

# Growing the Seeds of Emergence Congregational Leadership Development in the Baptist Union of Victoria<sup>1</sup>

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*The Baptist Union of Victoria (BUV) is committed to developing an organisational culture that enables successive generations of leaders to emerge and be empowered to lead. This project interviewed a group of emerging/emerged leaders and leadership development experts. It identified seven important factors for the emergence and practice of mainly Generation Y emerging leadership. To grow the seeds of emergence requires a culture of leadership development focused on mission; giving leaders opportunities with an apprenticeship of learning by doing; intentional mentoring; an empowering and collaborative leadership model; inclusion of gender, age, and cultural diversity; financially sustainable training and ministry; and a reframed definition of leadership.*

## Introduction

Developing the next generation of leaders is a challenge for all local churches and denominations. This chapter explores the critical contextual issues which affect emerging leadership in Baptist churches. We interviewed some Victorian Baptist emerging (or emerged) leaders and members of the leadership development community associated with BUV churches. This is an action-research project, investigating how younger generation leaders emerge and proposing principles and strategies for fostering leadership development.

To examine emerging leadership development, it is appropriate to consider what supports or inhibits the connection of young people with church. The church is aging and generally has a greater proportion of older people than the general population, and a lesser proportion of younger people. Baptists in Australia have a younger profile than the church overall, but still older than the general population.<sup>2</sup> This underlines the urgent need to connect with younger emerging generations.

The church needs younger leaders to guide us in how to connect better with younger generations. BUV recognises the critical need to engage younger leaders. For one level of leadership — pastoral ministry — many of our current serving pastors are approaching retirement: 58 percent are aged over 50; 33 percent are between 49 and 36; and only 9 percent are under 35 years old.<sup>3</sup> Within 15 years more than half of the current, serving pastors will retire. BUV currently has less than 10 percent of pastors under 35 (Generation Y are currently aged 21–35, born between 1980 and 1994). To reach younger generations we need a greater proportion of Gen-Y pastors and youth workers, and an emerging group from Gen-Z (those currently aged 6–20, born between 1995 and 2009).<sup>4</sup>

Generations Y and Z are increasingly mobile, but National Church Life Survey (NCLS) results warn that people who have been in church for fewer than five years are less likely to have a ministry role or feel their gifts and skills are encouraged.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, Victorian Baptist churches are comparatively less likely to appoint younger people and newcomers to ministry roles or encourage them to use their gifts and skills. Only 23 percent of 15–29 year old Victorian Baptist attenders in 2011 felt “their gifts and skills are encouraged to a great extent”, 9 percentage points below the 32 percent of all Australian attenders. Of people who switch or transfer from another church into Victorian Baptist churches, 16 percent feel greatly empowered, less than the 23 percent national average. The figure is worse for newcomers: 11 percent of Victorian Baptist newcomers feel greatly empowered, compared with 20 percent overall. For long-term attenders, the Baptist figure of 21 percent is identical to the national average. This raises the need for discerning what blockages we have against welcoming and integrating newcomers (and switchers and transferees) into leadership roles. It is unfortunate, especially for younger generations who want to be involved, that it is easier to sit and be preached at passively, than find a place to stand and contribute. Baptists say we believe in the ministry of all believers, but in Victoria we seem to adopt the ministry of mature believers.<sup>6</sup> What will it take to adopt a more proactive role in identifying and empowering leaders who are younger or newer to our churches?

## Principles for emerging leadership

To gain a deeper understanding of the experiences and practice of leadership amongst the next generation, we interviewed fourteen leaders aged 18 to 39, and 11 people involved in developing leaders. We wanted to explore how they developed as and/or develop leaders, and seek their insights about what could better foster leadership development in Victorian Baptist churches.

From our interviews, seven themes emerged as significant factors for the development and practice of leadership. These are principles that emerging leaders value and that we suggest are essential components for a Next Generation emerging leaders' development program.

### *A culture of missional leadership development*

Foundationally, churches and denominations need to prioritise cultivating a culture of leadership development that is focused on mission. One helpful model that some churches use is to imagine themselves as a “leadership farm”, existing to nurture and grow leaders. This is not merely or even primarily about growing leaders for “full-time ministry”, but helping the whole people of God to lead in their spheres of influence. We need mission-hearted leaders in the church, but also in government, business, and non-profit organisations.

A number of the leaders we spoke to are passionately eager to develop themselves and others for missional leadership. Some expressed frustration and disconnection from a leadership culture whose focus was to “shore up their own patch rather than putting the resources into pioneering expressions and innovations and doing things that are outward”<sup>7</sup> They have little patience for reluctance within the church to acknowledge and face society's changes. Urban Seed's Andreana Reale commented that churches often make little space for innovation and hold a traditional view of ministry with:

the idea of the teacher/pastor/leader who kind of does everything and other people kind of fit around the edges but are relatively passive ... even though we could have a theoretical conversation about “OK the world has moved on, the system is broken, we need to try some different things”, it is actually really hard to have the space to try those different things.<sup>8</sup>

Beth Barnett appeals for leadership development to be reframed away from a preoccupation with professional (usually male) full-time ministry and instead focus on developing leaders for missional contexts — in the world. She suggests ministers, who themselves have been called into full-time ministry, look at younger people with leadership qualities, passion, and integrity and think, “what I should do is encourage that person to become a full-time professional minister. That will be encouraging.” But in a post-Christendom context that is not the most empowering and usually not the most missional advice. Let’s encourage emerging leaders to dream about how they can remake their world more in line with God’s dream, from within work roles, and “connected to business and culture and the local tennis club ... rather than pulling all of our best articulators, evangelisers, and mobilisers into the Christian world vortex.”<sup>9</sup>

Emerging generations become an asset and a gift to the church when they challenge the church to be true to its missional identity. We need an organisational culture in our churches that promotes leadership development that is focused on mission.

### *Apprenticeship of learning by doing*

A second principle of leadership development is learning by doing. Gemma Bell said that being given the opportunity to try or “being thrown the keys” was crucial for leadership development.<sup>10</sup> Sam Hearn observed that he started developing as a leader as he was released into mission opportunities:

Lots of other leaders I’ve talked to ... the moment in which we actually stepped into leadership was the moment we first engaged in mission or in joining in God’s purpose ... Where we started our leadership journey ... was when we stopped just getting stuff from God and we started wanting to be a vessel for him to use.<sup>11</sup>

To develop leaders, churches need to create space for young people to learn while doing.

Interestingly while participants mentioned specific courses or training they had undertaken, few Anglo leaders identified these as key to their development as leaders. For example, Simon Burnett:

Certainly my theological training helped with my formation, but I would say that helped my formation far more as a believer... but didn’t really touch much on my formation as a leader.<sup>12</sup>

Arrow's Emerging Leaders Director Julian Dunham affirms that Bible College prepares people for understanding and teaching the Bible, thinking theologically about issues in the church and the world, and pastoral skills for a church of fewer than 150 people. But he suggests colleges do not usually prepare people to lead outside the box of a single staff church and broader leadership complexities.

Leadership formation is not primarily about teaching and acquiring more knowledge, but giving people experiences of service and ministry, and the opportunity to learn and grow through that. Benji Watson, in his leadership at Crossway, values this apprenticeship approach:

It's very much bringing back that New Testament model of discipleship. It's done through relationship. It's not just visual teaching ... It's come alongside of me, I'll show you what it looks like and then you do it.<sup>13</sup>

Several leaders from non-Western backgrounds especially appreciated their theological education at Whitley College, but underlined that their formation was valuable because their studies were combined with ministry experience. They also seemed to appreciate theological studies because it helped enculturate them into a new Australian system for church. However, one of their challenges is when their culture expects emerging leaders to be older before being given leadership opportunities.

Robert Banks appeals for re-envisioning theological education along missional lines — by which he means more field-based, related to everyday life, and empowering the mission of the whole people of God.<sup>14</sup> He argues that the best formation stretches students to *do* what they are studying. Many colleges have developed Supervised Theological Field-Education (STFE) programs which facilitate this action-reflection cycle well, and structure units in ways which foster learning while doing ministry. Students of Whitley's STFE program, such as Chin pastor Mang Hre, appreciate the space to present cases of their ministry experience, whether difficult or risky, to a supervisor and peer group for encouragement and support.<sup>15</sup> Informal leadership development programs cannot do all that theological education providers do, but they can apprentice disciples as leaders and help them to learn while doing.

### *Mentoring to support learning*

The results of a “learning by doing” approach are most successful when supported by mentors who offer resourcing, support, and evaluation.<sup>16</sup> In describing

processes that were helpful in their leadership development, participants stated it was mentoring relationships which have been most formative. Andy Mitchell said he has not had formal leadership training but credits his opportunities for experience with the support of people alongside them: “the small handful of people who have come alongside me and seen some potential and decided to mentor me or disciple me”.<sup>17</sup> Reale similarly states, “It’s that balance of space and support. Give them space to try things but also give them the support to be able to reflect and refine”.<sup>18</sup>

Mentoring is a qualitatively different approach to training — helping people to articulate their goals, develop strategies, and connect their experience with their own learning. It is not incompatible with tertiary education, but it does not depend on a classroom. It is more like an apprenticeship, where someone who is more experienced in the craft of leadership can guide emerging leaders in their development. Tim Devlin described his training happening more through learning with the help of mentors than through a classroom curriculum or textbook.<sup>19</sup>

Mentoring helps leaders develop character and spirituality as well as skills and strategies. Rowan Lewis explains:

There are two parts to the leadership game, there is the external, extrinsic being a leader amongst people and the things that you do and the actions that you take. And then there is the inner life growth and the character which can support being in a role.<sup>20</sup>

Mentoring is usually one on one, but can also happen in a group. The Victorian Council of Christian Education is developing Communities of Practice as a model for developing children and families’ ministry leaders. VCCE assumes most leaders do not need another expert course as much as a cohort of colleagues they can trust and learn with. Leaders need space to bring their own questions and issues, and the help of a facilitator to guide them to reflect theologically and develop ministry responses.<sup>21</sup>

Identifying and training mentors in an organisation is one direct way to help foster leadership development. Some interviewees identified the challenge of “finding people of character who want to invest in generations below them”.<sup>22</sup> They suggested the Western church is lacking the art of intergenerational discipleship. Watson expressed this concern:

There are certain instances and cases where God will call people to pioneer something that they can't model off someone else... when we have lost the discipleship process there is no one to imitate. So you have got these people bursting with potential and absolutely, clearly anointed by God but no one really knows how to lead them and empower them and help them develop.<sup>23</sup>

Assisting churches to develop networks of trained mentors who are committed to leadership development and linking them with emerging leaders facilitates opportunities to learn through doing while reducing the risks of going it alone.

### *An empowering and collaborative leadership model*

Our interview sample reflected a preference of Generation Y and Z for empowering and collaborative leadership. When asked to define leadership the interviewees described an open, collaborative process whose focus was not to get things done but empowering people to act. They defined leadership as “helping others to take effective action”,<sup>24</sup> “to steward surrendered trust”,<sup>25</sup> and “responsibility for the wellbeing of a group of people”.<sup>26</sup> Burnett emphasised the importance of empowering others rather than self-achievement: “For me I see leadership as something that empowers others to be leaders, and my role as a senior leader is to relinquish the desire to try and get it all done myself”.<sup>27</sup> Watson stated, “Leadership is not about you, it's actually about serving other people. If it's about you then you are not a leader”.<sup>28</sup> These leaders showed a strong sense of responsibility, caring for, and leading for the benefit of others.

Lewis suggests part of empowering leadership is being willing to let go of outdated approaches and re-contextualising leadership for new contexts. He urges being attentive to what God is doing and what leadership is popping up, and cooperating with that:

Instead of saying we have God and we need to give it to others... God is bigger and larger and more mysterious and active all around us. Sometimes he might even redeem the church but he's definitely redeeming the world and so we can go on and try to participate with that.<sup>29</sup>

Thus ultimately our collaboration is with God and what God is doing.

Many of those interviewed expressed the frustration of working within a less collaborative system. They are looking for not just the rhetoric but the reality of

empowerment, as Steve Echols warns:

While the proponents of this great-man theory of leadership, chauvinistic even in its title, are virtually extinct as theorists, in practice elitism in leadership is still unfortunately more prevalent than we would care to admit.<sup>30</sup>

The inability to “fit” these often unspoken leadership criteria limits access to opportunities. It can also result in negative early experiences.

Generation Y are more comfortable expressing leadership in empowering ways, and expect to be led with an empowering posture. Australian schooling aims to help children become empowered learners, to acquire attitudes and skills for self-directed learning for their whole lives. The Australian government whitepaper “Bridging the Gap” examines workplace intergenerational interactions, and how to engage and retain Gen Y employees:

(Generation Y) have been raised in an environment where they have been given leadership opportunities throughout their schooling and encouraged to challenge and independently evaluate other’s decisions. As a result Gen Y has brought new values to the workplace. Gen Y’s expect to be treated as equals, they expect to have choices and input into decision-making processes, and such expectations run counter to hierarchical systems of leadership. Indeed, 97% of Gen Y’s surveyed valued a leadership style that involved empowerment, consultation and partnership, and would leave if they did not get it.<sup>31</sup>

Church attenders and leaders are not “subordinates”. Their role is more often voluntary, and as such they even more expect consultation and empowerment.<sup>32</sup> Hierarchical leadership models no longer function adequately within groups whose members believe they can actively contribute.

### *Inclusion of gender, age, and cultural diversity*

Steve Echols, Professor of Leadership at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, proposes that inclusiveness is a key leadership quality for Christian leadership:

The inclusive leader rejects the notion that certain groups have no place at the table in regard to decision making. Leaders who practice

inclusion often believe it is not only morally wrong to marginalize certain groups within a constituency, but it is a grossly ineffective means of leadership that will minimize or even destroy the potential energy and creativity of any organization.<sup>33</sup>

Without inclusion the interaction and interdependence required to foster emergence cannot exist.

The interviewees identified three areas where they feel the church struggles to demonstrate inclusion in leadership: gender, age, and cultural diversity.

There is a vast difference in the expectations of gender equality for Generations X, Y, and Z compared with some traditional church views.<sup>34</sup> Young tertiary educated women are often surprised if their local church debates their role in church. Gender-based limitations to leadership are still prevalent. For example, of the 503 current serving pastors on the BUV database, only 18 percent are women.<sup>35</sup> The societal context in which these generations have grown up is much more gender inclusive.

Women in church who experience restricted access to leadership roles also experience deep pain.<sup>36</sup> One young woman, outside of the interview process, described to us the profound hurt she feels knowing that there are people within the church who see her training and knowledge as not just wasted but dangerous, because she is a woman.<sup>37</sup> Others, if they are leading, feel the pressure and expectation to lead in masculine ways. Kafieris commented:

I just want to be myself as female... I feel like "You're asking me to be masculine here in order to be heard, you need to see me as a man in order to validate my opinion". I don't like the fact that I have ... to make that shift in myself to be heard on behalf of others ... I don't think we have a feminine style of leadership (in the church) yet. Not one that is healthy and works and is one that even I would like to try and emulate.<sup>38</sup>

Emerging generations also see the need for involving the contribution of children and all ages, and people of all cultural backgrounds. This is critical for a church on whom God pours out the Holy Spirit on and through all nations (Acts 2:5–11; Rev 7:9) and sends the Spirit so that "sons and daughters will prophesy [and] old people will dream dreams [and] young people will see special dreams" (Joel 2:28). The church, however, often segments ministries along age and ethnic

lines; thus breaking God's kingdom into "bite-sized components"<sup>39</sup> but missing interdependence and mutual learning.

Barnett is an advocate for worship that incorporates all ages, cultures, and stages of faith. She invites different voices into the community to learn from one another. She affirms the voice of emerging generations who "bring a different kind of intelligence, I love the skills of critical thinking, the nuances of literature; they bring a hermeneutic of suspicion that's just natural to them. There's lot's we can learn from that."<sup>40</sup>

Hre and other culturally diverse leaders explain that Asian groups, as communal cultures, benefit from a group approach to leadership development, rather than extracting individuals from their context.<sup>41</sup> BUV Chin leadership development days have benefited from inviting pastors and existing congregational chairmen to attend together. A next step for BUV is for culturally diverse churches such as the Chin and Karen to send their young adults for training. BUV's Meewon Yang was serving in a Korean church but realised she needed to broaden her Australian experience in order to care for her Korean church in its new context. She urges churches to release their young adults to have the freedom to go out for broader experience: "Being a leader means you have to stretch. It's a vast land. We often pressure our kids ... We need to give home more freedom to go out and come back."<sup>42</sup> Camps and retreats for churches or networks may work well across cultures. Mixing Chin with Anglo and other culture emerging leaders and exploring together how to relate gospel to culture offers the benefit of learning from one another.<sup>43</sup> It is important for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) leaders to engage in more conversation about how best to collaborate for leadership development.

The broader church will suffer from cultural captivity if we do not learn from non-Western sisters and brothers. This suggests the importance of linking mentors and emerging leaders from different cultural backgrounds, but also considering the cultural diversity of preaching, worship, and leadership teams. Local churches can tend to default to white male older leadership, and need intentionality in including the leadership contribution of others.<sup>44</sup>

Among the gifts younger generations bring to church is their commitment to inclusiveness — they expect it, will notice its absence, and can lead us in more inclusive directions.

*Financially sustainable leadership development and ministry*

Another element of leadership culture raised by a number of interviewees was the financial cost of ministry, training, and the expectation of voluntary work. Emerging leaders, particularly those not pursuing ordination, report working in insecure, short-term, partially funded positions. Many of our interviewees hold two or three part-time roles, including paid and unpaid positions. Bell commented that living costs are higher today than twenty or thirty years ago, and support for leadership development is usually minimal. Emerging leaders often get a start in their development through self-financed, volunteer, or part-time roles, which may be possible for young single people for some time, but once older or with families it becomes less sustainable.<sup>45</sup> Some ministry roles require raising financial support from churches, which develops partnerships but takes effort.

Beyond the pure budgetary concerns it is also a matter of value and recognition. The assumption that “young adults have all this free time ... that if we need something doing we will get the young adults to do it because they don’t do anything,”<sup>46</sup> that young people can be expected to work long hours for little or no pay shows a disregard for the work, study, and family contexts, and the economic realities of ministry.

Internship programs which totally remove young adults from the workforce and give them few marketable skills can be irresponsible, taking advantage of the interns. We need alternative models for leadership development that leave space for young adults to stay connected to their work world — for financial and missional reasons. This is not to suggest the middle-class dream of a secure career and financial self-sufficiency is a gospel value. But it is better if churches can offer training and patterns which are sustainable in the longer term, and be transparent about the costs involved. Mitchell said that his colleagues are critical of internships that do not lead anywhere, or what he sceptically labels the “Cool, we will burn you out for a year then you’re done, goodbye!” year-long internship process. If there are no ongoing support and training options then interns are sometimes left feeling used. The church needs to “give them something that they can take away that’s more than just, ‘oh yeah, I had this really awful year at church and now I don’t go there.’”<sup>47</sup> Internships can be valuable learning experiences for the interns and enhance fruitful ministry for a church, but they ought to primarily add value to the future work and ministry of the intern. Programs which function alongside part-time or full-time work are also needed. It may also be helpful for churches

to explore alternate, entrepreneurial means of funding their ministries beyond Sunday morning offerings.

### *Reframing leadership*

The church needs to develop leaders appropriate for our twenty-first-century cultural contexts. One of the characteristics of many in this group was a reluctance to think of themselves as leaders. For some the magnitude of the responsibility weighed heavily on them. They do not perceive themselves as an authority figure who has the right to lead others, particularly in ministry. They are aware of the damage which can be the result of poor leadership. Many have felt pushed into leadership positions without adequate support or clear expectations. Merryn James, Children and Families Pastor at Crossway, acknowledges the difficulty achieving a balanced approach to leadership development:

For some young leaders they feel frustrated because they can't do what they are feeling God wants them to do, they don't have that opportunity because there is a lid on leadership. But for other young leaders it feels like they are given so much responsibility as a young adult that they burn out.<sup>48</sup>

Consequences of this include a reluctance to embrace the title of leader, distrust and rejection of leadership theory and training, and “profound scepticism about leadership material”.<sup>49</sup> These leaders are seeking a deeper interpretation of leadership beyond merely “running programs and trying to build a mega church”.<sup>50</sup> They want to address the misconceptions of leadership that are common amongst young people and the wider church. Mitchell commented:

Coming into leadership now in the church, I see a lot of young people who think it's about having a platform and suddenly you have to be like Francis Chan and you need a YouTube channel and you need a book deal and these are all signs that you have made it in leadership. It's all very events-based and you have to be running the next biggest and best thing but people seem to neglect discipleship and meaningful forms of leadership.<sup>51</sup>

Unless somebody fits preconceived “successful” notions of leadership, misconceived as they often are, their leadership gifts may be overlooked. Bell observed:

If the only foothold you have is within a church and if you're not a showy up-front-type person you get missed. I work with young

adults who have been extremely discouraged by that type of approach.<sup>52</sup>

Dunham described how Arrow teaches that leadership is not just for A-type, loud, courageous leaders who fit the stereotype of conductors, persuaders, or promoters. Quality leaders can also be introverts, detail-oriented, supporters, and coordinators.<sup>53</sup> Leadership development needs to help develop strengths, rather than expect people to be shaped into pre-existing moulds. Reale suggests that BUW should subvert preferred types of leadership and challenge stereotypes:

If a group of people can say “yeah we know what a Baptist pastor looks like they are ... they wear ... and their haircut is ...” then people will self-select out and go “I don’t fit that”. So being able to subvert that and say leaders come in all sorts of shapes and forms is fabulous.<sup>54</sup>

Reale encourages others to affirm the potential for anybody to lead, even if they do not hold a position; and to discern options for leadership in all different spheres, not just ordained pastoral ministry.<sup>55</sup> There is an eager openness from younger leaders to be guided and coached, and not just for traditional church leadership but for leading the church, and leading in society, in fresh directions.

Leadership development, at its best, will guide leaders-in-training to reframe leadership in directions that cooperate with God’s mission. Hearn describes leadership as helping people move in the directions God is calling them:

I feel that being a leader is being in between where God is and where he’s calling and leading, and where people are, who might not quite be as far along yet, who I can call to head in the same direction as I feel God is calling me.<sup>56</sup>

Leadership is not about dictating vision and direction, but needs reframing in our churches around an invitation to help people imagine and implement God’s vision and mission for them.

## **NextGen emerging leadership mentoring**

BUW is starting to plan and evaluate its emerging leadership development approaches with these principles that emerging/emerged leaders identified as important as a checklist. That is, we are asking to what extent the BUW, our programs, and our churches help foster:

- a. A culture of missional leadership development
- b. Apprenticeship of learning by doing
- c. Mentoring to support learning
- d. An empowering and collaborative leadership model
- e. Inclusion of gender, age, and cultural diversity
- f. Financially sustainable leadership development and ministry
- g. Reframing leadership.

Moreover, in the context of these principles and other available programs, BUV is exploring a program of mentoring and “communities-of-practice” group coaching for Gen X, Y, and Z leaders. This recommendation reflects the importance of mentoring that all emerging/emerged leaders discussed. Moreover, it reflects the fact that this is one area not served by other organisations, and most local churches would benefit from a denominational network of mentoring.<sup>57</sup>

The BUV vision is “to advance the kingdom of God by empowering leaders for mission”. Fostering a culture of missional leadership development is thus core business for BUV. The best way that BUV can add value to emerging leaders, and complement existing available programs, is to facilitating mentoring and the group coaching of “communities-of-practice” for Gen X, Y, and Z leaders.

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