

Church Revitalisation

**GEN
ONE** 

A thousand healthy
churches in a generation



Baptist Churches
of NSW & ACT

**“ This is to my Father’s glory,
that you bear much fruit,
showing yourselves to be my disciples.”**

John 15:8
(NIV)

Revitalisation and the vision

Church revitalisation is the key foundation of our 4 association vision pictures.

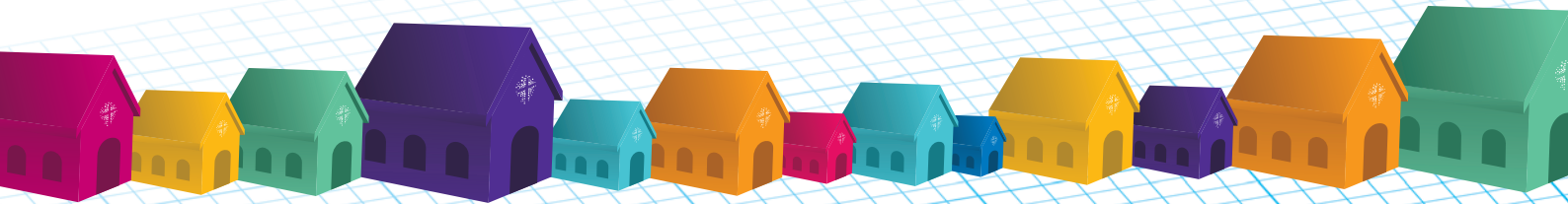
- › We see a movement of transforming, healthy communities
- › We see a movement raising and empowering Kingdom-focused leadership
- › We see an extraordinary mission shaped movement of God across our churches and affiliated groups
- › We see a movement impacting our society, culture and world

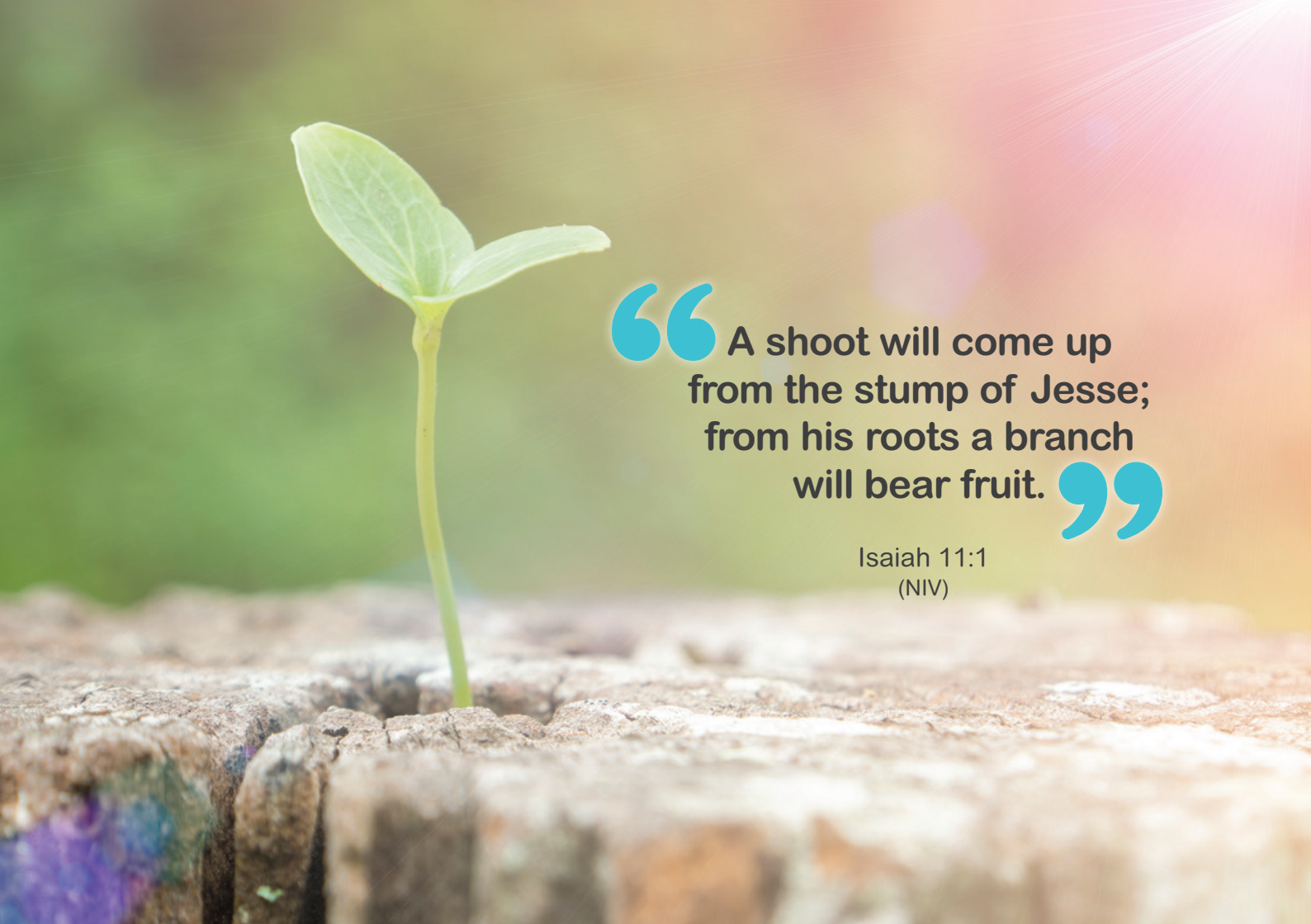
It underpins our desire to see:

- › churches develop from gatherings to transformational spaces
- › leaders birthed into a vast array of industries and ministries
- › churches engage missionally with the world around them
- › churches demonstrate biblical love for the world through engagement and advocacy

Revitalisation, no matter how capable a church is in each of these areas, can make a good thing even better and continue to transform churches of all shapes and sizes into thriving healthy communities.

This booklet, as part of the 'A Thousand Healthy Churches in a Generation' vision (GEN1K), will hopefully help you identify the life stage of your church and gain access to resources for possible approaches to improve it's impact internally and externally.





**“ A shoot will come up
from the stump of Jesse;
from his roots a branch
will bear fruit. ”**

Isaiah 11:1
(NIV)

Shape of a revitalised church

Our Baptist movement committed to Gen1K when we numbered 340 churches. The Gen1K vision sees that our movement will grow so that by 2050 we comprise 1000 healthy churches. We desire to see churches continually revitalised and for these distinctive characteristics of the vision to be in the life of a healthy church.

1. Communities of faith transforming disciples.

Small or large, network, neighbourhood or regional... the possible shapes of revitalised church communities are endless. However at the core of each will be a tangible transformational relationship with Jesus. A unique community of faith united to a larger group of communities by common passion for Jesus. Committed to growing disciples that make disciples.

2. Leaders identified, nurtured equipped and released.

Leaders in revitalised churches will be recognised early, nurtured continuously, equipped exhaustively and released broadly to the community and the broader Baptist movement. Healthy leaders building healthy leaders will be the expectation in all churches.

3. Mission Shaped and committed communities.

Revitalised churches will be intentionally and incarnationally taking the gospel into the community they serve. Stories of new commitments to faith and church growth will be the norm. Churches will have the desire to reach communities that do not know Christ and do everything, including the sending of people to birth new churches, to reach them.

4. Socially engaged and justice seeking followers of Jesus

A revitalised church will seek to be the hands, voice and compassion of Jesus into their world. Advocacy, social engagement and support of the vulnerable locally, nationally and internationally will be normal and expected.



We acknowledge that for this to become reality God will have chosen to pour out his blessing.

What is a congregational life cycle?

It is a generalised way to look at a church to ascertain some of the typical victories, joys and challenges that they can expect at certain times in their life.

It is like a “lens” or a “window” through which we are better able to visualise where a church might be heading on its journey.

The growth phases are shown by the upwards side of the cycle and the decline phases are shown by the downward side of the curve.

Different churches will take different lengths of time to get to the same point in the life cycle although there is some evidence that worldwide the typical lifespan of a church, if they are left to follow their own path, is about 30 to 40 years.

The great news is that churches can choose not to just drift along but intentionally take action to “re-launch” themselves into a growth phase. This happens when a church takes appropriate action to interrupt the tendency to move into decline and eventually death. It is what we often call Church “Revitalisation”.

The common mistake!

Most churches understand that taking action, by re-evaluating ministries and programs is essential for continued growth and vigour. Often churches do not consider the appropriate action for where they presently find themselves on the “Congregational Life Cycle”. This leads to the expenditure of

large amounts of energy and resources to follow a road that will not lead them to greater health. Like taking aspirin for pneumonia.

The reason a church should assess itself using this model is to help ensure that they are using the right methodology for their specific situation. In doing so they are more likely to get the desired result.

The good news and the bad news

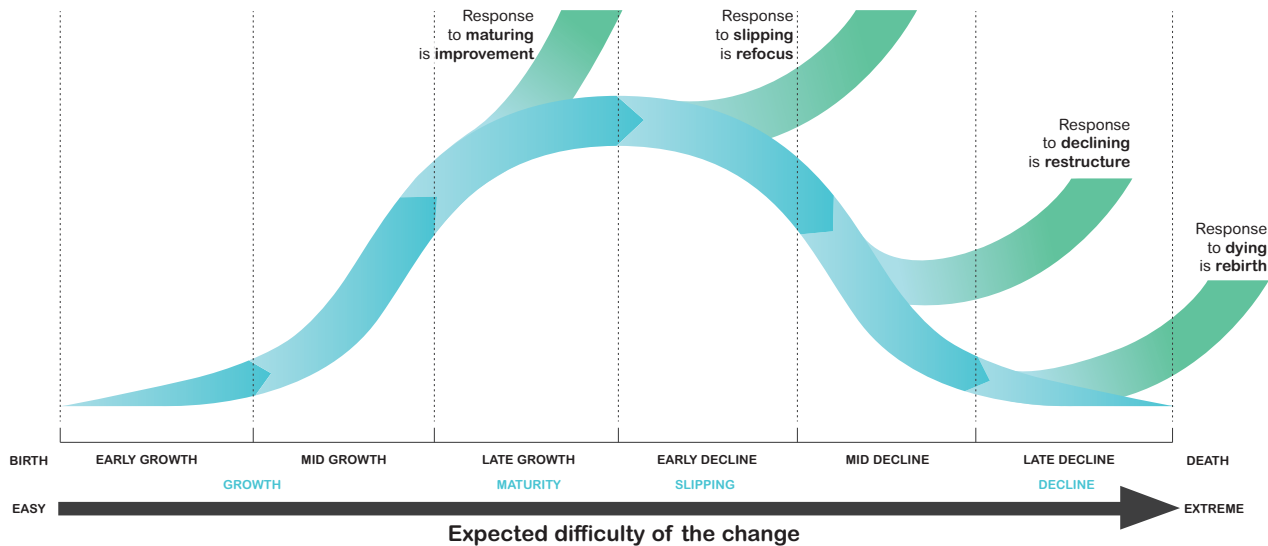
The good news is that because of the nature of our God, nothing is impossible. No matter where a church finds itself on the Congregational Life Cycle it can find a new phase of life and health.

The bad news is that the further along the “decline” side of the graph a church is, the more dramatic and drastic the appropriate methods required are. They require greater effort, increased degrees of change, and corresponding levels of disruption to the existing ways of operating as a church to get the result required.

A medical analogy

Imagine that churches were like limbs, maybe an arm or a leg, that had sustained an injury.

A scratch would require a Band Aid. A cut might require stitching, but a limb with severe muscle and tissue damage or a broken bone might need reconstructive surgery? Where



there is gangrene or total loss of tissue, amputation may be required. Seems logical enough right?

Now imagine if you used the wrong treatment! Scratches could result in amputation, or you could place a Band Aid on a severed limb

One of the common problems that churches can face is that they misdiagnose themselves and therefore end up putting a lot of energy and resources into a “course of treatment”

that is never going to provide the restoration of health and vigour they desire.

In order to help remedy this situation a number things are needed.

1. A way to gain a somewhat accurate diagnosis or assessment.
2. Clear information as to the appropriate restorative action.
3. An understanding of what the treatment will involve.
4. Where to go to for such help or medicine.
5. A commitment to engage in the treatment.

The right response

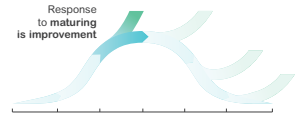
Being able to determine where on the congregational lifecycle a church is located is very important, but for a good outcome to be grasped it is just as important for a local church to embrace the appropriate responses (Improvement, refocusing, restructuring, or rebirth). In order for this to happen the right type of leadership and people resources will need to be, or become, available for the journey ahead.

However, there are a number of stories of how churches in each of these categories have been able to see their churches revitalised when they have trusted in God and committed to the arduous journey of change.





Improvement



Possible Key Indicators:

- › Church is in good health and growing
- › Positive morale and sense of excitement across the majority of church
- › Settled stable leadership
- › Clear sense of vision and direction
- › Increasing community impact

Even churches that are vibrant and thriving can always find areas in which they can improve. The fact that they are healthy and vibrant means that will have been attending to this type of ongoing assessment consistently for a number of years.

Improvement is usually focused on a narrow work area and will not normally entail a major disruption to normal church life. It will usually require focused attention and planning and some additional energy directed toward that area, at least initially.

These type of things often happen “under the radar” without major disruption.

Why

To improve already healthy churches.

How

- › By giving intense specific attention to rectify poorly functioning areas.

Timeframe

- › Usually up to 12 months



Refocusing

Possible Key Indicators:

- › Church is generally in good health
- › Mild sense of lost-ness or confusion over direction for the future.
- › Some weariness in leadership
- › Mix of stagnated and growing ministries
- › More focused inwardly than outwardly

Often called “re-visioning”, this requires a church to determine its God given vision for the next period of the church’s life. This happens optimally before a church “heads over the hump” on the “Lifecycle” graph but is also essential for churches in the early stages of the decline phase. (Many churches do this type of process as part of a pastoral call process).

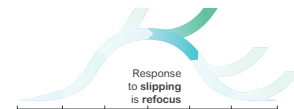
When the vision has been determined, or discovered, the church then needs to assess all its ministries in light of this call from God upon the church. Asking how each ministry is helping the church achieve the God given vision?

This means that ministries and structures will be reviewed, and this process can be traumatic for some people, especially if review has not been a normal part of ministry life. Questions about staffing positions and even staff members should be asked, and it is likely that some structural, ministry, and even role changes will occur.

This level of change will create some pain and disruption. It will be important to affirm the past without reproducing the past in this process. An understanding of change and transition will be very important as will be the ability for the pastoral leaders to be able to remain “self differentiated” amidst the dynamic of an unsettled period in church life.

When done well a church should emerge from this process with a sense of being in an exciting new chapter of the church’s life.

This process can definitely not happen “under the radar” it needs to be overt and well communicated.



Why

To refocus and discover fresh vision for the future, in order to have a framework for structure and ministry.

How

- › Church revisioning process
- › Strategic plan development
- › Annual review of progress towards strategic plan

Timeframe

- › Approx. 3 years



Restructuring or redeveloping

Possible Key Indicators:

- › Church is experiencing a general sense of pessimism or fear of the future
- › Attendance has been in decline, or plateaued over a number of years
- › Majority of leaders have been in leadership for many years
- › Ministries have had to close due to finance or lack of people
- › No clearly articulated strategic plan or vision

The restructuring process is a big deal! It involves an almost “blank sheet of paper” approach to the majority of church ministries and ways of operating. Not everything will change, but everything is up for grabs.

Like “refocusing”, it will require the development of a new vision. It will also require the often heartbreaking, realisation that the church is in quite a dire situation and that without major change it will eventually die.

It is highly unlikely that the present pastor (if they have been there for more than 4 or 5 years) can

remain, or lead this process forward. Similarly it is highly unlikely that the past leadership can remain as leaders in the process or in the next phase of church life. If the pastor and leaders had the required skills and personality they would have already done what was necessary.

A new leader, leadership, the laying down of past ministries and processes for operating, often at a time when people and resources are limited (or have declined), make this type of transition very difficult but not impossible. Indeed some churches are testimony to a complete restructuring that has led to a new and vibrant life for the church, but a significant number of churches in this decline phase don't make the journey from start to finish.

This type of transition will be virtually impossible without the assistance from people outside that local church's system. Consultants, denominational staff, Intentional Interim Ministers, and other forms of support people will be required.

One of the reasons that churches get to this point is by having a BandAid approach or a failure to do the work of refocusing, which in comparison is a significantly easier journey.



Why

To arrest and reverse decline

How

- › Visioning process with no assumed carry over from past traditions
- › Strategic plan with prioritised steps
- › New structure and leadership
- › Engage a “Change Management Coach” or advisor
- › Annual progress reviews from external source
- › Support during change and departures.

Timeframe

- › Approx. 3-6 years



Rebirth

Possible key indicators:

- › People are expressing a fear or expectancy of the death of the church
- › The church has a low sense of expectancy from God
- › Lack of young people or young families
- › Younger people or people from non-church background rarely stay around
- › Shrinking budget has resulted in ministry and staff cutbacks

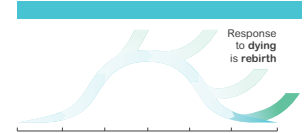
Some churches will have been in decline for so long, or will have become so depleted, that they no longer have the people resources or energy to engage effectively with the demands of restructuring.

Most churches in this phase hope for a legacy of what has gone before, even if they are not personally part of this new life. The vast majority of the people

will not be part of the new life that will emerge. In most cases it will involve a different ministry group, developing a different vision, and a radically different methodology. It requires the previous congregation and its leaders to give up control and influence over how things happen.

Rebirth requires a good closure, and hopefully a celebration of the previous church congregations' life and achievements, in order to have a "clean slate" from which to work forward. Connection with church planting staff and resources of the Association or denomination would be very helpful in this process.

Without rebirth decline will inevitably lead to death. The death of a church is "closure without vision for the future", and sadly this is how some churches end their life.



Why

To ensure a healthy closure for the existing church and a strategic use of resources and to leave a ministry legacy.

How

- › Bring an acceptance of the end of the past church
- › Appropriate pastoral care for the congregation
- › Celebration of the past
- › Decisions made regarding the resources and facilities
- › Exploration of options for rebirth
- › Closure and handover event
- › Establishment of new church plant

Timeframe

- › 1-2 years

What now?

Prayer support

Vital to the Gen1K vision is an ongoing reliance on God. If you can pray and/or mobilise others in prayer, this vision needs you!

Financial support

Financial support enables revitalisation resources to be made available for churches to be assessed, supported and coached, new churches to be started, strategic ongoing research undertaken, and the whole Gen1K vision resourced and supported. The Gen1K Fund has been established specifically to effectively steward contributions towards this vision.

Get involved

Be part of helping your church discuss and act on revitalisation.

- **Will you ask God how he would have you participate in what he is doing among us?**

Contact Ian Altman, Associate Director, Church Development
0412 682 819 OR ialtman@nswactbaptists.org.au

www.nswactbaptists.org.au/gen1k



Revitalisation resources

Following are a few resources that might be helpful in your journey of revitalisation.

Prayer

Seems cliché but nothing of significance happens in the absence of consistent, God-dependent prayer! Ministry without prayer is arrogance! Revitalisation is after all a work of God. Jesus called us to make disciples – it is His job to build the church.

Baptist Church Consultancy Process

We have trained consultants available to assist churches in various ways, one of which is Church Revitalisation. Each consultancy is developed around the specific needs of each individual church so it is suited to being “tailor made” to your church’s specific situation. It is fairly cost effective as consultants do all their work in a voluntary capacity. There is a small administrative fee and travel costs to cover.

Ministry Support & Development (MSD) Staff

Maybe an obvious resource are the very experienced MSD Staff working out of the Baptist Ministry Centre in Epping. They are available to advise and work with churches as they come to grips with the challenge of Church Revitalisation.

Natural Church Development (NCD)

This comes in a similar category as NCLS on the next page, except is it done over a world wide perspective. Many churches have used this as an ongoing way to monitor growth in specific identified areas. It gives a numerical score for each of its 8 areas. It is slightly more expensive than NCLS and uses a representative group of about 30 responders from each church. This can be quite effective if not done as a simple “one off”. There are people who are accredited as NCD Coaches to help churches work through their results.

National Church Life Survey (NCLS)

We are so privileged in Australia to be the home country for one of the worlds' largest and most definitive church health surveys. Definitely plan to be part of this incredible resource when it comes around again in 2016.

Apart from giving a snapshot of your own church's health it can show where your unique differences, or challenges, lay in comparison to other Baptist Churches.

It often takes a while to get the results after the major surveys but when they are completed any church can retake the survey for just over \$100 and get results back in about 3 weeks. This makes this resource one of the best ongoing ways to check a churches health, noting areas of growth and decline.

They have some great resources developed specifically around identifying areas needing attention.

Other Churches

It might seem simplistic but other churches that have travelled, or are travelling, the challenging journey of Church Revitalisation in its various arenas (improvement, refocusing, restructuring, rebirth) are incredible resources to our wider family of churches and should not be overlooked.

Regional Ministers

A number of regions outside of Sydney (and a few in Sydney) have Regional Ministers. These people have experience wider than a single church and are being kept up to date through their ongoing training in Church Health Matters.

Web based documents and resources

Some of these have been developed by our own staff members and others have been develop by others but found to be helpful to some of our churches

Go to the Baptist Association website to check out what is available. www.nswactbaptists.org.au



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