

A Blended Ecology

A diversity
of churches and
leaders working
together





In 2012, the Association of Baptist Churches in NSW & ACT agreed together, with God's enabling, that the legacy we would like to leave the next generation would be a tripling of the size of our movement to 1000 healthy churches by 2050.

THE 'GEN1K GOAL'

It is obvious that the achievement of such a bold vision requires an exponential number of churches planted over the next 30 years. The vision is for every NSW & ACT Baptist church to be linked to a church planting project in some way, either directly or indirectly.

Three strategic questions are immediately apparent:

- Where will we plant these churches?
- What sort of churches will they be?
- Who will lead them?

A bold vision requires an equally bold and informed strategy. How we answer these questions and the degree to which we are able to be flexible, innovative, and wise in the implication of our strategy will significantly impact our ability to achieve the goal God has set before us.

Where will we plant these churches?

By mapping and categorising all the existing churches in our movement and comparing this to projected population growth the Gen1K Mission team have ranked Local Government Areas (LGA's) according to church planting priority.

New churches are needed almost everywhere, but there are many LGA's that require a strategic and concerted church planting effort if we are to keep up with population growth. This is particularly vital when we consider that population growth is the single strongest predictor of church growth and church plant success.

What sort of churches will they be?

The speed of change in pluralistic post-COVID 21st Century Australia means that any single church planting strategy is likely to be outdated before it is fully implemented and what works in one context will struggle in another.

Diversity is key. Diversity is our strategy. A blended-ecology of church plants in which a variety of models and approaches work side by side is a strategic imperative in our context.

Who will lead them?

Diverse churches require diverse leaders. If we are to meet the Gen1K goal of 1000 healthy churches in a generation we will need to raise up, train, and empower a plurality of gifted leaders and leadership teams

If we are to succeed in a blended-ecology approach to church planting we will need diverse and perhaps unexpected leaders.

A one-size-fits-all approach will not work. As we expand our vision of what a church plant can look like we also need to expand our vision of who can be a successful church planter.

Adaptability and a willingness to contextualise are key to the global expansion of the Christian faith. In the Bible we do not see a single model of church or leadership but rather a plurality of context driven approaches. The Apostle Paul changes his approach, his preaching, and even the leadership structures of the churches he plants to fit with the specific context of the cities in which he plants. This is one of the great strengths of our faith. It is not culturally bound but universal in scope.

Every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord.

With this goal ahead of us we strive to plant a variety of churches that can reach a variety of people across our state and territory.

In particular, we have pinpointed four broad models of church that we believe should be strategically planted in various LGA's across NSW/ACT.

These are: Simple Churches, Regional Churches, Neighbourhood Churches, and Resource Churches.

It is important to note that these do not represent particular styles of church or approaches to how a church is planted. Throughout this document church "model" refers to the way a church organises itself: its structures, processes, organising principles, budgets, etc.

This impacts on strategy around growth and reproduction, ministry and mission, but does not necessarily determine a particular approach or style.

Four Key Models in Outline

1

Simple Churches

Simple churches have no paid staff or property. They usually consist of a relatively small number of members, though often have a significantly larger number of non-members connected to their community. They are highly relational and flexible in their structures and approach. They can exist everywhere and anywhere being based around a variety of coalescing factors such as: a particular area, a workplace, a community group, a theme or purpose, a project or interest.

2

Neighbourhood Churches

Neighbourhood churches are local churches with a strong sense of place. They often have a single Pastor (maybe part-time) with a broad range of pastoral, administrative, and leadership responsibilities. They are often built around a parish model of church, incarnationally ministering to the felt needs of their neighbourhood. They tend to be more relational, localised, and organic in their structures.

3

Regional Churches

Regional churches are often bigger churches that draw congregants from a large geographical area. As a result they tend to be more program driven in their ministry and mission and have a more heavily systematised, organised, and hierarchical structure. They are usually led by teams with specialist ministry focuses and a Lead Pastor who serves primarily in a team leadership, vision, and as a figurehead. If not built around programs these churches do often centre the majority of their ministry around a particular physical hub.

4

Resource Churches

Resource churches can be either a Regional church or a Neighbourhood church (sometimes with a connected network of simple churches). What defines them in regards to these other models is: they are planted in strategic

LGA's with large or growing populations, they are built around and committed to multiplication, they are committed to leadership development, they are in active partnership with their region and open to networks and partnerships,

they dedicate a significant proportion of their time and budget towards leadership development and multiplication, and they set aside significant proportions of their time, money, people, physical and intellectual resources towards other and future churches.

More on Church Models

Models are tools not goals

No church fits a model but they do apply models and in the real world there are no pure models. We need to think strategically about our church models, particularly when it comes to church planting. But there are questions to ask before we ask the 'what model?' question.

It is important to consider values before thinking about models.

It is important to consider leadership and calling before thinking about models.

It is important to consider context before thinking about models.

Models don't guarantee results

There is little to no reliable evidence that any particular church model is more missionally effective than another. But there is evidence that a diversity of church models and approaches is an effective strategy in a quickly changing 21st Century context. However, each model brings with it different challenges to sustainability and success.

Context trumps models

There is no one size all approach to church planting. What works in one place struggles to thrive in another. Undoubtedly, this is partly the work of the Spirit but we must not underestimate the impact of context. Context-driven churches are often thriving churches.

There are no easy answers to questions of context, leadership, or sustainability – however research shows that there are some re-occurring opportunities and threats common to each of these particular models.





1

Simple Church

Context

Top 3 Contextual Opportunities:

- Across the world Simple Churches have proven effective in large apartment complexes and in very high density areas.
- Simple Churches have the ability to be hyper-flexible and innovative giving this model a strategic advantage amidst heavily de-church and un-churched populations.
- This model can counteract the decentralising of community in some contexts and instead exist along various social and community networks rather than being tied to a specific location.

Top 3 Contextual Threats

- Being largely relationally based Simple Churches can struggle to thrive in transient communities if they are not in the habit of rapid multiplication and leadership development.
- Similarly, Simple Churches can struggle to thrive in communities that are very established with stagnant populations - particularly if they are not seen to add value to the local community.
- Simple Churches have proven very effective amongst minority cultures but are also at risk of reinforcing cultural and ethnic divides.



Leadership

Top 3 Leadership Opportunities:

- Simple Churches are often lay led and are great opportunities for empowering diverse and unexpected leaders.
- Simple Churches are a uniquely opportune context for leadership development and practical training.
- Simple Churches provide opportunities for agile and innovative leaders to experiment.

Top 3 Leadership Threats:

- Simple Church leaders can often feel isolated and unsupported. This highlights the importance of networked relationships between churches.
- Simple Churches can be heavily impacted by relational dynamics. Family systems theory could prove useful in this context.
- Simple Churches in time-poor contexts can often struggle for leadership as leaders usually have another vocation.

Finance/Sustainability

Top 3 Financial/Sustainability Opportunities:

- Individual Simple Churches are low/no cost.
- This allows Simple Churches to utilise their giving for other creative, innovative, or pressing purposes.
- This also means that the financial risk of multiplication is low/moot.

Top 3 Financial/Sustainability Risks

- Unpaid leadership can prove unsustainable in the long run. The strength of a Simple Church can often flux with the capacity and availability of leadership.
- Governance, Child Safety, and OH&S requirements can be burdensome for Simple Churches that are not networked.
- Simple churches can fail to multiply, thrive, or survive, if not connected with Resource Church or network. This is vital as the life-span of a Simple Church is often shorter than that of other models.

2

Neighbourhood Church



Context

Top 3 Contextual Opportunities:

- Neighbourhood Churches are ideal for localised communities: towns, satellite suburbs, suburbs with a village feel, city centres, local hubs.
- A strong commitment to place can help break down cultural, ethnic, and religious barriers (though there is a risk of reinforcing divides, particularly in fairly mono-cultural contexts).
- Due to their more relational structures Neighbourhood Churches have the capacity to include people with diverse views. This is one reason they have proved effective in highly pluralistic or secular contexts and in more socially progressive contexts.

Top 3 Contextual Threats

- Neighbourhood Churches can struggle in communities with little to no relationship with their geographical location. A mobile population can undermine the neighbourhood focus.
- Neighbourhood Churches can be disproportionately impacted by local change such as gentrification or immigration. There is a risk that Neighbourhood Churches end up reflecting a community that no longer exists.
- Neighbourhood churches can struggle in areas that lack population growth and end up competing with other churches in their area.



Leadership

Top 3 Leadership Opportunities:

- Neighbourhood Churches are good opportunities for those who wish to pursue co-vocational ministry.
- Neighbourhood Churches are good for all-rounders with a broad and diverse skill set and gifting.
- Neighbourhood Churches thrive with leaders who are committed to the local community.

Top 3 Leadership Threats:

- Solo (and co-vocational) pastoring can be draining on leadership. Particularly considering the organic structures and broad work requirements of a Neighbourhood Church leader.
- Neighbourhood Church pastors often report feeling unprepared for the breadth of work required in this model.
- Leadership development can be deprioritised due to more pressing constraints on solo, part-time pastors.

Finance/Sustainability

Top 3 Financial/Sustainability Opportunities:

- Due to their relational and organic structures Neighbourhood Churches can be more sustainable in time-poor communities.
- Neighbourhood Churches can survive with smaller budgets, particularly when the Pastor is co-vocational.
- Neighbourhood Churches are often as sustainable as their communities are - they can sometimes survive in areas where population growth is slow if church commitment is strong and established and the population is relatively wealthy. However, this would serve as a challenge for church plants.

Top 3 Financial/Sustainability Risks

- Sustainability is often difficult for Neighbourhood Churches. They seem to be either too small and/or have to maintain too much staff and property to be sustainable. This is exacerbated when a church relies solely on tithe as an income source.
- Neighbourhood Church Pastors often report being too busy maintaining the structures of the church to give sufficient time to ministry and mission.
- Neighbourhood Churches are more heavily impacted by contextual realities and community change than larger or smaller churches. As a result Neighbourhood Churches are prone to plateau or decline but lack the resources to facilitate necessary change at the scale required.



3

Regional Church

Context

Top 3 Contextual Opportunities:

- Regional Churches thrive in growth corridors whether there is or isn't a city centre – particularly areas where the majority of growth is families with children.
- Often effective in middle to upper class suburban contexts, particularly when there is a large proportion of Christians in the population or significant internal/international immigration from Bible Belt areas/countries.
- A more programmed approach to ministry and mission has proven particularly successful in suburban areas and areas with a large commuting workforce – including regional and rural contexts.

Top 3 Contextual Threats

- Regional Churches can struggle to maintain or achieve sustainable sizes in areas that are not seeing significant population growth.
- Regional Churches are more heavily impacted by inter-church competition and migration between churches – particularly if planted in areas with diminishing church attendance among the population.
- Regional Churches can struggle in more progressive, left-leaning, and urban contexts. However, this is often mitigated by gentrification (Middle/Upper Class suburban to urban migration) and the willingness of members to commute. Additionally, these contexts can increase the impact of the above two points.



Leadership

Top 3 Leadership Opportunities:

- A variety of leadership styles can thrive in this model and there is the possibility of employing specialised staff with specific skill sets.
- The size and program driven nature of Regional Churches can often provide opportunities for the development of young leaders. Many Regional Churches report that the majority of their staff have been raised up from within the church.
- Current leadership training and formation is often focussed on developing leaders for this model of church.

Top 3 Leadership Threats:

- A failure to develop good systems and structures can result in leadership burn out in planting a Regional Church.
- There is the potential for leadership to become disconnected with their context when the church attracts membership from a broad area. This can result in a failure to adapt to cultural change.
- Regional Churches will struggle to grow and multiply if pastors are not committed to leadership development. Regional Churches require leaders who lead and empower leaders.

Finance/Sustainability

Top 3 Financial/Sustainability Opportunities:

- The large size (and often middle class context) of Regional Churches means that this model is often financially sustainable on tithe alone.
- Drawing congregants from a larger geographical area can minimise the impact of contextual realities and change.
- Successful regional churches often have successful youth and children programs which positively impacts long term church sustainability.

Top 3 Financial/Sustainability Risks

- Regional Churches can be heavily impacted by population change. A stagnant or shrinking population, secularisation of the population, and aging populations will mean that Regional Churches have to increasingly compete with other churches in order to maintain a sustainable size.
- Regional Churches often require significant financial investment to start or are likely to fail to reach a sustainable size. This means a strong relationship with external benefactors or a planting church is required in the first few years.
- The structures of Regional Churches can be resistant to change and innovation and there is evidence that this adds to the attrition rate of churches planted using this model.



4

Resource Churches

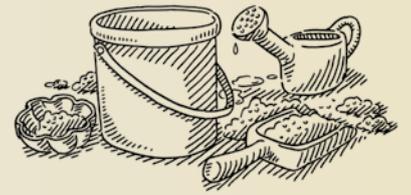
Context

Top 3 Contextual Opportunities:

- Resource Churches thrive in areas with growing and transient populations and tend to be successful in city centre areas where diversity, creativity, and the temporality of the culture create an advantage in pursuing innovation, leadership development, and sending capacity.
- Opportunities are maximised when Resource churches are planted in existing community/economic hubs and growth areas.
- Opportunities are maximised when Resource churches are in a networked relationship with other churches (including simple church networks).

Top 3 Contextual Threats

- Evidence from the Church of England suggests that Resource Churches can struggle in rural, regional, or low socio-economic areas.
- Resource Churches can have severe unforeseen negative impacts on other local churches while their own positive impact on the local area is comparable to existing churches. This is particularly the case when pursuing a regional model and “plant big” approach and given significant seed funding, staffing, and launch team members by a mother church or denomination. This necessitates a strategic approach to church plant location.
- Resource churches can struggle to achieve their end without significant member size and financial resources. These can all be heavily impacted by context. Successful Resource Churches in the UK often operate at a regional level and can be disconnected from or antagonistic to their particular context. The long term impact of this is untested.



Leadership

Top 3 Leadership Opportunities:

- Resource Churches need to prioritise leadership development. This requires leaders who train leaders.
- High accountability, low control leadership is necessary to maximise the potential of Resource Churches in leadership development. This has implications on both leadership style and ecclesiology.
- Resource Churches are likely to attract leaders and high capacity individuals.

Top 3 Leadership Threats:

- The long term well-being of resource church leaders has proven problematic in the UK - it is a challenging job with high expectations and many barriers to success.
- It is an emotionally and relationally draining role to be repeatedly raising up and sending out leaders.
- Leaders who are not supported to allow for risk, experimentation, innovation, and failure will struggle to thrive in a Resource Church. This relates directly to financial implications of sustainability and resourcing innovation.

Finance/Sustainability

Top 3 Financial/Sustainability Opportunities:

- The broader kingdom focussed vision of a Resource Church can inspire member giving.
- A focus on innovation and leadership development is likely to create new and alternative funding models.
- Experimentation with the base model (Regional, Neighbourhood, Simple) may result in a resource church model that is sustainable in a variety of contexts.

Top 3 Financial/Sustainability Risks

- The mandates around use of funds and members for multiplication can significantly impact the financial sustainability of Resource Churches particularly in contexts where this may already be difficult.
- Issues of sustainability can lead to a failure of a resource church to achieve their goals around multiplication and resourcing. Funding requirements can undermine mission.
- Being able to absorb failure and encourage risk requires a higher level of sustainability than might be achievable without significant external funding.

From the Field

In 2017 Narara Valley Baptist Church (NVBC) began to discern that God was calling them to plant churches. To do this they recognised the need to invest more intentionally into discipleship and leadership development. So, they connected with Crossway Baptist and were one of the pilot groups for Building a Discipling Culture (BDC).

By March 2019 NVBC launched their first church plant, Greenhouse Church in Long Jetty, and started the Garden Network that has a vision to:

- See new churches planted
- Experience collaborative learning
- Generously share resources for the common good

The Garden Network represents ‘a blended ecology’ of churches with no prescribed size, structure or form. Each church in the network is fully autonomous and they see their diversity as a reflection of God’s missional wisdom.

In 2020 the Garden Network planted their 3rd church, Meeting Ground, which is a multiplying Simple Church to reach the “misfits”.

Over 3 years a church of 400 people multiplied into a network 600 people, with 3 different expressions of what it means to be the church on the Central Coast.

Throughout the State and Territory these smaller collaborative networks are developing around 4Rs:

- Relationship
- Resourcing
- Raising leaders
- Reproduction



A bold vision requires an equally bold and informed strategy. How we answer these questions and the degree to which we are able to be flexible, innovative, and wise in the implication of our strategy will significantly impact our ability to achieve the goal God has set before us.



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