Darren Cronshaw*

Revitalization consultancy models: Australian church case studies

DOI 10.1515/ijpt-2014-0011

Abstract: Consultancy processes can help local churches that are plateaued or declining to revitalize. This article discusses six models of consultancies in Australian local churches or denominations: Alan Roxburgh’s Future Directions used by Churches of Christ, Paul Borden and Salvation Army’s Growing Health Corps, Natural Church Development with Brisbane Anglicans, Ken Morgan’s Pathways for Melbourne Anglicans, 3DM adapted by Fitzroy North Church of Christ, and Neil Cole’s Church Transfusion at Geelong’s Central Baptist Church. The essential elements in a revitalization consultancy are to resource spiritual depth, reconnect with Biblical and congregational stories, facilitate congregational conversations, provide leadership in change, and foster creative dreaming.

Keywords: Revitalization, church consultancy, missional church, change management, renewal, congregational transformation


*Corresponding author: Darren Cronshaw, Australian College of Ministries - Missiology and Research, 50 Auburn Road Hawthorn Victoria 3122, Australia, Email: pastor@auburn.org.au
In Search Of Revitalization Processes

In this era of unprecedented changes in society and the religious landscape of the Western world, churches need procedures and processes for innovation and planned change. The Baptist Union of Victoria (BUV), a denomination of 216 local churches and other agencies, has recently been through a reimagining and restructuring process. A key strategic need identified was for a revitalization plan and consultancy approach for local churches that are in decline or dying, especially in disadvantaged and remote areas. The pressing questions include how can BUV (or other denominational systems) help and empower declining churches to transform themselves to be viable and thriving community groups? What are the available assessment and consultancy tools that can be utilized and where do they work best? What processes do Baptist churches in Victoria already use? And what have other denominations been doing around Australia to help transform struggling local churches?

I am writing this as a BUV denominational resource person in our Mission Catalyst team in order to identify best practices for congregational consultancy. I am also a local church pastor seeking to lead AuburnLife Baptist Church through revitalization, and thus adopt the posture of a reflective practitioner with my questions and analysis.

The basis for these reflections is found in our BUV understanding of mission as “everything God is doing in the world to restore the world to God’s dream”. Mission can only happen in partnership with and inspired by God; it belongs not to us but to God in the missio Dei. A holistic approach to mission and church includes compassionate acts of service, advocacy for justice, care for creation and evangelism.¹

With that understanding of mission, “revitalization” is the process of reconnecting a local church with the life and mission of God. Revitalization is not just about adding numbers of people to church, a problematic and overly narrow metric, but renewing a church’s passion for and engagement with God’s mission. “Missional effectiveness” is the capacity of a church and its activities to fulfill the mission of God. “Discipleship” is about inviting people to become and grow as followers of Jesus, and thus be carriers and partners of the mission of God. Numbers of people attending is one measure of “success”, but we need broader

measures of discipleship and growth in faithfulness to what it is to be the essence of church, which is why the developing interest in “qualities” of “church health” has been a welcome trend. BUV is one of many denominations that are intentionally seeking to plant new churches and fresh expressions of church, and in parallel seek to revitalize and transform currently existing churches with all of their potential for mission.²

Over 1990–2010 BUV allocated approximately half-a-million dollars to revitalization partnership grants. These were allocated to local churches that sought funding to employ their usually part-time pastor for more days per week, or to develop an innovative program for mission. In 2013 I conducted an email survey of churches and pastors who received this funding during 2005–2010 as a representative sample, but the response and benefits churches could describe was negligible. The seeming lack of benefit of partnership grants has led us to ask in what ways can denominational resources best be applied to for revitalization? Of BUV’s 216 churches, many are plateaued or declining. What do they need to turn the decline around and grow as vibrant, mission-shaped communities? What processes will best help foster congregational transformation?

Apart from financial partnership and support, and whether or not that continues, BUV is eager to help guide churches and especially their leaders through a process of considering their strengths and opportunities for mission, learn and adopt new paradigms for church and mission in the 21st century, dream about new possibilities and a hopeful vision for the future, and empower leaders to lead in that direction.

Many eager missional leaders suggest it is easier to plant a new church than to remissionalize an existing one.³ Existing churches have inherited culture, leadership and patterns of operating that have got them to where they are now. Plateaued or declining churches need to change in order to grow. It is organizational insanity for them to think they can keep doing the same things and expect different results. But change and regaining missional momentum is difficult. It takes a thoughtful process and a committed leader or ideally leadership team. Whether remissionalization is more difficult to planting is a mute point. Church planting has its own challenges, and remissionalization has its own advantages. Remissionalization is especially needed in inner-suburban areas where many

---

² This is part of the “mixed economy” strategy of the Fresh Expressions movement that has inspired BUV. See Michael Moynagh with Philip Harrold, Church for every Context: An Introduction to Theology and Practice, (London: SCM, 2012) 431–447.

churches are struggling and property is expensive. Eddie Gibbs and Ian Coffey comment, “While it is sometimes said that it is easier to have babies than to raise the dead, it might just be that God has the greater miracle in mind.” With a conviction that God is in the miracle-working enterprise, the question of the BUV revitalization project is so how do we cooperate with God to invite miracles in our churches? What human processes are helpful to cooperate with divine agency for revitalization?

There are a number of consultancy and planned change processes that are used in local churches to help foster revitalization. Some of these have been applied well with broad consultation and empowering leadership. Some of them have not worked so well when consultation is limited or processes are poorly implemented. Processes that are popularly used in Australian churches include those developed by Alan Roxburgh, Paul Borden, Ken Morgan, Neil Cole, 3DM and Natural Church Development (NCD). This article investigates, describes and evaluates these six selected programs, including case studies of where they have worked in local churches and/or denominational systems. The case studies use Appreciative Inquiry to explore the helpful factors, learn from the processes used, and begin to develop a proposed preferable process or set of processes for BUV and other churches.

The focus of the article is what can we learn about best practices for congregational consultancy processes from existing processes and case studies of revitalization? The methodology is to select six revitalization processes and case studies and interview a representative leader for each process. I acknowledge the empirical approach of interviewing key advocates of each process can only show the program and its effects from one angle. Potential further research offering a more comprehensive evaluation of renewal dynamics and process limitations could interview and consider the experience and perceptions of pastors, church members and other consultancy process participants. I have begun to explore some of the processes and their elements in greater depth, but this introductory article is limited to a literature review of the consultancy materials and interviewing one person for each of the six processes. In exploring what we could learn from these different processes, questions ranged from asking for a description of the church and the process it used, through to asking how a denomination can best help a local church in revitalization:

---

Semi-structured interview guide

1. Please describe your church and its context. In what ways has your church functioned at its best over the last decade?
2. What is the revitalization process you followed and what is it informed by? How has it worked, at its best, for you and your congregation?
3. Where do you see the weaknesses of the process or program? Where do you see the program needs to go and develop?
4. What lessons have you learned about congregational renewal and the process you used that other churches might learn from? What advice would you offer?
5. If you were designing a new leadership or consultancy process for helping churches revitalize, what elements would be most important to include?
6. Who else do you think I should talk to or what other books or resources should I consult?
7. In what ways have or could your denomination or other outside consultants most help you and other churches continue to grow in health and mission?

These questions helped identify and explore the distinctive features of different processes, summarized and evaluated below, and this leads to consideration of a preferred model or at least elements of best practice for revitalization processes.

Available Revitalization Processes and Resources

Future Directions with Alan Roxburgh (Churches of Christ Vic-Tas)

Alan Roxburgh is a Canadian Baptist pastor and missional consultant who encourages congregations to foster congregational conversations and fresh imagination, to engage deeply with Scripture as well as their local context, and to discern where God is active so they can join God’s mission. He developed a “Missional Change Model” to guide churches to dream together, cultivate an alternative imagination for how they express church and mission, and plan new initiatives. The genius of his approach is assuming that God’s people have the resources and capacity to discern and do the mission God is calling them to.6

Roxburgh teaches a refreshingly thorough theological and biblical approach to congregational transformation. He invites churches not just to read Scripture in

an attempt to master it but to let Scripture read them, especially the formative sending of the seventy in Luke 10:1–12. This passage emphasizes hospitality, community rhythms and bringing shalom in places that are beyond church preoccupations – joining with what God is doing in our local neighborhoods. Congregational transformation, therefore, happens at its best when the church is focused on submerging with what God is doing in a neighborhood rather than tinkering with church forms. Luke 10 encourages a mutuality in mission – especially identifying local people of peace and enjoying their hospitality – which is appropriate in a postmodern context of religious plurality.

Instead of a focus on strategic planning, Roxburgh counsels “missional map-making” that aims for discipleship, leadership development and sending missionaries (rather than church attendance, budget and buildings). To dream and discern together, he sidelines organizational audits, church surveys and mission statements. He urges congregations to firstly begin with assessing how the world around is changing. Secondly, he urges congregations to re-find their identity in the biblical narrative and listen to God and one another about where God is calling them to continue the story. Some churches with stricter conservative theology and understanding of the Bible may find this problematic, but it offers an invitation to engage the Bible dynamically and seek to improvise how to continue the story. Third, he counsels creating a parallel culture that cultivates practices for spiritual formation: hospitality, solitude, prayer, Sabbath, sharing belongings, Scripture, serving the poor and welcoming strangers, all which lead in counter-cultural directions and tune people into what God is doing. Finally, Roxburgh suggests forming local partnerships and listening for what God is up to in the neighborhood. Roxburgh thus offers a call to renewal through attentive listening to God and one another and other classical spiritual practices.

The Churches of Christ Conference of Victoria and Tasmania (CCCVT) invited Roxburgh to help them to be more missionally effective. They had some dynamic churches and ministries, but at least half were static or declining. They

---

10 Churches of Christ in Victoria and Tasmania CCVT, Future Directions FAQs: Developing Health and Growth in Churches in Victoria and Tasmania, 2008; Paul Cameron, Interview with Darren Cronshaw, 29 May 2013.
wanted to recapture a sense of a Christian movement that promotes mission-shaped experiments, prioritizes missional transformation of existing churches, and celebrates a diversity of size, shape, location and culture of local churches. This is an important metric of missional effectiveness; not just measuring attendance numbers of existing churches but the number of diverse expressions of church. Paul Cameron, CCCVT CEO, says the resulting “Future Directions” (FD) was a central element of putting mission at the center of the movement with three cohorts 2003–2008.¹¹

FD had ministers undertake “misisonal readiness” and 360 degree surveys, link with a coach to develop a “personal development plan”, and gather in minister cohorts each month to dwell in Scripture and reflect on their call and mission. The process gave priority to leadership development – not to set up leaders as the central players, but to affirm the importance of positive leadership: “Leaders are environment cultivators who build and create socializing space for inspiration, mentoring and shaping of new leaders.”¹²

Congregations also did a missional readiness survey. This fed into a “Listening & Action Group” which identified challenges to face, and then a “Missional Action Team” or “Experiment Design Team” that designed innovative ways of responding. It was a guided missional transformation process where the congregation talked through the issues, not just an outside expert telling them what to do. In 2006 the third cohort also used small group and sermon material, using Appreciative Inquiry, to discover the congregation’s deeper story and audit its culture and community.¹³

Churches and leadership teams gathered at “Unfreeze” events where they dwelt in Scripture, listened to one another, and dreamed about new mission initiatives. Participants described part of the magic of these events was young and old, people from new and inherited churches, and believers from across the theological spectrum were mutually inspired by hearing one another’s experiences. The focus was reflecting on where they were “on mission” and giving permission to dream and do mission differently. For example, Southern Community reported FD helped them move on from being a “donut” church without a center, and to bring Jesus and mission clearly back to the center. Facilitating, and continuing, that sort of conversation takes courage. It was not about top-down vision-casting from denominational leaders, but creating space to hear something new from God.¹⁶

¹¹ CCVT, “Future Directions FAQs,” 4, 9, 16.
¹² CCVT, “Future Directions FAQs,” 5, 9.
¹³ CCVT, “Future Directions FAQs,” 5, 7, 10.
¹⁴ Cameron, Interview; CCVT, “Future Directions FAQs,” 7.
In review, FD focused on fostering conversations to encourage new ideas:

The FD process acknowledges that most change in complex ‘systems’ emerges as a result of conversations and interactions between the people in the system—the people themselves being complex systems! Complexity theory (as it is known) suggests that when there is enough connectivity, communication and conversation between people in a system, ‘emergence’ is likely to occur spontaneously.15

Roxburgh’s processes taught about “Dwelling in the Word”, listening to God and congregational conversations. FD has formally ceased, but its principles, practices, language and matrices continue. Its genius was that Roxburgh opened up a conversation process around what is most important. While other processes can be reactive and focused on problems and conflict on the one hand, or seek to be directive in communicating “the Vision” on the other hand, Future Direction was designed to foster trust and imagination from among the churches for new directions. This “bottom-up” approach is based in the assumption that “the future of God is within the people of God because the Holy Spirit is within the people of God”. Some ministers prefer to be more central and influential, but it is consistent with convictions about “the priesthood of all believers and “mutual ministry”. CCCVT have sought to move away from “bottom-up” language, not to revert back to “top-down” but preferring Richard Seel’s expression of middle-out: “everyone is involved and there is no preferred starting place”.16

FD is not about reassuring comfortable churches, but focusing attention on a process of “adaptive change for missional effectiveness” and empowering churches for a “missional change pilgrimage”. Citing Paul Borden: “there are two kinds of pain: the pain of death, or the pain of change” and FD encourages churches to choose the pain of change.17 Some consulting keeps churches “above the line” to alleviate anxiety. Roxburgh and Cameron acknowledge the need to increase anxiety, to challenge churches to face the real issues.18

Roxburgh is a popular writer and speaker and a helpful conversation partner for revitalization. His principles for fostering spiritual practices, inviting congre-

15 CCCVT, “Future Directions FAQs,” 5.
18 Cameron, Interview; see also Paul Cameron, “CCVT Renewal Challenge: A Conversation Paper,” in: Tension Summit (Discovery Church, Mt Evelyn, 2013) http://www.churchesofchrist.org.au/component/content/article/32-e-news/506-1304renewal
gational conversations, developing leaders in cohorts and encouraging innovative dreaming have parallels in a number of the other processes below. His encouragement to churches to find their identity in the biblical narrative is unique among these processes, but is a strategy that resonates well with BUV culture and values.

Parish Renewal with Ken Morgan (Melbourne Anglicans)

Ken Morgan is a church consultant who has worked with Church Resource Ministries and Church Army Australia. He developed the “Pathways” consulting model 15 years ago with a Supply Chain Network colleague, and has used it with churches, planters and colleges in a number of English-speaking countries. It begins with the basic questions that are an interrogation of reality: what have you got, and what one or two things could you do to do more effective mission?19

Recruited to the Melbourne Anglican Diocese in 2011 for his change agent skills, and appointed as “Coordinator for Implementation of Vision and Strategic Directions”, Morgan initiated a Parish Pilot Program. The process was renamed the “Growth in Mission Program for Parishes” and then the “Parish Renewal Program” under the banner of the Bishop Perry Institute.20 It is designed to help churches in cohorts to grow to the next size stage.21

They have offered five cohorts 2011–2014; one cohort of 15 mid-pastoral-sized parishes (140–200 average Sunday attendance) in 2011, a second of 11 pastoral to program transition parishes in 2012 including 3 “graduates from 2011”, a third of seven family to pastoral transition parishes in 2013, and two cohorts in 2014, one pastoral to program, the other family to pastoral. Working with cohorts of similarly-sized churches encourages collaboration as they address common issues.

For example, family-sized churches (35–50 average Sunday attendance) tend to have intense loyalty to the status quo and find it difficult to engage in paradigm-changing conversations let alone behavior, unless they have external

20 http://www.bishopperryinstitute.org.au
21 Carl E George and with Warren Bird, How to Break Growth Barriers: Capturing Overlooked Opportunities for Church Growth, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993); Alice Mann, The In-between Church: Navigating Size Transitions in Congregations (Alban Institute, 1998).
support and are faced with extinction. But a denominational program that gathers a cohort of teams from small churches together can help them step outside the box of their own family circle, learn change-management skills and be inspired by other small churches. The only caveat is that small churches can imbibe a “Napoleon complex” and if they perceive exterior pressure or feel bullied by a bigger system, they can resist fiercely.\textsuperscript{22}

Morgan is careful to clarify expectations with churches and ensure they are ready to sign up for the cost of change. Whereas some denominational staff report spending a lot of time with problems and conflicts, Morgan focuses on churches that are ready to change, and the program is by application. He is an advocate for allocating denominational resources with the greatest opportunities for growth rather than the loudest problems.

Parish Renewal is an integrated suite of leadership development and congregational resourcing. Morgan as Program Coordinator meets with the minister and Vestry to clarify expectations and decide whether to work with the Vestry or a separate Mission Action Team (MAT). The minister and Vestry/MAT then attend a one-day orientation that introduces Building a Mission Pathway (using “Pathways” for engaging unchurched people), the process of growth by transition to a different sized church bracket, and the discernment process involved in the program’s first year. Later in that first year they attend a seminar about leading during the process of change, focusing on congregational systems and ways they emotionally handle change and deal with the anxiety, facilitated with Jenny Brown from the Family Systems Institute. By the end of the year they will have completed a discernment process and developed a plan for change in areas needing attention.

The process is supported by a series of one-day seminars:

1. Seeing the Parish with Fresh Eyes (understanding your community)
2. Serving the Parish with Fresh Focus (using demographics for ministry)
3. From Belonging to Believing (building on “Pathways” for engaging unchurched people)
4. Being and Making Disciples of Jesus (for aligning with the mission and teachings of Jesus)
5. Reproducing Leaders (with a “Leadership Farm System”).

All seminars are based on interactive adult-learning methods, are outcome-driven and lead to a plan-of-action, and are done in teams so people cannot attend

\textsuperscript{22} Gil Rendle and Alice Mann, \textit{Holy Conversations: Strategic Planning as a Spiritual Practice for Congregations}, (Alban Institute, 2003), 183.
alone. The program also involves additional coaching, training and accountability for the minister. Churches cannot do a second module until they implement most of the action plan from the previous module, and if they are stuck a coach helps the Vicar lead through blockages.\(^{23}\) Morgan observes Christians are great at attending seminars and putting material on the shelf, but he wants churches to implement what they learn.

To participate, churches have to be paying their denominational fees and commit to the process and training for two years, including Vestry/MAT members making themselves available for 12 hours per month for the program. They are expected to commit to renewal and growth, establish a group devoted to consistent prayer for renewal, devote necessary resources to fuel growth, and change or stop activities that do not facilitate growth. The minister must commit to at least two more years in that parish, and be prepared to set and be accountable for key performance indicators. Family-sized church ministers must spend significant time (a third of salaried hours) with unchurched people. Although the program encourages the mission of the whole people of God, it assumes the minister leads the way, which is especially important for small churches to break through their growth barrier.\(^{24}\) There is no opt in/opt out arrangement to choose which parts to do, but a total and semi-intensive package over two years designed to reshape a parish for mission and growth.

Parish Renewal is designed to help churches align their resources and activities for mission and discipleship, and work toward the church more closely reflecting the surrounding community, which often means increasing their cultural diversity and age representation. It is not about prescribing particular programmed activities or worship styles, but helping “each parish find their unique response both to God’s invitation and to their local community.”\(^{25}\)

A central component of the wisdom of Parish Renewal is encouraging all churches to evaluate their activities and develop pathways to help people travel from no contact as a stranger to hear the gospel, and to be discipled and developed as a leader. The seven stages of the Pathways schematic are:

- Potential contact
- In touch
- Belonging

\(^{23}\) Morgan, Interview (n. 20); http://bishopsperyinstitute.org.au/training/


For example, St Paul’s Anglican Church in North Caulfield and their minister Howard Langmead joined the first cohort. They were mid-pastoral sized averaging 110 people in worship. Three years later they have grown to 212. Morgan describes them as an ordinary church with a reasonable location and a well-known “OMG” banner on their steeple. The genius of their growth has been adopting the Pathways approach to congregational planning. They have some good community ministries with playgroups and teaching English, all designed to welcome and serve people. Then there are pathways to opportunities to hear the gospel, be discipled, and be trained and serve in different ministries.

Parish Renewal is a denomination-wide but local church focused process worth learning from and includes resources that might be adapted by other denominations. Like other processes, Morgan facilitates leadership development through clustering leaders together, but he also has a unique approach to clustering churches who face similar issues and offering them a developed training syllabus. He encourages churches to dream in new directions, but especially about how to ensure they fill gaps in their pathways of faith development and discipleship, which adds a helpful focus to the process.

Growing Healthy Corps with Paul Borden
(Salvation Army, Australia Southern Territory)

Paul Borden is a Baptist pastor and denominational leader who reshaped an American Baptist denominational region, American Baptist Churches of the West, as “Growing Healthy Churches”. The narrative since Borden took over is of turnaround and revitalization. They have planted ten new congregations each

27 Morgan, Interview (n. 20).
28 http://www.growinghealthychurches.org/
year for eight years and baptisms increased from 800 to 4000 per year. Borden has become an international consultant for denominations seeking similar transformation and he brings a highly developed process and set of tools for congregational consultations. His starting point is to encourage pastors to minister with an outward focus and bring planned change to their churches, which focuses them outward on making disciples. On the one hand, he urges holding pastors accountable for fruitfulness. Churches are crying out for leadership, and Borden expects pastors to provide it and work with God to grow the church. On the other hand, he urges churches and denominations to provide the resources to help pastors and their churches to be healthy and grow. Training and budget, support and salary, decision-making and strategic planning should all be geared for health and growth. Basically everything the denomination does should be about catalyzing congregational transformation and empowering pastors to be change agents. For example, Borden advocates changing governance to a John Carver model where the board discards overall mission but empowers the pastor to lead.

Borden has consulted widely in Australia including the Salvation Army. “Growing Healthy Corps” (GHC) is a Southern territory-wide program that was trialed from 2004 in 40 corps/churches. GHC starts with Borden’s teaching on mission, challenging leaders to consider if they are making disciples. Borden preaches from Matthew 28: “If you ain’t making disciples, you ain’t being obedient”. To be making disciples, Borden teaches, leaders need to be leading, to lead they need to develop, and to develop they need to cluster for training and support. Borden’s usual and somewhat controversial prescription for congregational and denominational transformation is to correlate pastor salary increases to congregational growth. This was not transferable to Salvation Army, but they did want to link involvement with incentives. They promised officers in the process would stay in a Corp for 5 years and not be moved (part of a cultural change for Salvation Army), and the GHC budget pays for training and clusters.

Once a month small groups of Officers gather at a café with a facilitator for mutual support, training, reviewing statistical outcomes of growth, coffee and lunch together, and a book discussion. A range of leadership and ministry books

are posted out, and everyone is expected to read and come prepared to discuss them. Officers sometimes teach what they learn to their Corp leadership teams. There is also a layered learning day that Officers from each division attend, and an annual super cluster for 3–5 days, although that is now only offered to new Officers because of the expense.

Complementing the training support for leaders is a Corp consultation at some stage of the five-year process. The Corp prepares historical records, leadership team agendas, newsletters and statistics. Territorial staff analyze the data and using a GHC checklist interview the leaders and wider influencers, interview the Senior Pastors over dinner, and invite input from anyone in a larger focus group. The big question is what is the interest and focus on mission? For example, a typical question is: has the focus changed from “souls saved” of decades ago to “money raised” today? The consultants formulate a prescription which starts with a generic day of prayer, fasting and intercession and then specific suggestions including changing leaders, programs, and whatever the church needs to do to get healthy. At a Sunday service Borden or another consultant preaches on mission focus and after lunch the consultant reads the prescription as a sobering call to health and mission and the Corp votes on whether to do the prescription (one of the few times a Salvation Army Corp votes on anything).

A Sydney Corp had a band and songster group with a few grey-headed saints in the congregation, all Caucasian and not representing the cultural diversity of their suburb. The church sang while across the road groups played in the local park, but they had little future. The GHC prescription was that within 12 months the church needed a mixture of uniform and non-uniformed attenders, ages and cultures. The Corp was left to do that anyway they could. The band, to its credit, had music teachers who said to their students, “We’ll teach you music and you can take our place” and students came to play. The songsters invited siblings of the new band members to come and sing. They hosted a regular service in the park, and a turning point was when a group of Africans came and joined them for the Park service. The Corp grew by 50 people in 12 months.

Borden is most helpful for reminding us of the importance of leadership development and governance that best fosters mission, and holding leaders and churches accountable for fruitfulness. Governance is not necessarily the most exciting leverage for change, but it is important to ensure it is not detracting from

---


33 Len Turner, Interview with Darren Cronshaw, 29 January 2014.
mission. Borden mandates a consultation that includes a consultant talking to congregation members and leaders, so their input is taken into account, but his approach has less scope for congregational conversation and discernment. It is more leader-centric, in contrast especially to Roxburgh and to some extent Morgan who emphasize more the place of the congregation’s imagination for mission. Nevertheless, the pastor as leader is important especially if they can be released to empower members for mission.

**Natural Church Development (Brisbane Anglican Diocese)**

Natural Church Development (NCD) is an approach to church health and growth based on a diagnostic survey that measures eight qualitative characteristics. It identifies maximum and minimum factors, and encourages a church to focus on improving the minimum factors which NCD teaches limits growth; i.e. plug the holes. The NCD survey is undertaken ideally every 12–18 months by a representative sample of 30 people who are in small group, serving regularly, and representative of the church demographics and gender balance. Survey results are measured against results from all over the world in all different church settings and so become a helpful comparative and diagnostic tool. Moreover NCD produces resources to help churches develop in any of the quality areas: Empowering leadership, Gift-oriented ministry, Passionate spirituality, Functional structures, Inspiring worship service, Holistic small groups, Need-oriented evangelism, and Loving relationships.\(^\text{34}\)

NCD identifies bands of church health. A church below 35 is likely in significant numerical decline and will realize its crisis. A church in the 40s is below average, has a low capacity, will be slowly declining and needing serious intervention; this is the average Brisbane Anglican church. A church at a median on 50 is still not necessarily viable, and will hopefully know they need help but may not realize their crisis. To have growth potential, it needs to be above average, mid 50+. To get to that is a big movement, not incremental, and usually needs a big change in leadership. To move from 55 to 65 which will likely then have noticeable numerical growth impact is also leadership driven. A church that scores 65+ in all eight qualities will usually be growing.

---

The Brisbane Anglican Diocese began a trial NCD Project in 2009. Ralph Bowles had been a local user and advocate of NCD as Vicar at St Stephen’s Coorparoo, but was eager to see whether its success in improving quality could be replicated across the diocese, or bettered with more intentional use and support. Individual Anglican churches had used NCD, but no diocese or subgroup had collectively used it. The plan was to do 3 survey cycles (4 surveys) with 30 churches over 4 years. As NCD Project Officer, Bowles visits parishes thinking of engaging NCD and offers or arranges coaching. On reflection, he would have liked to have involved less churches but resourced them with more coaching. Enrollment in the program was voluntary, but 66 parishes have been involved or 44% of the Diocese and representing all traditions and qualities. The early adopters have finished (10–12 parishes), but the Archbishop has extended the trial period so the results can be fully evaluated across the whole sample.

Thus far, quality improvement has exceeded national and international improvement for churches undertaking 3 surveys. The international improvement average for churches doing 3 surveys is 6 points. The Australian average improvement is 9 points. The diocesan goal for 3 surveys was 11 points of improvement on the NCD scale, but they achieved that in 1 or 2 cycles. They increased from a general average before quality improvement (scoring 44) to about a medium level of church health (50); a big improvement but not yet at a point where numerical growth will manifest. There may be a selection bias with those results, as the early adopters who completed the process were keen and committed, and those that have been slower or less regular may not be seeing as much improvement. Bowles is aiming to evaluate the program overall and then hopefully continue it for ongoing quality improvement. Bowles says the next challenge is the 10 year journey to 55, or to where the Archbishop wants the Diocese at 65. That is a level of revitalization no church denomination has done or measured as a group. Bowles is confident NCD is a valid and reliable survey tool for measuring progress in church health and for identifying church growth factors. Parishes have consistently seen improvement in the qualities they selected to focus on.

For example, a parish in Rural Queensland showed below average quality on its first NCD survey. Its lowest minimum factor was loving relationships, attributable to a conflict they were experiencing over two issues but not resolving well. After consultation, the church developed a new conflict strategy and reflected on the NCD resource *Three Colors of Love*. These resources are relevant teaching tools, and can be accompanied with other online tests.35

---

The impact of NCD on the denominational leadership system in the Anglican Diocese of Brisbane is another important fruit of the NCD Project. It has begun to influence how the Church works for revitalization at a central leadership level.

Revitalization requires measurement and diagnostic tools to assess where a congregation is, and a process for leading them into a more positive and fruitful future. NCD offers both a ministry diagnosis and a planning process, and the discipline of revisiting it regularly every 12–18 months, and the accompanying resources that help churches not only identify where they are weak but build strength into their systems.36

NCD identifies weaknesses rather than strengths to work on, different to many consultancy approaches that are more strength-based building on the philosophy of assets-based community development. NCD does not prescribe congregational conversations or dreaming about new innovations like the previous consultancy processes do, but they give churches important themes and metrics to talk about, and include core qualities of passionate spirituality and empowering leadership that others also explore as important elements. Although NCD consultants are willing to help churches work though their results, it is a system that churches tend to use regularly as a self-diagnostic evaluative tool of church health, in contrast to Roxburgh, Morgan and Borden’s mission-focused church consultancies.

3DM (Fitzroy Church of Christ)

3DM resources churches for discipleship and mission by focusing on helping churches foster their “three dimensional relationships”: UP with God, IN with one another, and OUT with the world. They aim to make missional disciples who reproduce missional disciples, and missional communities that reproduce missional communities. Starting in the UK, they have branched out to Europe, USA, Australia and other countries. Their genius is in their use of Huddles (where a coach gathers a few people together to share life and discuss what God is inviting people towards as a discipleship vehicle), missional communities (15–50 people gathering in mid-sized groups as a missional vehicle), and Lifeshapes (a learning and common language tool). These frameworks have proven effective in church planting and/or revitalization, helping churches to focus on discipleship and mission. 3DM founder Mike Breen comments:

People want to create missional churches or missional programs or missional small groups. The problem is that we don’t have a “missional” problem in the Western church. We have a discipleship problem. If you know how to disciple people well, you will always get mission.37

The intended focus is not recruiting more church volunteers but creating space and conversation for people to listen to God and respond – a discipleship that naturally leads to mission.38

Stephen Sutton, Church of Christ pastor of Fitzroy North Community Church (FNCC), sought out 3DM as he was eager to develop or find a discipleship process. Sutton recruited Shane Meyer on to staff to implement 3DM. As they considered their church and mission, they were inspired by 3DM but wanted to adapt and amend the tools.39

They have not adopted missional communities as a missional vehicle; their main gatherings are still Sunday church and Discipleship groups. They also do not stress the need for people to meet 1-on-1 with leaders. They wanted to invite people to be equipped to live life, not just participate in church life; and so did not want to keep adding groups and expectations to the church program. They learned from the recent self-analysis of Willow Creek Reveal Study that a busy church system is not necessarily helpful for discipleship.40 Sutton and Meyer’s desire is to make discipleship, not necessarily church busyness, a bigger part of people’s lives. They use some of the Lifeshapes images to describe discipleship.

The main 3DM element they adopted was small groups with intentional discipleship questions. They did not adopt the complete style of 3DM’s huddles. Huddles are fine for some people, Meyer explains, but Fitzroy North is what he terms a “disclaimer church” because everyone says they are not really interested in church, although they come. As post faith-crisis people they are suspicious of top-down structures, and were not comfortable adopting 3DM’s leader-directed huddles. They describe group leadership as being on a journey with their people, like a facilitator who prepares a meal to share. Meyer’s group called themselves “the problem children” and when he took them out for drinks to discuss the idea of a group to talk about faith and everyday life, they agreed but with the proviso,

37 Mike Breen and Steve Cockram, Building a Discipling Culture: How to Release a Missional Movement by Discipling People Like Jesus Did, (USA: 3DM, 2011).
“As long as you don’t make us group leaders or try to multiply the group”. Meyer realized he needed to adapt the usual expectations. However, they started with four groups and have added to that number and now have seven, called D groups or Discipleship groups.

They especially liked the idea of the discipleship questions, although they struggled with the ways they are framed: “What is God saying to me?” and “What am I doing about it?” 3DM say these are central questions for discipleship. However, Sutton and Meyer felt those specific questions were too individualistic, too definite in the answers they solicited, and gave no guidance how to discern guidance. They wanted to ask different albeit related questions that focused people’s attentiveness to the Kingdom of God and how to participate in it communally. And they wanted to help people reflect on what God is like and what of God resonates with them, and the implications of this for reflecting God in everyday life.

North Fitzroy groups instead use three questions:
1. What is God doing in the world and how am I participating?
2. What might God be saying to me and what am I doing about it?
3. Where is God leading me and how am I following?

They ask all three questions at different times, but mainly the first question, the second less frequently (but framed under the first), and the third more rarely. They do not want to dwell on encouraging big life changes as much as encouraging reflection on how to live faithfully in people’s current situations. Sometimes God leads people dramatically in new directions. We all like to do something “significant”. But Fitzroy North wants to foster the sense that going to Africa as a missionary or Aid worker is not the only important and significant vocational choice. Some are called to a vastly different context, like Peter who left his nets to follow Jesus. But most are called to live faithfully where we have been sent locally, as the Apostle Paul taught to go about everyday life as a way of following God. Both are valid forms of following Jesus, and Fitzroy North wants to celebrate the local and ordinary, not just the global and extraordinary.

Thus the main question is: “What is God doing in the world and how am I participating?” They encourage people to reflect on aspects of God’s character that resonate for them and seek to emulate that. For example, one member recognized that “God wants to welcome people” and so sought to cooperate with that in offering hospitality. Another saw God as non-judgmental, and consequently committed to avoiding any judgmental forms of faith. They wanted to promote the sense that God invites people towards faith and Christian community with a smile, rather than a frown. Meyer’s discipleship group members are all interested in justice and peacemaking. They celebrate God as redeemer, and have
discussed how they want to join with God in advocating for the marginalized and taking what is broken or lacking wholeness and make it whole.41

The Kingdom of God has become a guiding framework. Meyer developed small group outlines to introduce the Kingdom of God as a basis for discipleship. They talk through the different scripts that influence us: Pharisees and their concern for purity; Essenes and their escaping; Sadducees and their compromise; Zealots and their preoccupation with violent overthrow; and Jesus’ script which subverts all of them. They also discuss kingdom themes: redemption, adoption, peacemaking and justice, and encourage one another to live those out in everyday life. Thus they start with grounding people in the biblical story, and encourage people to improvise how they continue that story. If the “old scorecard” for discipleship was church involvement, they want to recalibrate to see discipleship lived out in the world. People don’t feel they have to change careers or relocate or find something new to do in order to be more “Christian”. Discipleship is about imagining how Jesus wants to foster the Kingdom of God in the midst of your life situation, whether as an architect, nurse or physiotherapist, or as a parent, retiree or volunteer, rather than what new thing you need to do to make you more “Christian”.42

As a church with building facilities, Fitzroy North has also been renovating to make best use of their space. They have pioneered the North Collective, gathering people who share space and a passion for justice and creativity and who facilitate learning and social interaction. Inspired by Bromley-by-Bow Centre in East London, UK, they have started with:

– Co-shared workspace
– Community learning centre
– Community café and kitchen
– Community space to rent
– Fitzroy North Arts Collective.

The Collective is pioneered and hosted by the church, but the church is inviting community partners, including people of no or different faith, to take ownership and help shape its direction and ethos.43

With consultancy processes or discipleship programs sometimes it is simple and helpful to adopt a whole system and benefit from the genius of the designers. Other times it is necessary to locally adapt a program. The popular advice when

41 Sutton and Meyer, Interview (n. 40).
42 Sutton and Meyer, Interview (n. 40).
43 http://fitzroynorthchurch.org.au/
you find a good thing is, “Do not reinvent the wheel”. But a BUV colleague, Mission Catalyst for Community Engagement Brent Lyons-Lee, urges leaders: “Do make sure you reinvent the wheel”. His reasoning is that we need locally adapted systems and processes. Fitzroy North have reinvented the 3DM wheel with a thoughtfully developed theological framework around creating space for fostering the Kingdom of God and inviting people to cooperate with who God is and what God is doing.

3DM offers excellent tools for spiritual depth, focused questions for dreaming about mission, and clusters for leadership development. It does not intentionally seek to invite the whole congregation into conversation and discernment as much as Roxburgh and Morgan’s processes. Yet Fitzroy Church of Christ were inspired by 3DM to invite their people to reengage the biblical story. Ultimately, they have prioritized matrices beyond church involvement as they challenge and empower disciples in their church to live out mission in their everyday lives.

**Church Transfusion with Neil Cole (Central Baptist)**

Neil Cole is author of *Organic Church* and co-founder of Church Multiplication Associates (CMA), which has planted thousands of churches internationally. Cole advocates simplifying church life and multiplying disciples, leaders, churches and movements. He and CMA co-founder Phil Helfer are not just interested in house churches but want to help existing churches take a transformational journey and become more organic and simply focused on disciple-making.

They espouse a careful process of revitalization for existing churches, not focused on organizational redesign as much as inviting a “transfusion” of missional purpose and new life. They start not with crafting a vision statement but emphasizing dependence on God. They work not with top-down leadership direction but trust God’s Spirit to guide every believer. They suggest churches can underutilize the presence of Jesus in the church and world and try to control the agenda themselves rather than prioritizing discerning what Jesus is doing. Their perspectives are a helpful reminder that revitalization is not about following a pastor’s agenda but releasing all of God’s people to listen to Jesus about what he wants to do. Their goal is not to dismantle old structures, but to cultivate new wine and wineskins parallel to the old.

---

They label one of their revitalization strategies “Water the Green Spot”. They urge pastors to pour encouragement where life is emerging and to foster creative responses with “skunk works”. Following the example of businesses designing new technology, church transfusion can be initiated by a selected group of innovators who have permission to explore out-of-the-box possibilities and ask “why not?” Churches that want to foster this kind of parallel emergence of creativity do best to set few or no boundaries, start ministries outside the church building, prioritize good communication, celebrate their stories, and block innovators from criticism. Revitalization, according to Cole and Helfer, is not a top-down project to control, but a facilitated journey and transfusion of life as churches unleash God’s people to follow Jesus in new directions. Success is not about getting more people to attend church, but sending more disciples to transform the world. The measure for transfusion success is not a Sunday show but the weekly marketplace where disciples are sent and living on mission.

Tim King and Central Baptist Church in Geelong were inspired by Neil Cole’s organic frameworks. The church is contemporary-styled with a busy men’s shed and long-running playgroup ministry, a youth group and ministry in a local high school. They have prioritized “community” and fostered a family approach to church rather than church as organization. Services have grown more informal, children and youth become more engaged, and meals together more common. Services commonly include testimonies about how people are sharing their faith at work, including King sharing his experiences since he is a bi-vocational pastor. The Sunday before I talked to King, a 70-year-old man shared his touching story of how his son came to faith after praying for him for over a decade.

King started at the church in 2009, sent by “Church by the Bay” as part of a partnership support arrangement. The trial partnership finished, but Clifton Springs called King as pastor. He taught from his passion for renewal and his conviction that church is a movement rather than static organization. He did not want to turn the church upside down, but diligently pastored and taught, and spent three years getting the church on its feet. He helped the church to focus on community and relationships, and prioritized gathering people together for small groups (often in groups of about 12) and for intensive discipleship (often in groups of 3). He also continued to read about renewal and discovered and read Neil Cole’s Journeys to Significance about Paul’s leadership development and Organic

46 Tim King, Interview with Darren Cronshaw, 21 January 2014.
Church and its approach to lowering the bar on what we expect of church but raising our expectations for discipleship.\(^{47}\)

Inspired by Cole’s ideas, King trialed a decentralized approach to church in 2012. He wanted to do church “properly”, to be less content with sitting and being fed, and more proactive in evangelism and pioneering new initiatives. Instead of gathering everyone together for Sunday church, they divided into a number of small groups. The ultimate goal was not to eliminate the Sunday service but to make it secondary and make small groups primary. Small groups included interactive teaching and communion, and people were encouraged to see that as the primary expression of church. Half the church also met in discipleship pairs or triplets for prayer, Bible reading and accountability. These were modeled on Cole’s “Life Transformation Groups” (LTGs), but Central Baptist called them “Pockets of Discipleship” (PODs).\(^{48}\) A Sunday morning gathering at a traditional timeslot remained open to visitors and anyone not in a small group.

When the trial decentralization was proposed for 2 years, 85% voted for the trial. Most people transitioned to a small group or new Sunday service. But one small group of retirees did not like the change and left to attend another church, albeit on good terms. King acknowledged small group leaders didn’t necessarily have the same passion as him. Moreover, the Sunday morning gathering often had 30–40 people so it was too big to be a small group and too small to be a big group. King reflected that he learned several important lessons. After 6 months of trial the leadership decided to resume the morning gathering as primary. The trial decentralization helped the church rethink what they meant by church and community. It helped them see that works best in different sized groups. If people are committed to a local church of 30–150 people, that can be a relatively healthy unit and it is okay to leave them to it and start again. That is what King hopes to do in the future – continue to nurture Central Baptist as a good healthy “normal” church, but experiment boldly on the margins and plant a multiplying number of churches out from the church.

Organic evangelism and discipleship is emerging around Central Baptist. A young person came to faith recently, joined a Bible study, and learned organic language and principles for his discipleship. He started meeting with a heroin addict to explore faith and is influencing his mum as well. King wants to give people freedom and permission to focus on people who are lost without Christ, and not have church activities drain people of all their time and energy. This is

\(^{47}\) Cole, Organic Church (n. 45); Neil Cole, Journeys to Significance: Charting a Leadership Course from the Life of Paul, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011).

important for pastors as well, and King values his opportunity for modeling engaged evangelism by working in the community and prioritizing a good amount of his church time on people outside the church orbit.

King suggests denominations can help churches foster more organic approaches to church through training and stories, to some extent, but mainly through giving permission and nurturing innovative leaders. King urges leaders to be talent scouts, and to then champion people who are dissatisfied with the status quo and who can show initiative and carry the future of the church.

Cole’s simple approaches to organic church are effective approaches for revitalization, or in his terms “church transfusion”. In order to transfuse new life and missional purpose, Cole’s advice overlaps with Roxburgh. Morgan and Borden in fostering spirituality, congregational conversations, leadership development, careful processes for change, and dreaming about mission. Cole also has a focus on empowering believers for mission in the marketplace, not just in-house church ministry, a focus he shares especially with 3DM.

Towards an “Out of the Box” Revitalization Process

Michael Jinkins challenges the church in the West to face up to its decline, not to cling to institutional survival but to re-find its identity and be prepared to let parts of it die. Problematically, Jinkins suggests, when church leaders see church decline it arouses all sorts of anxiety:

The anxiety occasioned by numerical decline and these attendant problems has led some in the church to a posture similar to that of the proverbial deer in the headlights—paralysis. Another common reaction, at the other extreme, is the hyperactivity of panic. This manifests itself in clutching for any and every programmatic solution and structural reorganization in the desperate hope that survival is just another project or organizational chart away.49

This project has sought to point leaders in constructive directions for congregational transformation rather than the paralysis of denial or inaction. On the other hand, hopefully the options for consultancy processes do not lead to a hyperac-

tive drivenness to try all of them, or necessarily any of them. Any one process is not the guaranteed best process for any and every church context. Nevertheless, there are principles discernable across the different processes.

Whether a church adopts one of the processes above, or follows its own process, there are five principles or practices that I suggest are foundational for congregational transformation consultancy that we can learn from these processes.

1. Spiritual depth

The six consulting approaches approach spiritual formation differently, but they all make it a priority. Roxburgh counsels developing a suite of spiritual practices to tune people into what God is doing. Morgan and Borden focus on training and inspiration for making disciples. One of the NCD core qualities is passionate spirituality. 3DM’s focus is cultivating discipleship for the sake of mission. Cole prioritizes simply helping people listening to and following Jesus in fresh directions.

The foundational element of revitalization is spiritual depth. Revitalization, at its essence, is reconnecting a church to relationship with the living God. Jesus said “I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5). Part of people’s dissatisfaction with existing forms of church is their over-reliance on rationalist, cerebral forms. Comments Andrew Walker:

Mission shaped churches and emerging churches for all their resourcefulness, vigour and imaginative drive, will not succeed unless they heed the lessons from their charismatic precursors in renewal and drop anchors in the deep waters of a church that goes all the way down to the hidden reservoirs of the life-giving Spirit.50

Revitalization is not firstly about strategic planning and organizational restructure, nor heroic leadership and innovative programs, but foundationally about helping God’s people reconnect with the vibrant life-giving Spirit of God through classic spiritual disciplines.

2. Connecting with the biblical and congregational story

A second ingredient for revitalization is helping a church reconnect with its biblical and congregational story. Uniquely, this is an important element of Roxburgh’s approach, and also part of Fitzroy Church of Christ’s 3DM-inspired story. A church that freshly understands the biblical narrative can have their imaginations captured with how they can locally continue the mission of God that they read about in Scripture. A church that understands its own story – its origins, narrative highlights, key characters, crises and the values that continue to shape the church – will be more likely to understand their DNA and how they can best live out their mission in ways that are authentic to their own story. Any exercises and programs that help a church understand its history in the context of the biblical story and their own local church story will help them imagine a renewed story.51

3. Congregational conversation and discernment

A third essential element for revitalization consultancy is to invite a congregation into conversation and some kind of discernment process. It does not matter what method or model that is used, but when congregations are invited to reflect on and discuss their history, where they are at the moment, where they function at their best, and where they want to go and grow as a church, the conversation will be helpful. Roxburgh comments: ‘The great reality of the church is that by the Spirit, God’s imagination for the future is already among God’s people, and so the work of leadership is in the cultivation of the environment that will allow this imagination to gather energy.’52 Roxburgh’s Future Directions encouraged conversations at congregational and denominational levels. Morgan, Borden, 3DM and Cole similarly cluster leaders and churches together to dream and scheme about how to listen to God and respond. NCD gives churches measures of weakness and strength to discuss. David Devine suggests the dynamic is like Marriage Enrichment weekends; they use different approaches, but the genius is giving a couple space for conversation and things to talk about. Relationship deterioration happens when a couple stops paying attention to their relationship. Church decline happens when a church forgets to reflect on why they exist and how they

52 Roxburgh, Missional Map-Making, 179 (n. 10).
can better fulfill their mission. But a church that seeks to be attentive to what God is saying to them – through listening with discernment to one another’s prayers and visions – will likely be surprised by fresh inspiration for their future.

4. Leadership

Leadership is not the only element in revitalization, certainly not a top-down approach. Nevertheless a wise and careful leader with a commitment to good processes and a commitment to see a revitalization process through is important for congregational transformation. Bill Hybels discusses different leadership styles, including reaffirming a uniquely reengineering leadership style:

> These leaders are gifted by God to thrive on the challenge of taking a troubled situation – a team that has lost its vision, a ministry where people are in wrong positions, a department trying to move forward without a strategy – and turning it around. This leader says, ‘This is my lucky day. I get to start reengineering the mess.’

---

Borden has probably the strongest emphasis on the role of the leader in revitalization. Roxburgh, Morgan and Cole emphasize more the role of the congregation discerning together their direction, and the leader’s role is facilitating a bottom-up (or middle out) process. This is consistent also with the NCD core quality of “empowering leadership” and 3DM’s coaching and clustering people for discipleship and mission. Revitalization leadership requires a careful approach to cultivating trust, building team, developing vision, fostering experimentation and persevering with a non-anxious commitment to transformation. A quality revitalization process will seek to recruit, make room for and/or develop that kind of leadership.

5. Creative dreaming and innovation

A final element of revitalization is creative dreaming and innovation. For churches to turn around they need to think outside-the-box and be prepared to change the status quo. It is organizational insanity to think you can continue doing the same things and get different results. This is why Roxburgh forms Mission Action Teams.

---

53 David Devine, Interview with Darren Cronshaw, 4 Feb 2014.
54 Bill Hybels, *Courageous Leadership*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002); 153.
and gives them a mandate to dream about fresh directions and Cole suggests “skunkworks”. 3DM asks open-ended questions about what God is doing. Others are more focused in what they invite people to dream about – church health core qualities (NCD), how to develop appropriate “pathways” for growing people in faith (Morgan), or simply how to make disciples (Borden). It is not enough for churches to be told they need to change and increase their relevance; they need processes to guide them in imagining and exploring fresh ways of being church and expressing mission.

This need for creative dreaming is what lay behind the Baptist Union of Victoria developing Out of the Box, a resource to guide churches to dream and innovate fresh ways to express worship, prayer, mission and community.55 The writers were convinced that, “In the story of God’s people, it is often those who dared to imagine a different reality who were crucial in helping their community to move in God’s new direction.” People may be open to be inspired in new directions and want to see their church revitalized, but they need their horizons broadened and need to see different ways of doing things in order to imagine their own possible different ways of being church. Some of the most helpful exercises in Out of the Box are neighborhood prayer walks, visits to churches who worship differently, and inviting input from the local mayor, refugee group leader or visitor from a non-churches background. Churches need to reconnect with God and their biblical and congregational story, and listen to one another and their leaders, but in order to dream outside their own boxes they also need to listen to their neighborhoods and neighbors who are not already engaged with church life.

**Conclusion**

A church that is plateaued or declining, or simply needing fresh mission focus, can be helped by the intervention or invitation of a church consultancy process. A skilled outside facilitator or team can help a church or whole denominational system to assess its reality and dream about a preferred future. This article has explored how Alan Roxburgh’s Future Directions, Paul Borden’s Growing Health Corps, Natural Church Development, Ken Morgan’s Parish Renewal, 3DM, and Neil Cole’s Church Transfusion have resourced selected Australian church case studies. The essential elements learned from these approaches are to resource

---

spiritual depth, reconnect with Biblical and congregational stories, facilitate congregational conversations, provide effective leadership through change, and foster creative dreaming and innovation. There is an overlap of themes in the consultancy processes discussed above – most start with spirituality and Scripture, encourage both congregational conversations and leadership for change, and foster dreaming about innovations for mission. These are not steps but ingredients in the consulting mixture; not items to pick and choose from but essential elements that Baptist Union of Victoria or any other church or denominational system would benefit from focusing on as they develop their own “Out of the Box” revitalization process.

Note: This article is part of a Baptist Union of Victoria “Baptist local churches revitalization research project”, funded by a Collier Charitable Fund Grant in 2013 and approved through Sydney College of Divinity Human Research Ethics Committee.