Vineyard Meets Emerging Missional Churches

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Introduction

In October 1987 a team of people from the USA led by John Wimber arrived in Canberra to lead a conference on “Signs and Wonders and Church Growth.” Most of the group were from the Anaheim Vineyard Christian Fellowship in Los Angeles; a church that had been experiencing incredible growth in membership and laid claim to seeing God consistently at work in healings and miracles. This was the first time Vineyard ministries had visited Australia.

By the time the Vineyard had made it to Australian shores it had already become well known in other countries such as England, Canada and New Zealand. It had made a large impact in England, particularly amongst members and leaders of Anglican churches. The relaxed style of Wimber and his team, intimate and accessible worship songs, and teaching and ministry on healing and signs and wonders were embraced by many Christians, particularly from
mainstream traditional churches. But there were also many voices of opposition both overseas and in Australia.

Although the conferences included much in the way of teaching on the missional aspect of church life it was the gathered church functions that were strongly embraced. Vineyard styles of church helped people find a new freedom in form and expression. Also the national church context that the Vineyard was received into in Australia in its foundational years was very much centred on the Sunday life of church. It was inevitable that it was the corporate and gathered aspects of church life that would take centre stage for those seeking to do church the Vineyard way.
Vineyard Churches Timeline

- **1974 First Vineyard Church**
  - Ken and Joanie Gulliksen plant a Calvary Chapel at Costa Mesa, California which eventually is named Vineyard.

- **1977 Wimber joins Calvary Chapel**
  - Wimber and 40 members from his home group become the Calvary Chapel of Yorba Linda.

- **1982 Wimber and church join Vineyard, VCF Anaheim begins.**
  - Due to the “charismatic” emphasis at Calvary Chapel Yorba Linda the church is asked to leave the Calvary movement. They join Kenn Gulliksen’s Vineyard churches.

- **1985 Vineyard Churches USA commences as movement**

- **1988 First Vineyard Conference in Australia**
  - Altogether Wimber and his teams make five visits between 1988 and 1994 to do conferences.

- **1995 First Australian Vineyards released**
  - 11 churches were released in February including Cabramatta (then known as South West Sydney). Pine Rivers commenced in November

- **1997 John Wimber dies**

- **1999 Network Vineyard commences**
  - Network Vineyard is planted out of Beachway Vineyard (Perth)

- **2003 Vineyard Churches released as movement**
  - The Association of Vineyard Churches Australia is released from the USA Vineyard.
  - The release of *The Shaping of Things to Come* and the profile of the EMC in Australia begin to impact Vineyard churches in Australia.
In the same year (2003) that the Australian Vineyard churches were released from Vineyard-USA to be governed by an Australian leadership a major change was starting to take place in the national church scene. In that year Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch released a book entitled The Shaping of Things to Come. It encapsulated the message of the Emerging Missional Church (EMC) that it was time for a change in Australian ecclesiology. It declared that the church needed to return to its missional heritage and not be so inward-looking. It also challenged the church about being the product of a modernist mindset and that it was time to engage more fully with the host culture and present the message of the gospel in a way that communicated more effectively.

EMC thinking has had significant influence on the ecclesiological theory and practice of a number of Vineyard churches, but the extent and endurance of that influence is uncertain. In this article we look broadly at the Global Vineyard movement and then more closely at the life of Australian Vineyard churches, and a case study of one congregation particularly influenced by EMC missional/ecclesiological frameworks.

**The Global Vineyard Movement**

The Sunday corporate worship meetings that take place in Vineyard churches had very humble beginnings in a Los Angeles lounge room in October 1976. Bob and Penny Fulton led these meetings. In those earliest of days it was a group of burnt-out Christians pleading with God for “more” than what they had experienced, both privately and corporately. The “formula” was simple: open hearts and simple songs of worship.

It was some time before John Wimber joined the group as his travelling role as a consultant with Fuller Institute didn’t allow it. By April the next year the group had grown to one hundred people and John had become its leader. It was at this point that the group was asked to leave the Calvary Chapel movement. John and Carol consented to this on the condition that the leadership of Calvary Chapel write a letter both releasing them and blessing them.

In May 1979, on Mother’s Day, one of the most significant events in Vineyard history took place. John and his young church had been crying out to God to heal the sick, but nothing was happening. A young hippie evangelist by the name of Lonnie Frisbee was invited to preach and for the first time in a Vineyard worship service the words “Come, Holy Spirit” were uttered. The Holy Spirit was powerfully at work in healing and other manifestations. Over the next two months over 700 new converts were baptised at Wimber’s church.

It was in 1982 that a handful of churches, all previously a part of the Calvary Chapel movement, left at the same time and became loosely known as “Vineyard” fellowships. Key in the establishing of these groups was a young pastor and church-planter named Ken Gullikson, but he and others quickly recognised John was the obvious choice as leader of this young group of churches. It was also around this time that the newly titled “Vineyard Christian Fellowship of Yorba Linda” started to care in a significant way for the poor.

The international ministry of John Wimber and the Vineyard was also taking off in the early 1980s. A strategic relationship that played a catalytic role in the Vineyard’s global identity was the friendship Wimber had developed with leading Anglican cleric, David Watson. Watson was at this time the Rector of St. Michael-le-Belfrey in York, England and was well-respected amongst both evangelical and charismatic sectors of the church internationally. Watson’s endorsement of Wimber and the Vineyard opened many doors, most noticeably in England, for the visit of Wimber and his teams. Initially these visits focussed on bringing
teaching and ministry on personal and church renewal to existing Christians and churches, but later developed into the planting and releasing of Vineyard churches in many countries.  

At present there are over 1,500 Vineyard churches throughout the world, with many other expressions of church life at work in mission countries under the auspices of the Vineyard.

**The Australian Vineyard**

The first visit of the Vineyard to Australia was in 1987 when Wimber and a large group of Vineyard members came out from America to present two “Signs and Wonders” conferences, one in Canberra and one in Perth. Although there was no official Vineyard presence in Australia between 1988 and 1995 numerous “Wimber conferences” were held in this country and many of the present-day Australian Vineyard leaders had spent considerable time visiting or doing internships in North American Vineyard churches. Another strong influence on the Australian scene was the Vineyard Ranch in California where many Australians attended Schools of Ministry or Worship, or schools for pastors. 

During this time considerable numbers were discovering that the Vineyard way of doing church was what they were looking for and sought to bring some of the Vineyard flavour and emphasis to their church. Others left their existing churches to join or form a new church along Vineyard lines. Pressure grew for the Vineyard movement to establish an official presence in Australia and to allow those who considered themselves as “Vineyard babies” to be made legitimate by being recognised officially as Vineyard churches. As a result the first eleven Australian Vineyard churches were released in February 1995 and were overseen from the USA. AVC-Australia was formally established eight years later, on the 13th March, 2003 and the churches were released from USA governance. This was the beginning of the movement now known as Vineyard Churches Australia (VCA).

In the early to mid-nineties the mainstream ecclesiastical spectrum in Australia varied from traditional churches which mainly emanated from British (or sometimes European) roots through to Pentecostal churches which were mostly from the USA. What the Vineyard had to offer was “middle ground” in its expression of church practice and theology. This is particularly seen in the movement’s conservative evangelical theological base combined with a charismatic emphasis on the work of the Spirit.

It was in some ways unfortunate that in Australia the first taste the wider church had of the Vineyard was through the early Signs and Wonders conferences. This caused an immediate alienation by those whose pneumatology could not embrace the Vineyard emphasis. It also established an identity for the movement that focussed on the corporate meeting at the expense of a broader ecclesiology. A better start for the new movement in Australia would have been for it to have been birthed out of deliberate church-planting from healthy USA or UK Vineyard churches. One benefit of this would have been an investment in Australian leaders which would have served the Australian movement well in ensuing years. Instead a period of fifteen years passed between the first arrival of Vineyard (the 1988 Canberra Conference) and the release of the Australian Vineyard movement as its own entity and under its own leadership. During this period there was minimal local authority to give direction and shape to Vineyard ecclesiology and to train leaders.

During the last decade a more diverse ecclesiology has begun to emerge in the Australian Vineyard. The strong corporate gathering focus still remains, but greater emphasis has also been given to pastoral and missional issues that go beyond the Sunday meeting.
Key Features of Vineyard Ecclesiology

Intimacy with God

From the very first meetings in the home of Bob and Penny Fulton there arose “a raw and desperate hunger for God in worship”. This small group, which included John and Carol Wimber, began to grow and started writing their own worship songs that expressed who they were and what they were feeling. These were love songs to Jesus. They didn’t know it at the time but over the next two decades these songs revolutionised modern Christian worship in the western church.

The word that captures what this early Vineyard worship was about is “intimacy”. It is the desire to “touch the Father’s heart”. Intimate worship has been central to Vineyard’s corporate worship expression since its beginning and played a primary role in the emergence of the global Vineyard movement in its early years.

Inviting people towards intimacy with God and an authentic spirituality is arguably an appropriate contextualisation of the gospel in a spiritually hungry society like Australia. Ian Breward suggests that the decline in attendances by Australian churchgoers represents a moving away from the institution of the church rather than people moving away from faith in God. He suggests a privatisation in faith develops during this period, built on an historic reluctance to “endow any institution or way of life with too much sacred significance.”

Gary Bouma agrees:

> Whatever theories of secularisation predicted, it has become increasingly clear at the opening of the twenty-first century that spirituality is not on the decline ... Rather, in secular societies religion and spirituality have seeped out of the monopolistic control of formal organisations like churches.

Total secularization is a myth, and in this context it is missiologically helpful for churches to celebrate the spirituality of Christian life and invite people to experience intimacy with God.

“Come, Holy Spirit”

Those present in that first Vineyard small group longed for God’s presence and constantly invited him to move in their midst. However it was the Mother’s Day incident of 1979 where Lonnie Frisbee cried out “Come, Holy Spirit” that this longing was encapsulated in a phrase.

The emphatic use of the prayer “Come, Holy Spirit” is continued in Vineyard corporate gatherings today and indicates the expectation of the presence and activity of God in Vineyard meetings. Anglican Bishop, David Pytches later wrote a book by the same name which has served as a manual for many on how to invite the Holy Spirit to come and minister in spiritual gifts in the corporate gathering as Wimber modelled.

Healing

The early days of the Vineyard saw an on-going battle to establish healing as a regular part of church life. Wimber was committed to trusting scripture on the matter rather than his
experience (or lack thereof). After many attempts, much teaching, and praying for many people, healing became a central part of corporate life in the Vineyard.  

It soon became clear to John and Carol Wimber that John had a gift of healing. He was also convinced that this gift was not to stop with him; healing was for the entire body to engage with in some way. He was strongly committed to Ephesians 4:11-13 and that all God’s people were to be prepared for ministry. Wimber constantly proclaimed “everyone gets to play”.  

As a result church services were frequently times of worship followed by “clinics” where Wimber would teach from the Bible what Jesus and the disciples did and then get those in attendance doing it. It was rare to find anyone in the Vineyard in the early days who was not equipped with the “five step healing model” that he taught.  

The Vineyard church led by Wimber believed that healing came from the compassion and mercy of God, and that God sought a people to do it with Him. Over the coming years healing was to be central to the life of Vineyard churches. They also saw healing as a significant part of what they were to share with other churches in many countries around the world.  

The Kingdom of God  

The value of “The Kingdom of God” requires special mention. It is one of the values in Vineyard USA’s “Theological and Philosophical Statements” published in 1995, eleven years after the Movement’s founding. “The Kingdom of God” theology of the Vineyard emphasises God’s reaching into this present age to exercise his reign, made possible by Jesus work on the cross. As a result we see the kingdom here now, but not yet here in its fullness. It is further summarised by the most recent statement of values put out by The Association of Vineyard Churches in the USA:  

We view the Kingdom of God as the overarching and integrating theme of the Bible. From the beginning, the Vineyard has been committed to proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom of God and to bearing witness to the “already and not yet” of the kingdom in our words and deeds.  

The understanding that because of the work of Jesus on the Cross the Kingdom of God has broken through into this present evil age is central to Vineyard theology. We see similar “in-breakings” of the kingdom in history such as when God lead his people into exodus (Exodus chapters 3-15) or into captivity (2 Kings 24:12-16) as illustrated in the Figure below. Jesus through the cross has ushered in the presence of the kingdom and God’s presence can be expected now. It is not yet here in its fullness, and will not be until Christ returns a second time. But because the kingdom is here now the Vineyard has expectation of the breakthrough of God’s presence as evidenced in healing and signs and wonders.  

The presence of the kingdom activity of God is anticipated in the corporate worship gathering of Vineyard churches. Particular emphasis is given to the “in-breaking” of the kingdom during ministry times which occur almost weekly in most Vineyard churches. Wimber spoke often of the praxis of the Kingdom, especially as it relates to the life of the individual and in the corporate gathering.
The Statements go on to talk of other values, priorities, and practices that are expected to be embedded in the life of Vineyard churches. Worship and fellowship are two of the values that are important to our study and that we see in operation in the corporate worship gathering.

Worship

Worship is an “all-of-life” activity. The Vineyard declares, “We desire to worship God with our whole being. We want Jesus at the centre as our Lord.” At the same time the Vineyard values the Spirit drawing them intimately before God in a “style that is intimate, dynamic, culture current, and life changing.” Venter states:

We see worship as an absolute non-negotiable Trinitarian priority. It is all about giving and receiving love – the love of the Father. It honours and gives tangible expression to the value of Jesus’ headship over the Church, anticipating His Headship over all things.

In Vineyard churches, as in most Pentecostal/charismatic churches the term “worship” is most frequently used to describe a time of meeting with God in song and music. It is seen as a real and dynamic transaction of giving and receiving. The Vineyard worship gathering has historically been considered the pre-eminent meeting place of God and the people of the movement. It is in many respects the test case of what Vineyard believes and how the movement lives up to its values.

Fellowship

In emphasizing the importance of fellowship the “Statements” refer to John 17:20-23 where Jesus prays to the Father that “they may be one as we are one.” The theme of “intimacy” is introduced again, this time as it describes the type of relationship that brothers and sisters in Christ should hold. The Vineyard has always emphasized that it is a “relational” movement which is not dependent on programme or structure for life, but on “real, intimate, enabling friendships.” To that end small groups, or “kinships” as they have been known in the USA, have played a huge part in Vineyard corporate life since the beginning of the movement. They have never been considered as an alternative to the congregational meeting, but rather
an additional involvement for members. The Sunday gathering is a key format for cultivating fellowship.

_The Legacy of John Wimber_

In all that has been written we see that the legacy of John Wimber to the Vineyard has been large. The official Vineyard publication “VOV – Voice of the Vineyard” featured “The Legacy of John Wimber” in its Fall, 1998 edition. A number of Vineyard leaders wrote on Wimber’s legacy in regards to worship, church-planting, bible teaching, equipping, evangelism, kingdom theology, compassion, and healing, declaring how influential he had been within the movement and beyond.43 Much of the theology and practice that is held today in the movement was articulated initially by him. Leaders from other churches have also appreciated Wimber’s legacy and the important role he has played in their life or church.44 This does not suggest Wimber was correct in everything he did or said, but he modelled well humility and determination in seeking to follow God and lead the church.45

This is an overview of the birth of the Vineyard overseas, especially in the USA, and how the Vineyard denomination in Australia has been strongly influenced by its overseas counterparts and by the legacy of John Wimber. The key aspects of Australian Vineyard church life such as intimacy, healing, Kingdom of God theology, worship and fellowship have been largely shaped by both these contributors.

_Emerging Missional Church and Today’s Local Church_

A significant occurrence in the Australian church over the last decade has been the arrival of the “emerging church” or “missional church” movement. This movement in Australia is commonly designated as the “Emerging Missional Church” (EMC). At the forefront of EMC in Australia have been the figures of Alan Hirsch and Michael Frost. They are the ones who gave the name EMC to this new phenomenon.

At the heart of the EMC message is the challenge to the church to return to its missionary calling. Frost and Hirsch write:

> We are living in an epoch-shifting period in the West (and globally) as we shift from the modern to the postmodern....To reach them [postmodern subcultures]...the church should abandon its role as a static institution and embrace its initial calling to be a missionary movement.46

Many in the Australian church are greatly indebted to Frost, Hirsch, and others who have called the church back to its missionary calling. The emerging church message in Australia has been missional in its focus, and secondarily focussed on structural forms and issues of spiritual expression.

With this background we can now look at a case study of one particular congregation belonging to Vineyard Churches Australia and examine the influence of EMC frameworks on the congregation and especially its corporate worship gatherings.
Cabramatta Vineyard Church (A case study)

History

“Cabra Vineyard”, as it is commonly referred to (or CVC), was one of the original eleven Vineyard churches released in February 1995. It was newly planted by the present pastors Greg and Dianne Trainor who had returned from Vancouver, Canada where Greg was an assistant pastor in a Vineyard church. Cabramatta is recognised as the multicultural centre of Sydney with people from over one hundred and twenty nationalities. Its population is mostly found at the poorer end of the socio-economic scale. It has also been labelled by some as the drug capital of Sydney however in recent years Cabramatta’s drug problem has been decreasing. The Trainors were attracted by the multicultural hub and social needs of Cabramatta.

In its first weeks the congregation of seven adult members embarked on Vineyard life along the typical style of the North American Vineyards. Just a few months later Dianne gave birth to their daughter Hannah, who tragically only lived for six days. This had a large impact not just on the Trainors, but on the small congregation. CVC entered into a holding pattern for the next twelve months.

Others members joined the small group and by the end of 1997 about fifty people identified themselves as belonging to the church. This precipitated a move to a small hall at King’s Park Public School in the Wakeley area of Cabramatta which helped facilitate further growth to about one hundred members by the end of 1999. Greg Trainor said he appreciated the growth but hoped to better represent the local area: “It was a nice stage in the life of the church. But for Di and I our expectation was that the church would be multicultural because our area was.” Although the church at this time had approximately ten different ethnic groups in the fellowship they were all white and European in origin.

At the end of 1999 the church moved into Cabramatta Public School where it saw five or six years of stability. It was a healthy and dynamic community, but under the surface frustrations were growing, especially within Greg Trainor. Even though they were now located centrally in the Cabramatta community “we were still the white young families from King’s Park”. Adding to their frustration was the fact that the church was not impacting the youth of Cabramatta which had always been integral to the Trainors’ vision.

A number of factors coincided that dramatically affected the future of the church. Dianne suffered a severe case of post-natal depression after the birth of their son, Luke, and Greg turned forty, quit his job, and went full-time with the church. This affected Trainor more than the church. For the first time he found himself devoid of a day-to-day context for evangelism.

Trainor returned part-time to his life as a science teacher at Cabramatta High School. At the same time he read a book edited by Darrell Guder’s entitled *Missional Church: The Sending of the Church in North America* and was captured by its missional message and the way it complemented the “Kingdom of God thinking” of the Vineyard movement. From that moment CVC has pursued the “missional church” life. Also strongly influenced by thinkers such as Alan Hirsch and Michael Frost, and others internationally such as Neil Cole, the church has applied itself diligently to being a missional community.
Key Features

CVC clearly defines itself as a “missional community”. Their thinking centres on the recognition that God is the first and foremost missionary, and that the task of the Christian is to attach one’s self to the mission of God towards the world, or missio Dei. This concept of the missio Dei began to emerge in the early 1930s when Karl Barth and other theologians started to redefine mission by discussing it as an activity of God himself. Until then it was mainly considered as a soteriological work, or as a cultural activity bringing the “more advanced” Western ways to other cultures. During the next twenty years the concept developed until it reached a clear expression at the Willingen Conference of the International Missionary Council. Bosch writes:

It was here that the idea (not the exact term) missio Dei first surfaced clearly. Mission was understood as being derived from the very nature of God... The classical doctrine on the missio Dei as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and Son sending the Spirit was expanded to include yet another “movement”: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world.54

So for Cabramatta Vineyard discipleship was redefined as “following Jesus into his mission” with each individual responsible for finding what Jesus is doing in and through their own life. CVC encourages all its members to determine how they are to partner with God in mission.

A key concept taught at CVC is that of the church being a “preview community” of what it is to live under God’s generous rule; a community of people called to demonstrate the presence of the kingdom and to share it with others.55 Cabramatta Vineyard has a strong focus on the Kingdom of God in both its teaching and practice. The three-strand frame of reference applied in the church in order to assist its members live out a kingdom-centred life focuses on the following three areas:

- Community
- Spiritual Life
- Mission.

i. Community

The most obvious thing that one recognises when entering any type of corporate gathering at CVC is the strong sense of community. And this community extends beyond the corporate meeting. It is summed up by one of the focus group participants. “When we say goodbye to one another we don’t say ‘see you on Sunday’, instead we say ‘see you tomorrow’, as CVC shared life is almost a daily occurrence.56

For many years CVC did not gather regularly in a corporate “Sunday-style” meeting that included all their members. Such a meeting has recommenced in 2010. Belonging to CVC came as a result of being in a smaller group such as a home group, or an accountability threesome known as a “Crave group,” an acronym for “Confess-Read-Ask-Value-Eat”.57

When asked in our research “What are the reasons you keep coming back to this church?” two of the three equally strongest responses stated it was to do with the friends they had at church and the loving and caring atmosphere that existed.58 But it is more than a loving atmosphere or a good time that keeps them together. When one young couple moved home, twenty-seven people from the church turned up to help them move “because they wanted
This is indicative of the shared sense of purpose and bonding they have developed. Hirsch refers to this as *communitas* and defines it as an expression of communality that develops “in the context of a shared ordeal that binds them together in a much deeper form of community than the one we have generally become accustomed to.”

This is certainly true of the CVC group who freely share the highs and lows of life with one another (see below “Figure: Further quotes on CVC Community life”).

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**Figure: Further Quotes on CVC Community Life**

### ii. Spiritual Life

A feature of CVC’s spiritual life have been the Crave groups. Members of these groups are expected to participate in a weekly or fortnightly meeting with one or two other members and regularly engage in the disciplines of forgiveness, Bible-reading and prayer. An agreed list of accountability questions is used in the group with members scrutinising one another at each meeting and praying for and encouraging one another. It is also expected that each member will bring the names of two or three non-Christians who the group will pray for at the meeting and on a daily basis in order for them to come to know Jesus.

Other teaching and training activities take place in the life of the church to aid spiritual life. CVC actively teaches and encourages practices such as meditation, journaling, silence, and solitude. Also there is teaching on spiritual gifts and an emphasis that they are primarily for use in the market-place rather than in the church gathering. Prophecy and healing are the two gifts that members are particularly encouraged to engage in.
There are a number of indicators that spirituality has a strong missional or practical slant at CVC. This often comes at the cost of a more devotional spiritual life in CVC members. Trainor admits “I have never been a good prayer”.63 Josh illustrates the point well when he says, “More my worship is if I am driving along, I am praying for people I want to see saved, and thinking about others.”64 A focus group member further clarifies the spirituality of CVC when she adds “the God stuff is intrinsic in all we do”.65

Amidst the impressive 2006 NCLS survey results for CVC there is one notable exception: the amount of time spent in the private devotional activity of private prayer, Bible reading, and meditation, decreased markedly over the five year period. It is one of the rare times when the church scored less than the denominational average (see Figure below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time spent in devotional activity</th>
<th>CVC 2006</th>
<th>CVC 2001</th>
<th>Vineyard Denom 2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Every day/most days</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least weekly</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**FIGURE: DEVOTIONAL ACTIVITY – CABRAMATTA CHURCH MEMBERS**

This may be explained by the nature of the spirituality of CVC members which favours active and physical expressions of engagement. To use the example of Luke 10:38-42 the CVC members more closely resemble Martha’s activist response than they do Mary’s contemplative response to Jesus.

iii. **Mission**

It is this third strand of Christian living, mission, that gives the clearest definition to the identity of CVC. It is a missional community determined to live a life of sharing Jesus with their local community. Daniel explains their approach:

> We are not setting up massive buildings and arenas and saying to people “come to me” but actually being there melted into society and its cracks, and not being the church on the corner that people come to at Christmas and Easter...but each member out there being followers of Jesus, that’s being the church.67

Daniel’s comment illustrates the influence of EMC and its desire to be “incarnational” and “missional” rather than “attractional” in nature like traditional churches.68

There are a number of recurring phrases and ideas uncovered by our research that show clearly the heart for mission held at CV. These include:

- being “incarnational” rather than “attractional;”69
- taking the role of a “display” or “preview” community of kingdom life;70
- raising up disciple-making disciples;71 and
- the Kingdom of God and the “generous rule of God”.72

The project research shows that these are more than just ideas held by the members of CVC. For example, at CVC 68% (21 out of 31 respondents) of members attended the church because an existing CVC member reached out to them with an invitation to attend.73 Most of
these invitations were extended through relationships held at local schools. This figure compares to the national Vineyard average of 44% who first attended their Vineyard church because they were invited by someone they knew.\(^7\)

NCLS data also supports the identity of CVC as a missional community. In 2006 when asked what were the top three aspects of their congregation that attendees most valued, 50% of their congregation included “Reaching those who do not attend church”. This made it the second highest valued aspect of their church’s life. This compared with the denominational average of 18%. In 2001 CVC only scored 20% for the same value.\(^7\) Trainor claims that three quarters of his church’s members belong as a result of conversion growth. In my observations of CVC it is true that they live an effective missional existence in one of Australia’s most diverse cultural and religious communities.

**The Corporate Gathering**

Cabramatta Vineyard commenced life in 1995 typical of any Vineyard Christian Fellowship that you would walk into anywhere in the world. Like other Vineyards it used the universal template for a corporate gathering that had been in existence in the Vineyard since the early eighties and that is still held by most to this day.

By the end of 1999 a growing discontent was evidenced at CVC. The denominational template was not going down well with the multiculturalism of Cabramatta. Locals were not attracted to the Sunday meeting. Their lack of success in attracting a crowd coincided with their discovery of the growing movement known as the “emerging church” or “missional church.” These two realisations came together to cause a transition away from the centrality of the Sunday gathering towards its present-day incarnational emphasis.

Over the next few years the Sunday gathering was dismantled and the corporate life of the church was experienced in various expressions such as Crave groups and home groups. Two larger combined home group meetings were added on the first and third Sundays of the month meeting in separate locations.

That change in emphasis increased the missional awareness and activity of the church, but it appears to have negatively affected the aspects of life that the corporate gathering had to offer. Worship rated second last in strength of nine core qualities in 2006. It had fallen from 65% of attendees holding it in their top three values in 2001 to only 38% in 2006; well below the denominational average of 48%.\(^7\) Jenny recounted it was during this time that she and a couple of friends from CVC visited another Vineyard-style church “and together we realised the hunger we had for that noisier, broader, get-lost in worship. It happened so gradually we didn’t really notice it was gone.”\(^7\) Others from CVC spoke of similar feelings, although many were unconcerned by the absence of the larger gathering and its worship.

Amongst the other things that were lost with the demise of the Sunday gathering was the sense of community the church had previously held. There was something about all being together in the one place at the one time that added to the understanding of their identity and the sense that they were part of a larger, stronger, and diverse family of faith. Angela explains:

> There is something beautiful about corporate worship. Studying together, singing together; there is energy about it. I think if we didn’t have it we would
be scattered. I think it is important to remind us who we are, and what our values are.78

In saying this Angela recognises the importance of the corporate gathering for helping to keep everyone in unity relationally and conceptually. The passing on of values, practices, teaching, and vision, although meeting with some success through the group-life of the church, is perceived as stronger when the entire tribe meets together regularly.

It is the recognition of the decline in the values of worship, community, and shared focus that has seen CVC in recent months again start meeting in the “Sunday gathering”. On the first Sunday of each month the entire community now comes together and meets in much the same way as any other Vineyard church.79

Interestingly worship is the aspect of church life which today is most valued by CVC members (see Figure below). Three different reasons are held equally strongly as the reason why CVC members keep coming back to church, they are, i) worship style; ii) I have friends here; and iii) the loving/caring atmosphere.80 The last two are each 10% higher than the denominational average. The figure pertaining to “worship style” is 18% higher than the denominational average. This indicates that despite the strong missional stance of CVC there has in recent times been a strong swing back to the value and practice of worship. This is reflected in the worship offered in small groups and in the larger corporate gathering.

One CVC leader stated that the leadership felt CVC had “lost their way in worship” in recent times and that now was the time to be more purposeful and less “organic”, in their approach to corporate worship.81 This recognition has contributed to the decision to introduce the more conventional Sunday service (once a month) with worship taking a key place in the gathering.

An analysis of the components of the corporate gathering was instigated by the question “Which of the following aspects of church life do you find most helpful?” The two strongest responses were “worship” (84% or 26 out of 31 respondents rated this response as “very helpful”) and “community” (68% or 21 out of 31 respondents rated it as “very helpful”). In comparison regular corporate gathering staples such as preaching (32%), communion (16%), and intercessory prayer (35%) lagged behind (see Figure below).
Alongside worship and community, it is intended that the newly invigorated corporate gathering at CVC will also help bring focus to the life of the CVC family.

The more the [CVC] network expands outward the more central and important the first Sunday service is in keeping us focussed on the things we need to be focussed on. And reminding people we are here about the King and his kingdom and the mission of Jesus in our various lives. For me I guess the Sunday gathering has become more important as we have headed down the missional track because if we don’t have that how do we know that everyone heads down the same track?

The leaders at CVC recognise that not having a corporate gathering where the entire church comes together has undermined their ability to bring a unified vision and direction.

CVC holds tightly to the values of the Vineyard movement. It is the way they go about these values that is very different from most other Vineyard churches.

Worship is a high value at CVC, and has always featured in the community’s life. As they admit, it has not always been “done well” but the people of CVC have always loved to worship. It is not the corporate gathering that has been the main forum of worship, and in fact some would prefer their private worship times over the public and corporate expressions. The priority of corporate worship has begun to change however, with the introduction of a monthly corporate worship service and a desire to lead worship with excellence. It seems the change pendulum has swung wide at CVC regarding corporate worship, and is now about to return to some degree.
Mission remains central to CVC teaching and practice. The mission training emphasis at CVC focuses on equipping individuals to take their place and mission in their local community. However the strong relational ties within CVC mean that the missional activity tends to be engaged in corporately. The training and equipping though, is aimed at the individual and their personal pursuit of the missio Dei rather than a corporate plan of evangelism that has been programmed by the church.

The corporate gathering will take a more important role in the life of CVC, but the fact that it only meets monthly is a clear statement that there is still no room in the CVC philosophy for it to approach a central place in the life of the church. Even so, it is valued, as much for its opportunity for fostering fellowship and focusing vision as for the opportunity to worship.

Conclusion

The Vineyard movement has brought a renewal of understanding about intimacy with God in worship, openness to the healing work of God, and insight into the presence of the Kingdom of God. A lot of the momentum for Vineyard conferences and then congregations was in gathering the people of God together to experience God in worship, as well as encouraging compassionate acts of service for the poor in mission. Parallel to the growth of Vineyard churches has been the growing influence of the Emerging Missional Church in Australia. Of the thirty Australian Vineyard churches today, a growing number are being influenced by the EMC. The example of Cabramatta Vineyard Church and the leadership of Greg Trainor have been significant influences for this change. CVC started in 1995 as a Vineyard congregation with a strong commitment to Sunday gatherings, but they have experimented with focusing on other small groups and accountability “Crave” groups as the locus of community, while encouraging one another in discipleship and mission. There is some nervousness about this kind of experimentation. Within CVC, and the broader Vineyard movement, there is some desire to refocus back on the Sunday corporate gathering. Some within the movement fear that otherwise this will be an abandonment of “the very essence” of what Vineyard is and feel that all Vineyard Churches should hold a commonality of practice and expression, not just of theological perspective and values. It is sometimes a challenge to embrace and create unity amongst such diverse ecclesiological and missiological expressions under the one denominational banner. As Vineyard meets the EMC, Cabramatta Vineyard with Trainor’s leadership is an example of one church which has been considering afresh how to keep mission at the forefront of its life, while maintaining the other aspects of its heart in the worship together and creating space for people to experience the presence and healing of God as the Kingdom of God breaks in. No matter what may evolve in the coming months and years, Vineyard Churches Australia is indebted to the Emerging Missional Church for rattling its theological cage and helping it to rethink the mission of the local church.

Appendix 1: Five Step Healing Model

**STEP 1: THE INTERVIEW – MARK 9:21**

Answers the question: “Where does it hurt?” Learn the value of really listening to someone. When “how are you?” becomes a real question rather than a greeting, you are on your way to a healing ministry!

A. Conducted on two planes
1. Natural level (what’s wrong, how can I pray for you?)
   a. Listen and sort information according to their personal experiences
   b. Observe what you can see, hear, what you know, etc.
   c. This is NOT a medical interview
   d. Listen as long as is appropriate for the setting in which you are ministering

2. Supernatural level (what is the Holy Spirit saying about this?)
   a. Sort information according to the gifts of the Holy Spirit
      assumes a theology that says all the gifts are available to
      every believer on a situational basis
   b. As you gain experience, give more weight to what the Holy
      Spirit is saying

B. This is for information gathering (basic facts; listen longer in a non-church setting)
   1. Where does it hurt?
   2. How long has it been hurting?
   3. Has a doctor diagnosed it?
   4. What do you feel the problem is?

C. The interview is complete when:
   1. You have ascertained some of the natural and/or spiritual causes of their condition
   2. God has inspired you with specific direction in prayer

STEP 2: THE DIAGNOSTIC DECISION – JOHN 9:3
Answers the question: “What is causing this condition?” Seek to deal with root issues if possible, but don’t neglect the presenting problem.

A. Natural factors
   1. Living in a fallen, sinful world (viruses, accidents, etc.)
   2. Lifestyle consequences (diet, out-of-balance life, sinful behavior, etc.)
   3. Emotional or social issues (abuse, anger, bitterness, unforgiveness)
   4. Genetic factors (heart disease, diabetes)

B. Spiritual factors
   1. Demonic affliction (anything with Biblical precedent, i.e. blindness, deafness, etc.)
   2. Demonic oppression (compulsive behavior, fear, etc.)
   3. Witchcraft (curses, dabbling in the occult, demonic movies, etc.)

Note: Beware of dogmatic cause/effect equations

STEP 3: THE PRAYER SELECTION – JOHN 8:6
Answers the question “What kind of prayer will I need?”

A. Prayer directed toward God
   1. Invocation (inviting the Holy Spirit to come and minister)
   2. Prayer in the Spirit (doorway to other gifts – 1 Cor. 14:14-15)
   3. Petition (asking God for what we want, with thanksgiving – Phil. 4:6-7)
   4. Intercession (standing in the gap, identifying with another’s situation – Gal. 6:2)

B. Prayer from God
   1. Command of faith (be healed, rise and walk, etc. See Acts 3:6)
   2. Pronouncement of faith (God has forgiven you, etc. See Matt. 9:2)
3. Rebuking, binding, or expelling a spirit or condition (stop it! See Mark 1:25)

**STEP 4: THE PRAYER ENGAGEMENT – MARK 8:23-24**

Applies the power of God, while continually asking for the Holy Spirit’s direction

**A. Basics of Ministry Prayer**
1. Position yourself in front of the person so that you can speak with them
2. Pray with your eyes open so you can see what is happening with them
3. Invite the Lord to come, and wait until He comes! Waiting in silence is OK
4. Dial down your soul-realm so you can discern the Spirit’s promptings more easily
5. Bless what you see the Father doing

**B. Praying for Effect**
1. Watch for clues of the Holy Spirit’s presence (warmth, tingling, muscle spasms, shaking, deep breathing, etc.)
2. Aim for the relief of the presenting problem
3. Address other issues as the Holy Spirit gives direction (often leads back to the interview process)
4. Monitor emotional or spiritual realities in yourself as you pray

**C. The Importance of Dialogue**
1. Healing often is more of a process than a sudden event
2. Dialogue does not disturb the Holy Spirit
3. The person will tell you what effects are occurring, helping you to bless what God is doing
4. Helps build your faith when positive responses come
5. Helps you discern factors that are blocking successful prayer
   a. Resistance rooted in some sort of fear (exposure, new responsibility, etc.)
   b. Unbelief (in either the person or in you!)

**D. Ending the Prayer Time**
1. Stop when the person indicates they want to be done
2. Stop when the Holy Spirit indicates He is done
3. Stop when you run out of things to say
4. Stop when you have prayed and have not gotten anywhere

**STEP 5: POST-PRAYER DIRECTION – LUKE 5:14**

Answers the question “What should I do or expect next?”

**A. Summarize the Situation**
1. Explain what has occurred to the best of your understanding
2. Share any words of encouragement from the Lord (impressions, pictures, etc.)
3. Direction toward practical repentance from sin
4. If healing is not complete, affirm and encourage them to keep asking, seeking, knocking
5. Offer simple Biblical instruction
   a. Go and sin no more
   b. Make restitution or confession as appropriate
   c. Get prayer again and again
   d. Continue to resist the evil one
B. Avoid the Following Problems
   1. Don’t give personal advice for life direction
   2. Don’t condemn or blame the person for not receiving healing
   3. Don’t be insensitive to the person’s pain, guilt, fears, and confusion
   4. Don’t preach or give unwanted counsel
   5. Avoid overt gestures, loud voices, etc.
   6. Resist emotional attraction to the person
   7. Do not touch the person inappropriately (asking permission to lay hands on is helpful)

C. Refer
   1. Encourage them to join a fellowship Group
   2. Encourage them to attend specific classes or seminars related to their need
   3. Encourage follow-up counseling from staff or professionals
   4. Encourage them to get books or tapes related to their need

Appendix 2: Crave Group Questions

The following is an example of the “Crave” cards used by Cabramatta Vineyard Church:
CONFESS YOUR SINS

1. Have you honoured Jesus with your words and actions this week?
2. Have you looked at sexually explicit material or played with sexual thoughts about someone you aren’t married to?
3. Have you been fair, honest and generous with your money or longed for something that isn’t yours?
4. Have you been honouring, and generous in your important relationships this week?
5. Have you hurt someone with your words, either behind their back or to their face?
6. Have you given in to a bad habit or addiction this past week? Explain.
7. Have you stayed angry with anyone?
8. Have you wanted someone to get into trouble so you would do well?
9. Did you finish the reading and hear from God? What did he say to you? What are you going to do about it?
10. Have you prayed for my 3 friends to have a life-changing encounter with Jesus?
11. Another question that you need to be asked.
12. Have you been completely honest with me today?

Confess your sins
Read the Bible
Ask God for lost people
Vineyard Ways
Eat together

1 This article draws on Peter Downes, “The Purpose and Significance of the ‘Sunday’ Corporate Worship Gathering in Australian Vineyard Churches”, Doctor of Ministry thesis (Australian College of Theology, Melbourne School of Theology, 2011), supervised by Darren Cronshaw.

2 “Signs and Wonders and Church Growth Conference”, Bruce Stadium, Australian Institute of Sport, Canberra, November 1987.


5 Hunt, Wimberites, 111. Hunt argues that the Charismatic movement had peaked in the UK in the late 1970s and was beginning to wane in the early 80s when Wimber and his team arrived in the UK. He observes: “there were numerous Anglican charismatics looking for a way forward”. This would be true of the spiritual climate
Vineyard meets Emerging Missional Churches

amongst mainstream charismatics in Australia at the same time, as evidenced by two large meetings in Canberra in the mid-90s convened by Brian Medway. These meetings saw a large number of “disenfranchised” charismatic leaders, especially from the Uniting Church, but from nearly all major non-pentecostal denominations come together to seek a way forward. These meetings were significant in the role they played in contributing to the birth of new third-wave influenced movements such as “Crosslink Christian Network”, “Vineyard Churches Australia”, and later the “Association of Southern Cross Churches”. 


The “foundational years” as referred to here would be from 1988 – 2003. These years date from the first Australian conference through to the release of the Australian Vineyard movement as its own entity and under its own governance. NCLS Survey results show us that during these years 81% of church attendees were in church on a weekly basis, compared to only 26% at study or prayer groups and 31% at a social function. NCLS Research, Initial Impressions 2001 (Sydney: NCLS Research, 2010), accessible at http://www.ncls.org.au/default.aspx?sitemapid=33#Inv_Summary.


Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-century Church (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2003). Alan Hirsch is the co-founder of Forge Mission Training Network and author of a number of important writings on the emerging missional church. Originally from Melbourne he now lives and works in the USA. Michael Frost is Vice-Principal at Morling College in Sydney, Australia, co-founder of Forge, and author and speaker on the emerging missional church.

“Emerging Missional Church” or “EMC” is the phrase we will use to describe the missional or emerging church movement in Australia. The term “emerging church” is applied to a variety of different expressions or approaches across the western church. We use it here to denote the EMC and similar expressions that have a missional emphasis. It is not to be confused with “Emergent” which is particularly strong in the USA and seeks to redesign theology and ecclesiology in the light of postmodern thought and influence. See Alan Hirsch, “Who put the E into EMC?” Catalyse: Quarterly News and Inspiration from the Forge Mission Training Network, vol. 1, no. 2 (2004), 1, 6-7.

Bob and Penny Fulton live in Los Angeles, California and have played a key role in the movement’s foundation. Penny Fulton is Carol Wimber’s sister. Bob Fulton was for a number of years the overseer of the international ministries of Vineyard and has held a number of roles in the movement in Los Angeles and abroad. AVC-USA. VOV - Voice of the Vineyard, Spring ed. (Anaheim: AVC, 1997), p.11.

Bill Jackson, The Quest for the Radical Middle (Cape Town: VIP, 1999), 58-59. Jackson, Quest, 63.


Alexander Venter, Doing Church: Building from the Bottom Up (Cape Town: VIP, 2000), 27-28

There are presently ten released Associations of Vineyard Churches in various nations or national clusters: Vineyard USA (AVC-USA), Vineyard Canada, Vineyard UK/Ireland, Vineyard GAS (Germany Austria, Switzerland), Vineyard South Africa, Vineyard Costa Rica, Vineyard Australia, Vineyard New Zealand, Vineyard Benelux (Belgium, Netherlands, Luxemburg), and Vineyard Norden (Nordic Countries).


These conferences were held in Canberra (1987), Sydney (1988), Melbourne (1989), Sydney (1991) and Brisbane (1994). On each occasion a parallel conference was held in Perth.

One of the authors of this paper (Peter) was appointed National Director of the new Australian Vineyard movement during this release, and was present through all events mentioned in this section. Information is sourced from his recollections and through various archives held in his collection.

Venter, Doing Church, 25. The word “worship” when referring to a component of the Sunday church service generally means a time of focussing on God in music and song.

Vineyard Music was the largest selling Christian music in the world during the 1990s.


It is most often practical and to meet someone’s needs rather than devotional. E.g.

Stoughton, 1999).

Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 121

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27 Jackson, Quest, 72-76.
30 John Wimber, Everyone Gets to Play (Boise: Ampelon, 2008).
33 AVC-USA, Core Values and Beliefs (Dallas: AVC, 2009), 4.
34 Where the Vineyard differs from most other evangelical and Pentecostal churches’ understanding of healing is that they see it essentially as a result of the in-breaking of the Kingdom of God rather than as a result of the atonement. Therefore they believe there is not a guarantee that those they pray for will be healed due to the “now but not yet” nature of the Kingdom of God. This is unlike forgiveness, which is achieved as a result of the atonement, and therefore is guaranteed to all who genuinely seek it.
38 AVC-USA, Theological and Philosophical Statements, 2.
39 Venter, Doing Church, 157.
41 AVC-USA, Theological and Philosophical Statements, 25.
45 See the biography by his wife, Carol Wimber, John Wimber: The Way It Was (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1999).
46 Frost and Hirsch, Shaping, 15-16.
47 VCA Archives, held at Vineyard Churches Australia office.
50 Trainor, “Interview”, 1.
51 Trainor, “Interview”, 1.
53 Neil Cole is the founder and executive director of Church Multiplication Associates which has helped start hundreds of churches in thirty-five states of the USA and thirty nations. He is one of the key founders of he organic- or simple-church movement. A key aspect of his work has been the establishment of a discipleship tool known as Life Transformation Groups (LTGs). See Neil Cole, Organic Church: Growing Faith Where Life Happens (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005).
56 Focus Group Member 7, “CVC Focus Group – Cabramatta”, Sydney (13 May, 2010), 1.
59 Member 9, “CVC Focus Group”, 2.
60 Alan Hirsch, The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006), 218.
62 See “Appendix 2: Crave Group Questions”.
64 Josh, “Interview with Josh – Cabramatta”, Sydney (25 May, 2010), 3. This quote is typical of prayer at CVC. It is most often practical and to meet someone’s needs rather than devotional. E.g. “When I’m feeling down, discouraged or ashamed they are always praying for me.” Respondent 12, “CVC Survey”, 29.
Member 2, “CVC Focus Group”, 2.

“NCLS-CVC Church Profile”.


Frost and Hirsch, Shaping, 18-19.


“CVC Survey”, 6.

“VCA-Survey, Combined”, 11.

“NCLS-CVC Church Profile”, 10. “Prayer ministry for one another” ranked highest at 65%.

Jenny, “Interview”, 5.

Angela, “Interview with Angela – Cabramatta”, Sydney (26 May, 2010), 4.

One Focus Group member summarises with some exasperation the history of change to the corporate worship gathering at CVC, “We have gone from one school to another, changed to a meeting, changed to a pub, changed to meeting in homes, now gone to meeting fortnightly and one of those is a celebration.” Member 6, “CVC Focus Group”, 5.

“CVC Survey”, 11. This number represents 23 of the 31 respondents.


“CVC Survey”, 19.

Trainor, “Interview”, 8.