

## **Strategy for Welcoming, Follow-Up, and Integration 2011-2012**

### **Preamble**

This strategy begins by sketching (at some length) three related areas of research/strategy that are pertinent to improving our approach to welcoming, follow-up of newcomers, and integration of people into our church community. The proposed strategy builds upon those to frame a new direction for us at several levels.

### **Background to the Strategy**

The following three studies provide a helpful background to critiquing our own existing welcoming-to-integration process.

### **Background #1: Why aren't we Growing?**

Tony Payne—a Sydney Anglican—builds on the research of Tim Sims in identifying three 'reasons' we aren't seeing (much) growth in churches like ours.<sup>1</sup>

1. The content and presentation of our church meetings are not sufficiently compelling.
2. Lack of genuine spiritual growth among congregation members.
3. Follow-up is inadequate.

### **Reflection #1**

Tony Payne primarily focuses on a more-thoroughgoing application of *The Trellis and the Vine* (intentional, Bible-centred, one-to-one

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted from: [www.matthiasmedia.com/briefing/2011/08/why-arent-we-growing/](http://www.matthiasmedia.com/briefing/2011/08/why-arent-we-growing/)  
It's worth noting that the Sydney scene bears greater similarity to our own than the American context. But it's also worth making explicit this connection: many of our leaders have spent time under the tutelage of some of Sydney's best, so shortcomings in Sydney are all-the-more likely to effect analogues in our context. More info at [www.effectiveministry.org](http://www.effectiveministry.org).

ministry) as the primary initiative required to address these shortcomings.

We don't deny that Bible-centred one-to-one ministry could be improved in our circles, but the research begs for a more-direct addressing of the 'reasons'. To the degree that we can 'own' the criticisms, let's address them as they are. To that end, we need to ask:

- How might we make our meetings more compelling, less-boring, more fulfilling?
- How can we promote real growth, and how can we make it visible in an authentic and appropriate way?
- What systems of follow-up might we put in place? Or what trellises might we erect that perform the function of follow-up, even indirectly?

## **Background #2: Eight Characteristics, Eight Measures**

Ed Stetzer, following Win Arn, identifies eight characteristics of a newcomer who has become assimilated into a new church.<sup>2</sup> While research-based (rather than grounded in Scripture), they provide a helpful frame for our strategy.

1. New members should be able to list at least seven new friends they have made in the church.
2. New members should be able to identify their spiritual gifts.
3. New members should be involved in at least one (preferably several) roles/tasks/ministries in the church, appropriate to their spiritual gifts.
4. New members should be actively involved in a small fellowship (face-to-face) group.
5. New members should demonstrate a regular financial commitment to the church.
6. New members should personally understand and identify with church goals.

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<sup>2</sup> See *Planting Missional Churches*, 280-81.

7. New members should attend worship services regularly.
8. New members should identify unchurched friends and relatives and take specific steps to help them toward responsible church membership.

Compare the first of the above characteristics with this (again, from Stetzer):

“William Hendricks, in his book *Exit Interviews*, argues that new Christians are likely to leave the church within the first six months of faith if they don’t develop seven significant relationships with the congregation in that time.”<sup>3</sup>

To the degree that it would be true of our setting, that gives us a measurable goal together with a timeframe.

## Reflection #2

Helpfully, the above characteristics can be specifically planned-for and measured. However, it is worth noting that they are not Christian growth in themselves, though they are certainly tangled-up with it. Nevertheless, we must beware the error of seeing them as ‘success’ in some ultimate sense.

We might collect the above characteristics as describing a person who has found ways to become invested in our church in terms of:

- regular time in their week
  - So... do our church structures capture people up in a rhythm of attendance?
- identifiable friendships
  - So... do our church structures and systems facilitate the formation of genuine friendships?
- personal finances
  - So... are our systems for financial giving readily accessible to a newcomer?

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3 *Planting Missional Churches*, 290.

- avenues to practically serve that suit them
  - So... can newbies find a way into service easily, whether in our systems (e.g. rosters) or in non-structured ways?
- sharing the church's vision and direction
  - So... do we set our vision before newbies in a way they can understand, draw-out, and take-on for themselves?
- an evangelistic orientation beyond church
  - So... do our structures and does our culture endorse such an evangelistic concern for the lost in a winsome, even infectious way?

### **Background #3: Environments for Integration**

'[T]he environments of a church can work as steps to move people down a relational path to where they experience a sense of belonging and care.'<sup>4</sup> In *7 Practices of Effective Ministry*. Stanley, et al., adopt the metaphor of three rooms in a house for thinking about the different 'environments' in our church programs.

So here are the three rooms (quoting):

- “*Foyer* typically describes a larger environment... it is an entry point for the unchurched... The relational goal of a Foyer Environment is to make sure that people walk away and feel like *guests*...
- *The Living Room* is an environment where a number of people can network and meet with one another... Our goal is for people to walk away and feel like they are *friends* with someone...
- *The Kitchen Table* is the most intimate of environments... where people should begin to feel like they are *family*.”<sup>5</sup>

### **Reflection #3**

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<sup>4</sup> *7 Practices of Effective Ministry*. Stanley, et al., 92.

<sup>5</sup> *7 Practices of Effective Ministry*. Stanley, et al., 92-93.

On their appraisal, Sunday church fits the ‘Foyer’ category (though they’re a bigger church than us); small groups are a ‘Kitchen Table’ environment. In their view, things like Mums’ Groups are the middle category, that’s where people really make friends.

While there are exceptions, it seems fair to say that while we get visitors to our Sunday meeting, we don’t see many finding their way into our smallgroups. Perhaps our smallgroups are (for the most part) ‘family’ environments—where a person already committed to these people in principle will strive to *make it work*, allowing friendship to follow-along afterwards. The above approach might say, “You struggle to integrate people because you’re not providing an interim environment where people find their place as *friends*”.

We might opt for two alternative approaches:

- *Mid-Size + Promoting One-to-One*: Replace smallgroups with a middle-sized group that maintains the big Bible focus, but whose relational fluidity allows for people to make friends amidst a larger pool of people.
  - Where would the *family* element come from? By investing considerable energy into one-to-one ministry.
- *smallgroups + Promoting ‘Living Rooms’*: Keep smallgroups in (roughly) the same mold as they’ve been to date. Capitalise on the family-like intimacy of those groups, and emphasise the role of friends and leaders in helping integrate newbies into those groups—they function as ‘adopters’ (to continue the family metaphor).
  - The risky part of this approach lies in finding ways to promote *living room* environments. These could be explicitly Bible-centred (such as Mum’s Bible Study), or far more casual/cultural (dinner parties, birthdays, etc.).
    - Imagine a church committed to preferring mid-sized celebrations/events over small-scale. More, imagine a church where we routinely try to bring our church and non-church friend-networks together in such events. Some people would find it hard, some people are doing it already, and it would require people really ‘getting’ *why* we’re promoting it: because, socially, it’s what our church structures really *need*, in order for newbies to have a chance of hopping onboard.

- Leaders, particularly, setting the example here.

## Common Themes

For our purposes of formulating a strategy to improve in the areas of welcoming, follow-up, and integration, let us distill the above research into six themes:

- Churches must assist in the cultivation of genuine friendships between newcomers and existing members/partners.
- Churches must communicate that they're going somewhere, both in terms of personal growth or vision.
- Churches must empower newcomers toward involvement and service in keeping with their uniqueness.
- A church's structures must take account of what they do and don't provide in terms of social context.
- A church's systems must efficiently provide a newcomer with access to the normal pattern of church life (e.g. a way into a smallgroup, financial giving, etc.)
- A church's culture must engage newcomers socially and intellectually, and actively facilitate the process of integrating newcomers—systems and structures cannot do it alone.

## Strategy

Overall, this strategy aims to:

- strengthen our church culture of integrating newcomers *through formal and grass-roots education and leading by example,*
- create a warmer and more compelling 'welcome', and more-organised and better-targeted 'follow-up' *by introducing new systems and improving and streamlining our existing ones;* and
- aiding and accelerating the social process of 'integration' *by improving the ministry structures we already have and encouraging a more-intelligent use of them.*

## Strengthening our Church Culture

- *Promote a Heart for the Outsider and Evangelism in Prayer* in our smaller settings of smallgroups and one-to-one.
  - **Action:** Establish specific evangelistic prayer for friends and newbies in smallgroups; agitate for such prayer in one-to-one contexts (through formal teaching, as appropriate, and through channels like announce@ and community life); encourage staff to lead by example.
- *Encourage Grass-Roots 'Living Room' Events* as an important complement to our church structures, which tend to favour 'Foyer' and 'Kitchen Table' settings.
  - **Action:** Four times a year in *Community Life*, encourage everyone in our church to *consider* hosting a social event in the year designed to bring their own church and non-church networks of contacts together (e.g. a Grand Final bbq, a birthday dinner, a formal dinner party, a New Years party, a post-exams soccer game, heading out to a band/festival together); continue with the Endless Summer platform for hosting 'Living Room' events.
- *Develop the Practice of Speaking of Christian Conversion and Growth* in authentic and appropriate ways. This is about learning together how to speak of growth, blockers to it, and to share the victories, the failures, and the burden for it.
  - **Action:** Make it a regular feature of our meetings (both Sunday and smallgroups) to speak of growth (also see below for this); coach smallgroup leaders in facilitating and modeling such.
- *Empower Partners as Newbie Integrators* to friendship networks and smallgroups. Every partner at Crossroads in a smallgroup who befriends a newcomer has an opportunity to ease that newbie's entry to the smallgroup. Every partner at Crossroads has friendships they can share with newbies.
  - **Action:** Encourage every partner into smallgroups and empower every partner as an inviter-to-smallgroup; encourage a generosity in friend-sharing (through teaching, as appropriate). Staff to visit each smallgroup to encourage to that end by March.

## Systems of Welcome and Follow-Up

- *Incorporate Response Forms* into the new Crossroads Classic welcome card. In addition to improved data-capture for attendance stats, it will improve our ability to simply capture the contact details of newcomers, as well as an avenue for ‘what’s next’ with them.
  - **Actions:** produce a response form attached to the (new) welcome card, which suits our purposes; develop winsome ways of encouraging people to fill them in and put them in the collection baskets; add to meeting plan templates; establish forms distribution and processing in welcomer role descriptions and staff routines.
- *Get Newbies Plugged into our Formal Communication* more-quickly (incl. announce@ and Facebook pages), to lower the barriers to their getting more involved.
  - **Action:** include an invitation to get into announce@ in our Newbies nights material; include links to Facebook pages on post-service slide; encourage newbies to follow us on (a newly established) Twitter account; get staff (incl. Missionary) to each tweet twice-weekly.
- *Make our Systems of Financial Giving more Accessible and Intelligible* in the weekly meeting, through formal channels (e.g. announce@ footer), through website. i.e. make it easy for new people to start giving money electronically.
  - **Actions:** Update Classic slide deck (post-service) to include details more-clearly; make it a regular feature of announce@; get newbies onto announce@ more quickly (see above); put a link to ‘giving’ details on web frontpage and a new position in the hierarchy (e.g. ‘Support Us’ on front page).
- *Promote Actual Ways to Integrate Newcomers for Existing Ministry Roles*, such that staff, kids ministry, smallgroup leaders, welcomers, MC, etc. have clear goals/intentions with regard to welcoming, follow-up, and integration.
  - NB. There’s an angle here for just regular partners, too—how can I, as a regular partner, help this new person get integrated into church life?

- **Action:** itemise newcomer-focus in existing role descriptions in consultation with those in ministry roles.
- *Make our Church Services More Compelling.* While there are many facets to this, we might think of our meetings in terms of the threefold, “Is it true? Is it clear? Is it real?” It’s the third of these that we are focusing on: a strong and compelling connection to real-life. Structurally, our meetings presently feature little prayer for evangelism/conversion (except for world mission). Practically, our meetings involve mostly paid staff in application and personal testimony (in the context of the sermon).
  - **Action:** Coach MCs toward excellence in ‘real’; introduce more testimonials of conversion and the Normal Christian Life; increase prayer for evangelism/kingdom growth into sample meetings (templates); focus staff development (for preachers) on honing the evangelistic edge in week-to-week sermons.

### **Structures for Integration**

- *Connect Newbie Nights with smallgroups* to smooth the transition into smallgroups. This includes renaming New Partners Nights to Newbie Nights, with an attendant change in content—it is intended to sweep even non-Christian adherents into our orbit. At present, the New Partners Nights are poorly attended (for a variety of reasons), and it is an added thing to then get someone to a smallgroup (or integrated into other areas of church life). This change would see smallgroups host of the New Partners’ material (though a pastor/elder could come in to run it), providing a clear next step: come along next week for regular smallgroup.
  - **Action:** make space for New Partners Nights in the smallgroup calendar; revise the newbie material for this new purpose and context; appoint staff/pastors/elders to the leading role (for that night only).
- *Capitalise on Existing ‘Living Room’ Structures.* While we may not have many of the mid-sized friendship-cultivating structures in our weekly routine, we have a few in less-frequent rotation: e.g. church camps/conferences, church Summits, Endless Summer of Love, and the occasional special event.

- **Action:** recognise those mid-sized group events as legitimate friendship building structures; promote them to newbies as another way 'in'