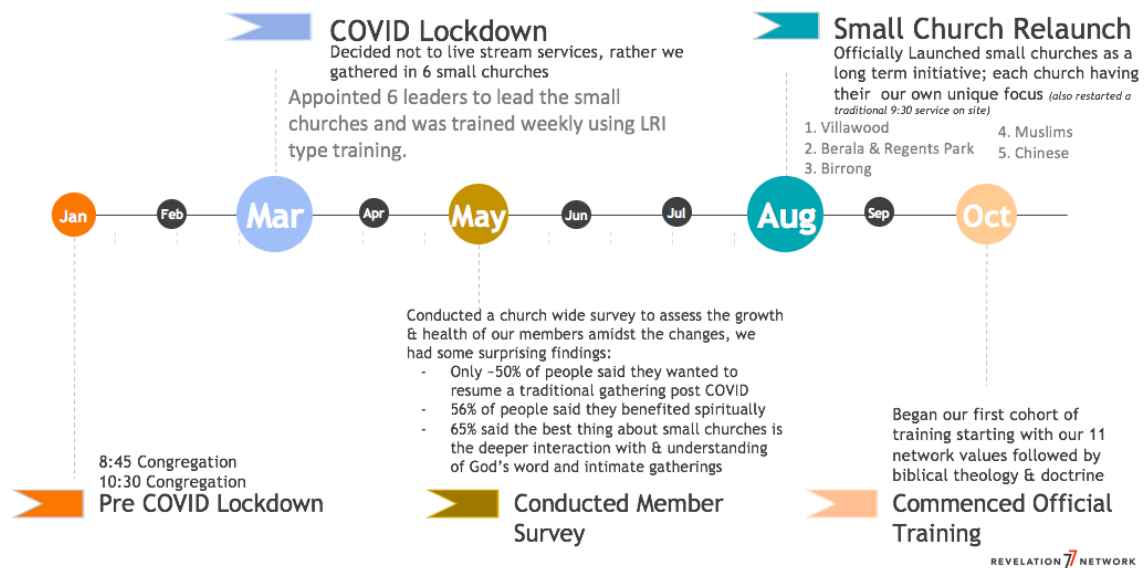
It was March 2020 and we were entering into the destructive reign of COVID-19. Things were rapidly beginning to lock down. Supermarkets had empty shelves where pasta, rice, soap and toilet paper used to be stocked. Frazzled teachers were frantically sending home packs to transition kids to online learning. Churches were frantically learning new technology to move services online. All the new year plans rapidly being thrown out the window. Adrenaline was high.

One March evening our leadership team gathered while they still could. Sitting around a lounge room, they stayed late into the night. It was decided that because we were so multi-ethnic we wouldn't livestream our services. Instead we split into six small churches and appointed six leaders to oversee them. All the leaders would have a zoom meeting each week to go through the exegetical principles and prepare a passage together and then they would lead is over zoom with their small church interactively. Instead of releasing one or two small churches, we now had six.

As restrictions began to lift we wondered what the next steps would be. 2020 was an unpredictable year with restrictions constantly being tightened and loosened. It was hard to plan and we didn't want to just be at the mercy of COVID-19. Small gatherings would be easier to continue. It was easy to meet in homes where there were less restrictions and legalities. And easier to have online options for vulnerable groups. In May we surveyed the church with some surprising results.

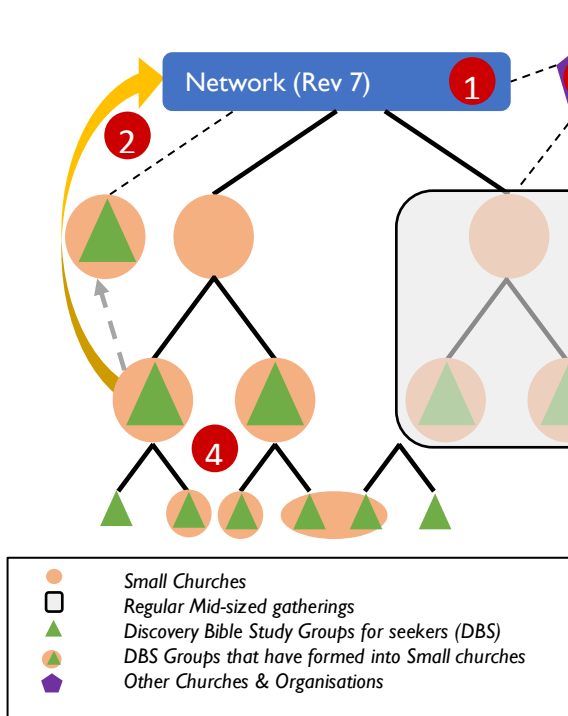
- Less than 50% said they wanted to resume a traditional gathering post COVID
- 56% said they benefited spiritually
- 65% said the best thing about small church was a deeper interaction with and understanding of God's word in more intimate gatherings.

Faced with that feedback, the leadership team decided to commit to keeping the small church experiment going for another year or so. In August five churches were launched, each with a special missional focus (some a nationality, some a religious group, some a geographic group). In October we began a training school for all elders and potential leaders.



We launched these under a network called the Revelation 7 network. The purpose of Revelation 7 was to hold the more homogenous churches together and share resources such as kids, youth, evangelistic ministries and training. It would also provide a body to oversee leadership in the churches. The diagram below tries to represent what the relationship looks like. We will explain each element below.

How does the network work operationally?



- 1 Governance & Finance**
 - The network leadership is responsible for ensuring that these small churches have the required governing frameworks in place & implemented e.g. safe ministry, insurance, financial governance.
- 2 Training & Equipping**
 - All leaders of a SC (regardless of generation) will require training in theological formation, preaching and teaching, church planting. They also need coaching and collaborative think tanks.
 - We may utilise existing courses such as PTC but some will be custom built.
- 3 Relationship with other churches & organisations**
 - If other churches believe that this strategy would better reach a particular people group they are welcome to send an individual or team to begin catalysing a small church within our network under our leadership.
 - We can provide learning, training & equipping opportunities for churches who are interested.
- 4 How does Multiplication work?**
 - Multiplication happens as groups of new believers form and are discipled. Wherever possible a leader indigenous to this group will be raised to lead it and it will become a new church.

What does each small church look like?

Each small church has a weekly church gathering and once a month they meet with other small churches for an 'all-in' (see the rectangle symbol for mid-size gatherings). The monthly all-in is an easy place to invite religious people and experience multi-ethnic community (since the smaller groups are more homogenous).

A normal weekly service can meet wherever the church chooses. A lounge room, park or hall. Their services use a three-thirds rhythm of 'stop-listen-go'.

- Stop: prayer, pastoral care, worship and accountability to mission
- Listen: combination of preaching and an interactive study of the Bible
- Go: think about how to obediently live out this part of the Bible in your life and evangelism

The reason for this is to help people hear God's word clearly and respond with whole of life worship (obedience).

What about kids and youth in small churches?

The network has employed a children's minister. She works with a representative in each small church, providing them with training and materials to teach the kids in their small church. Each church teaches its kids differently depending on age, number and preference of those in the group. In some groups, the whole church does a half hr kids program together to begin and then the kids go out to play while they do adult church. Others run a parallel program during the church. Others run it before the church (those with kids come early and teach them together). As long as children are being disciplined, the church is free to decide what form that takes. In the monthly 'all in' there is a program for all the kids run during the service.

Kids experience wonderful intergenerational ministry in their small church and are disciplined well, however, we know kids also need their peers. For this reason, in addition to the weekly services, we have a weekly kids club called *Marvel*. Children from all *Revelation 7* churches are strongly encouraged to come to this. It is run at a local school on a Friday afternoon and many non-churched or non-Christian parents send their kids. However, it teaches explicitly Christian material. Thus, its dual purpose is evangelism and also maturing kids with a wider group of peers. Parents from small churches are able to connect with many non-churched parents through *Marvel*. Churches often work together through ministries like *Marvel* such as our kid's holiday clubs and Music and Playtime programs.

The network has also employed a youth minister. Youth need a critical mass of peers even more than children. Therefore, each week there is youth group and youth from across the network are strongly encouraged to come. Our youth group is very multicultural.

Who leads small churches?

Each church has at least one elder, but we aim to train up a plurality of elders where possible as some will go on to lead other churches. These elders are required to participate ongoingly in the network training (see next section).

A question you might have is *how does someone become an elder?* Just because your group multiplies and another elder is needed, this doesn't mean anyone will automatically become an elder. People become elders when they feel ready for the commitment and those around them feel agree that they are ready. Those in the network and small churches are able to see each other's life and doctrine clearly and they should decide this together. An elder must have the three 'c's – character, conviction and competency.

- **Character** of an elder such as that which is described in I Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:5-9.
- Have gospel **convictions** to lead and protect the church from false teaching. This means have completed (or made a significantly start) at least one year or the equivalent of approved theological study⁷³ and has completed certain elements of our leadership training such as the network values.
- Have church planting **competencies**. That is being able to understand leadership strategies and to coach, teach and train people to be a church planting church.

What training and equipping does the network provide?

Many organisations have adopted the 70-20-10 framework to develop leaders (see diagram⁷⁴).

We have adopted this current practice in our network. This means, to train leaders:

- *70% is given to practical experience*
People learn by trying new skills (e.g. like running a DBS or teaching something) or to practically solve a problem (e.g. trying a few different things to get a group forming around a DBS).
- *20% of our time is spent on social learning*
This happens in two main ways. Firstly, through coaching relationships. Every elder (and those leading DBS groups) have a coach they meet with regularly. Secondly, through collaborative think tanks. All the leaders regularly get together to share problems, successes and resources with each other. A team approach is taken to working through problems together.
- *10% of their time is spend on formal training*
That is, more centralised training like workshops and courses. This happens at leaders training most weeks during school terms. Often in training leaders will learn how to exegete the passage they are doing at church that week (many churches follow the same preaching roster). Doctrine, ethics and church planting subjects are also studied. This is done ongoingly. Over time we want to offer this training in multiple languages as the need is required.



⁷³ This study needs to be at a reformed evangelical theological institution where the leader has studied exegesis, biblical theology and doctrine.

⁷⁴ 70-20-10 Live available May 10, 2021 at https://www.702010live.com/about-the-framework?r_done=1

CHAPTER SIX Next steps

The previous chapters have shared our journey into multi-ethnic ministry. We hope that we have been able to clearly articulate our passion to raise multi-ethnic leaders to help build a truly multi-ethnic church. We don't just want to do this so minority groups have a voice in the church, but also so that we can reach our diverse communities who don't know Jesus. This will be virtually impossible if we don't have leaders from other nations. In the end, that is our ultimate passion and what drives all we do – seeing people from all nations bow before Jesus and find true hope in him.

Perhaps you feel convicted that this is something you would like to invest in or be a part of. There are three ways you can partner with us.



Prayer: Part of our core values is to commit to extraordinary prayer. We are looking for people to join us in praying that God will reach the nations in Sydney. Please subscribe to our newsletter on the bottom of our homepage at <https://revelation7.network/about-us/>



Financial: We work with many migrants who can't give much money to support the work that Rev 7 does. Additionally, many people groups (such as Muslims) will take a long time to reach. In many ways, we are similar to a missionary organisation in the sense that we rely on the giving of others. You can give financially at <https://revelation7.network/give/>



Visit or join us: We love visitors and to connect with people interested in possibly joining the network. Please contact us at <https://revelation7.network/join-us/> if you would like to:

- Visit a small church
- Join a small church

Also, if you already have an existing small church or are interested in an internship, student ministry or leadership position please contact us.

Alternatively, you can call Paul Webb on 0422844380

APPENDIX ONE Theological reflections and application of the *Homogenous Unit Principle (HUP)*

Page 9 addressed some issues of lumping class, language and race in one principle.⁷⁵ It was said that the Bible treats each differently. It is not really biblical or good to treat someone differently based on their income or skin colour. In fact, its contrary to scripture. However, linguistically specific ministry is different. This paper examines this.

The Bible doesn't explicitly talk about linguistically specific ministry but it gives us ethical principles to inform and shape the discussion about it. I believe these principles do two things. Firstly, they *pull us towards* developing more linguistically homogenous ministries, training programs and resources. Secondly, they *pull us away* from them.

In terms of why we linguistically homogenous ministries are important; it all began at creation. God, unlike us, is all seeing and knowing. In contrast, humans are embodied. They are restricted to a time and place meaning each person experiences and makes sense of the world differently. From the moment breath was breathed into our lungs, we became diverse. Of course, depending on our contexts, some are more diverse than others. My husband and I are both English-speaking Australian Anglos, yet because the experiences that have shaped us are so varied, I something think even we are from different planets! However, that contrast is clearly more significant between me and someone who has grown up in rural Russia and speaks no English.

Our differences come from the way God made us before the fall and we know he created humans good. Therefore, differences do not primarily come from sin (although they can be sinful and we will address that later). We are embodied, so therefore different. Of course, we should note, that we're not completely different. There are many things that bond humans together. Firstly, we're made in God's image. Secondly, we're all totally deprave. Thirdly, we desperately need Jesus. Beyond those profound similarities, there's a lot of variation.

The heart of this difference is language. We learn about this at the tower of Babel (Gen 11). Humanity tried to reach heaven and make a name for themselves rather than God's. So, God confuses their language as an act of mercy to curtail this evil plan, but also, as an act of judgement. So, does the Bible see different languages as a good or bad thing? At Pentecost (Acts 2) everyone speaks and understands foreign languages to show that God has inaugurated a new humanity who can reach heaven through Jesus. The miscommunication issue is resolved, but interestingly, the different languages remain. In fact, they seem to still remain even in heaven (Rev 7:9) where a unified, but not *uniform*, people gathered around God. It cannot be said that language is purely a good or bad thing, but something about humanity that God works through in his salvation plan to teach different things.

David Williams argues that its best to understand language in a loose way. It's not just English or Arabic but also like how, for example, children have a different language.⁷⁶ That's why they need age-appropriate ministries and resources to "speak their language". Or another example; last summer my daughters had surf lessons and their instructor was telling them how surfing changes the way you live and speak. Thankfully the

⁷⁵ Williams, "Reflecting"

⁷⁶ Williams, "Reflecting"

groms didn't come home stoked they carved a gnarly wave (I probably wrote that wrong, because I don't understand surf lingo, but you get the idea). A loose understanding of language is helpful because it shows that language is complex. Intelligible communication is not always as simple as directly translating wooden truths,⁷⁷ however, it is also a spectrum where some 'languages' are more difficult to translate than others.

The good news for us is that the gospel can be translated. This marks the Bible as different to the Quran. The incarnation is the supreme example where Jesus translated to us who God is by becoming like us. Also, in Acts 17 Paul translates ideas for his Greek audience into their context. In fact, elsewhere he explains he becomes all things to all men so that some might be saved (1 Cor 9:19-23).

Now this translation is a serious business. It's difficult to do well, but since God's word is the means that gathers and grows his church, then is crucial people can access it intelligibly. Thus, churches should be very concerned that people are able to access this in a way that they can understand, digest and obey.

So that's why we need elements of linguistically homogenous approaches. But what's the push back? The main way people argue from scripture for the need to push against the HUP is *teleological*. If we look forward to the future we see that heaven is a diverse group gathered for together for one purpose; worshipping God eternally. If that is what the heavenly church is, then it is appropriate the local gathering should express that where possible. Obviously expecting all nations to gather here on earth is a little over-realised and harder for those in Cronulla to express than say, in Fairfield. But where you can seek it, it makes sense.

The second big reason, is Scripture's emphasis on Christian unity. Right from Genesis 12 - the beginning of God's redemptive plan - he promised to bless the nations through Abraham. Throughout the OT a few outsiders are ingrafted in and there are hints and prophecies throughout the OT picking up on this idea of blessing all nations. However, it isn't really until Jesus that we see this all come together. Through Jesus, Jews and Gentiles are made into a new unified humanity (Ephesians 2). While this theme in Scripture mainly focuses on 'Jew-Gentile' relations and doesn't fit neatly over say 'Vietnamese-Arabic' or 'Chinese-Anglo', it goes to say that all Gentiles are part of this one new body in Christ. Being in Christ is the primary identity to which all other things submit.

Paul often taught that the church was a diverse place where people were to express unity. He'd often use the body image (e.g. 1 Cor 12) to show distinction coupled with interdependence that was meant to work together for a unified purpose. Again, this is not map neatly on to discussions about language groups, as these passages are primarily about gifts, but again it overlaps. Part of our giftings can include cultural insights of differently language groups. It's important to recognise that Paul's argument here depends on us being diverse, not uniform. Unity means we keep those things that make us distinctive, not lose them. The part that unifies us is that we work for a common goal, that is building each other up and to see God glorified.

In short, God made the church to need each other. In practice, we have seen this wisdom played out in our local church. We learn from those who are different to us as they point out our blind spots. We rely on each other to connect with those we struggle to reach. For example, we had a Chinese lady show up to playgroup with minimal conversational English. In God's kindness, we have a diverse group running playtime, so I could find

⁷⁷ This probably also depends on what you're doing. Although there is debate, I'd probably lean to being quite careful and more wooden if I was perhaps a bible translator, but in preaching and everyday conversations, I'd use translation in a much more flexible sense. The main thing I am trying to convey is that translation is a broader and more complex issue than it may first appear.

a believer to speak Chinese with her. We need each other to reach culturally diverse communities. Diverse churches are strong churches.

Lastly, crossing cultures is an enormous demonstration of costly love. It's uncomfortable. Many times, we've had people with little English over for lunch and have spent time fumbling over google translate for a while and then shared some photos and then wondered what we were going to talk about for the next hour. It's hard work and awkward for all involved but, in our world where racism is rampant, lovingly reaching out to those different to us and taking the time to really understand them shows self-giving not self-justification. Racism is a big problem. This means while some reasons to split up such as for the sake of linguistic accessibility are legitimate, others such as being comfortable, are not. Racism is a sin. It says that my way of seeing the world is superior and it puts others down to prove it. In diverse communities there is much racism. I've seen it in our community but even more sadly, our church and even my own heart. All people are wired to self-protect and justify how they see the world, so when we see people who are different we must intentionally develop the generous and humble posture of a learner, holding off judgement until we have spent a long time listening and understanding.

So, to bring it all together. The Bible's take on linguistically homogenous ministry is not two-dimensional. It drives us to both homogenous and multi-ethnic gatherings. Finding a way to express the different facets of these biblical truths in our churches will take wisdom, risks and practice.

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