



Enliven

Churches Project

Project Report

Insights from healthy,
flourishing churches



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Project Report

Part A: Background: About church vitality

Part B: Findings: Insights from healthy, flourishing churches

Part C: Outputs from the project



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Defining and measuring church vitality

Part A: Background

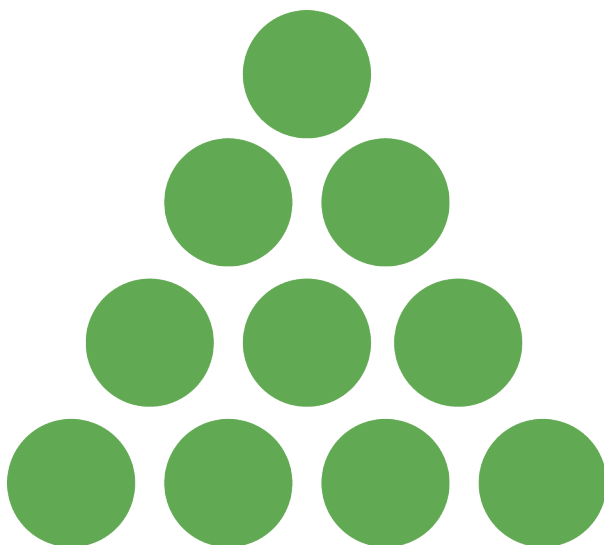
How do you know if a church is healthy?



Approaches to evaluating church health & vitality

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Quantity



Quality



Approaches to evaluating church health & vitality

.....

Quantity = count people

- Simple
- One measure
- Concrete



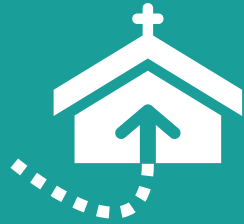
“Make disciples of all nations”

Matthew 28:16-20

Healthy churches are sustainable

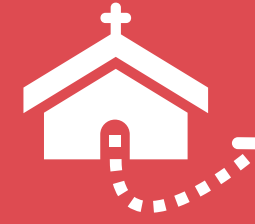
.....

Inflow



- Growth
- Newcomers
- Young people retained

Outflow



Approaches to evaluating church health & vitality

.....

Qualities

- Complex
- Multiple qualities
- Stakeholders
- Systems

Quality



**“I have come that you might have life
and have it to the full”**

John 10:10

COMMUNITY *Outward focus*
leadership spirituality **PRAYER**
discipleship *Vision*
Giving Innovation
healing *beauty* **DIVERSITY**
numerical growth
young adult retention **NEWCOMERS**

Approaches to evaluating church health & vitality

.....

We are interested in the
‘so that’...

So that people will:

- grow in their faith *or*
- participate in God’s mission in the world



Healthy Churches...

are sustainable



Attendance
change



Newcomers



Young Adults

help people in their
relationships



With God



With each
other



With the wider
community

have a church culture
where there is a confident
capacity for action.



An owned
vision



Open to
innovation



Leadership

Core Qualities of Church Health

.....

Nine Core Qualities

- Internal
- Outward
- Inspirational

The International Core Qualities



Faith

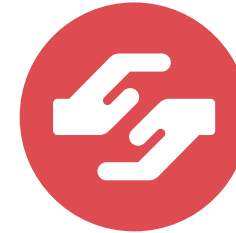


Worship



Belonging

The Outward Core Qualities



Service



Faith-Sharing



Inclusion

The Inspirational Core Qualities



Vision



Innovation



Leadership
Culture



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NCLS Research findings

Part A: Background

Factors associated with flourishing churches



Groups of factors:



**National
factors**



**Local
Community
Factors**



**Denominational
factors**



**Local
congregational
factors**

Groups of factors:



**National
factors**



**Local
Community
Factors**



**Denominational
factors**



**Local
congregational
factors**



Outside the control of the local church

Research has found that **internal local church factors** matter the most



Local congregational factors

Core Qualities in local churches play a role **over and above** local community factors and theological tradition or style

The International Core Qualities



Faith



Worship



Belonging

The Outward Core Qualities



Service



Faith-Sharing



Inclusion

The Inspirational Core Qualities



Vision



Innovation



Leadership Culture



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Part B: Project Findings

Insights from healthy, flourishing churches



About the project

Healthy, flourishing churches are growing in numbers, spiritual health and vitality.

The research question:

How did these churches become and remain vital?



Healthy churches were identified

Used National Church Life Survey, the largest longitudinal study of church life in the world,

From ~3000 churches, we identified strong churches using a variety of measures of vitality.

1991 National
Church Life
Survey

2006 National
Church Life
Survey

1996 National
Church Life
Survey

2011 National
Church Life
Survey

2001 National
Church Life
Survey

2016 National
Church Life
Survey

We looked for churches that had strong signs of health

They were sustainable



Attendance
change



Newcomers



Young Adults

They helped people in their relationships



With God



With each
other



With the wider
community

They had a church culture where there was a confident capacity for action.



An owned
vision



Open to
innovation



Leadership



Church leaders were interviewed

Senior church leaders and their leadership teams were interviewed to investigate how they became and remained healthy and vital.

Interview responses were analysed to discover common characteristics across these churches.

Strategies, ideas and approaches used by the churches were identified.





The culture within the churches:

12 common characteristics were found.

These fell into 4 broad categories

Faith-filled and Collaborative

The actions or approaches of the churches:

Intentional and Aligned

Inclusive and Empowering

Learning Communities



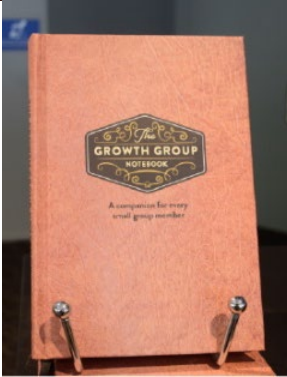
12 characteristics of flourishing churches:

Faith-filled and Collaborative	1. Faith Foundations	Inclusive and Empowering	7. Focus Beyond
	2. Collective Identity		8. Be Hospitable
	3. Collaborative Leadership		9. Be Inclusive
Intentional and Aligned	4. Envision		10. Empower
	5. Strategise	Learning Communities	11. Learn
	6. Innovate		12. Sustain

1. Faith Foundations

Flourishing churches nurture faith foundations, faith practices and trust in God.

An intentional focus on discipleship was found in the healthy churches, including pathways for growth in faith, prayer, worship and engaging with the Word of God. Spiritual elders were often present, with a valued role of mentoring and discernment within the church.

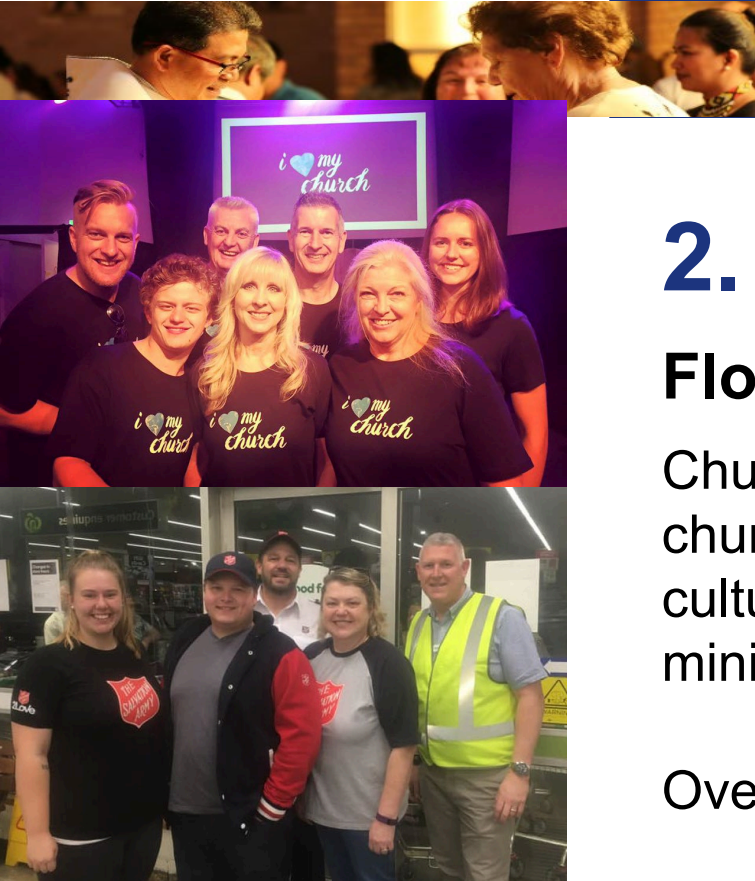


2. Collective identity

Flourishing churches have strong core identity and values.

Churches who were interviewed used the word “we” when describing their church and “what we’re like” or “the way we do things” to describe a shared culture. Often mentioned was “our DNA”, indicative of group ownership of ministry goals and shared values.

Overall, a confident collective culture was evident.



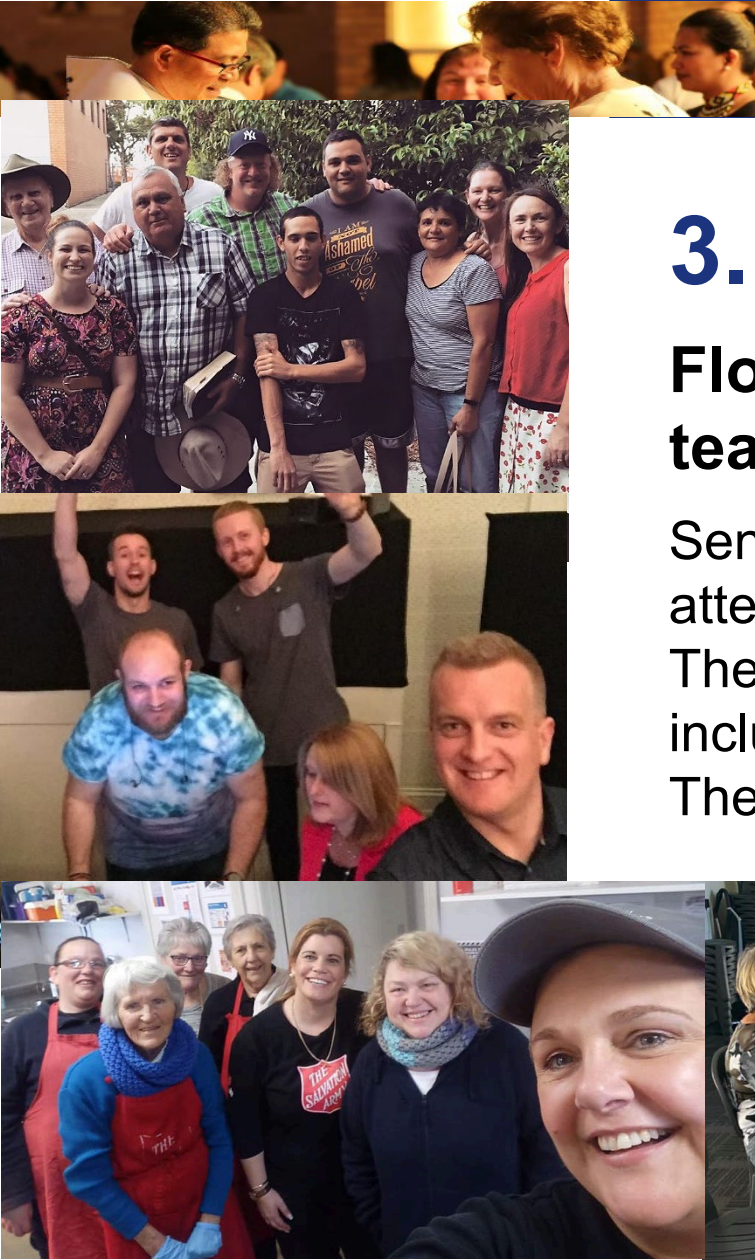
3. Collaborative leadership

Flourishing churches model a collaborative leadership team culture.

Senior leaders collaborated with other leaders along with building teams of attenders in ministry roles.

They were active in nurturing teamwork and cooperative ministry models, including complimentary skills of people.

They demonstrated a positive, generous and relational leadership style.



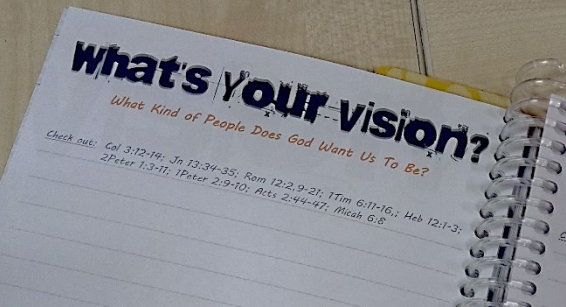
4. Envision

Flourishing churches discern and communicate a clear and owned vision for the future.

Senior leaders clearly articulated the vision for their church, giving clear direction and inspiring attenders into the future.

Some churches created their vision collaboratively with all attenders, through a reflection process.

Church attenders showed commitment to and ownership of the church's vision.



To reach a post-church generation with real encounters with God, through authentic people.



OUR MISSION

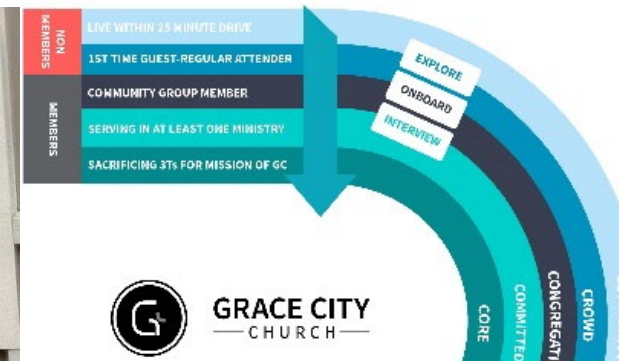
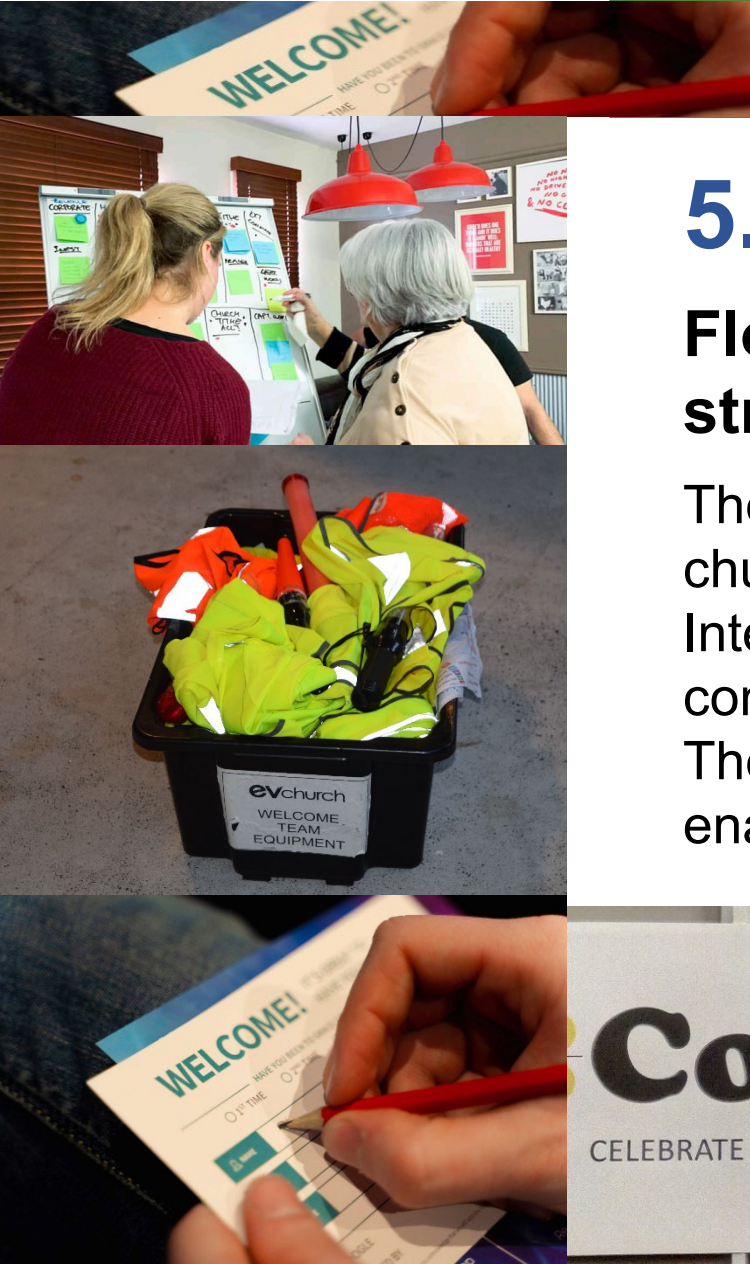
CONNECTING PEOPLE TO GOD, PEOPLE & PURPOSE.

5. Strategise

Flourishing churches are thoughtful and intentional about strategy.

There were often clear processes from initial welcome to involvement in church life. Goals were identified and actions put in place to achieve them. Intentional pathways and programs built belonging, membership and contribution in leadership roles.

These processes started as a person was invited along to church and were enacted throughout the full experience of attending.



6. Innovate

Flourishing churches take risks and step out into the unknown.

Flourishing churches were willing to 'give it a go', even when it had not been done before.

Leaders could be intentionally creative, entrepreneurial, willing to risk, free to 'fail', then adjust and try again.

There were also signs that leaders were willing to sit with tension of the unknown and work to bring a group through it.



Exciting launch of our new
Saturday Night Church





7. Focus beyond

Flourishing churches focus beyond into their surrounding community.

The physical spaces appeared friendly and open to the community and non-churched.

Leaders developed relationships and collaborative activities within the local community.

They spoke in plain language which put people, such as newcomers, at ease. They were accessible to a broad range of people.





8. Be hospitable

Flourishing churches are active in welcoming and hospitality.

In the churches interviewed, there were often clear process for welcome, belonging and contribution. The sharing of food and life built a sense of belonging through authentic relationship. A priority on welcoming was evident and celebration and joy were commonplace.



9. Be inclusive

Flourishing churches tend to have an inclusive culture.

Inclusion was seen through the value of cultural, age and gender diversity, in leadership roles as well as ministry activities.

Some churches were intentionally multi-generational in worship.

Others expressed inclusion through a relaxed attitude to time (and being late), a relevant dress code, or creative options for all learning styles in church.





10. Empower

Flourishing churches look to empower attenders to participate and contribute.

Healthy churches involve their attenders.

Some churches even invited new arrivals to contribute in activities, as a way to enhance belonging, which is understood to come before behaving or believing. In most churches there were clear pathways for people to participate in ministry and contribute in leadership roles, at different points in their discipleship journey.



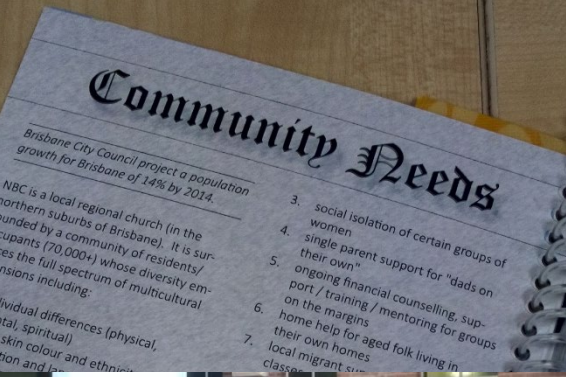
11. Learn

Flourishing churches tend to be lifelong learners.

Learning from others, reflecting and adapting over time, were common attributes of these churches.

They actively sought wisdom and learnt from the experience of others. Leaders often attained skills beyond theological training e.g. community organising, or leadership development skills.

Most churches had programs or small groups to help attenders to grow.



12. Sustain

Flourishing churches use sustainable practices in leadership and activities.

As well as being thoughtful about allocating sufficient resources to ministry activities, the healthy churches were dedicated to sustainability and the wellbeing of their people, encouraging a healthy life balance in order to avoid burnout. A considered approach was brought to their sense of stewardship of the time, talents and people within their church.





12 characteristics of flourishing churches:

Faith-filled and Collaborative	1. Faith Foundations	Inclusive and Empowering	7. Focus Beyond
	2. Collective Identity		8. Be Hospitable
	3. Collaborative Leadership		9. Be Inclusive
			10. Empower
Intentional and Aligned	4. Envision	Learning Communities	11. Learn
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	6. Innovate		



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Part C: Outputs from the Project



Other outputs – See enlivenchurches.ncls.org.au

Case studies

The case study churches, across faith traditions and contexts, are available to read and explore each church's journey.

Church stories

More than 50 stories, strategies and ideas of how churches have grown and maintained their vitality and health.

Photo gallery

Photos which present a visual story-telling of the churches' strategies and approaches.



Building vitality is an ongoing journey

This project captured the journey of a healthy church at one moment in time.

Each church expressed they were very much on a journey and hadn't yet 'arrived'.

Leaders described an ongoing process of growing health and vitality. This process involved fluctuations, changes, challenges and growth ceilings met along the way. Lessons were learned, goals were revised and people were nurtured, as each church worked towards their vision.



Recommendations

Understand your context

In this project, each church knew their local area well and understood the community that their attenders came from. Rather than try to mimic another church entirely, they created their own identity and culture that suited their social context.

Leadership practices

These flourishing churches sought to develop new leaders, involving and empowering their attenders and sustaining their people over time. They inspired, encouraged and nurtured their people to realise their full potential.



Recommendations

Shape your ministry

Each of the healthy churches shaped, adjusted and innovated in their ministry and mission activities. They were intentional in the way they set and reached goals, as well as in the design of spiritual nurture activities they provided.

Grow into the future

Leaders of flourishing churches realised they were on a journey and sought to learn and grow in knowledge, skills, attitude and approach. They were often humble, able to change and mature personally as individuals. They realised much was ahead of them and planned for the future with a positive anticipation.

Thank you to our participating churches



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