

THE CASE FOR CHANGE UPDATED: 10 URGENT CHALLENGES THE PCNSW MUST CONFRONT NOW

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Our Church is shaped substantially by its past. Over the course of our 150 year history, few events have defined us more than the formation of the Uniting Church on 22 June 1977. Referring to this period in the opening of his address to the 2015 Assembly, the Moderator reminded us that we should be thankful that our Church still exists under Jesus. Quoting an unnamed minister, he said:

...It was a marvel that God should have taken a small and sometimes divided group and allowed it to survive. There were probably times when we came perilously close to folding¹.

Although stories of past battles and conflict still abound today, there is much that our Church can be thankful to God for.

The Presbyterian Church of Australia is one of the only denominations with a classically evangelical and Bible-based Church in every State. Within NSW, we have many congregations that are flourishing. We have a number of active and growing churches in Sydney and regional NSW. Some of our congregations have been revitalised, while new congregations have been planted. It has been exciting to see new congregations formed through intentional partnerships between local congregations.

In 2017 there are 200 students and 30 candidates pursuing world-class theological and ministry training within a cohesive confessional framework at Christ College². New partnerships with City-to-City Australia have extended further the range of opportunities available to students. Committees like METRO encourage ministry apprenticeships through local congregations across the State, while Presbyterian Youth has enjoyed growth in its camping ministry. Ministry Training for Women through Christ College and retreat groups for the wives of pastoral leaders have also been a blessing to many.

Jericho Road (Presbyterian Social Services) works with and for our Church to proclaim the gospel in deed and word to the most vulnerable through a range of ministries. These include chaplains in prisons and hospitals, emergency and food ministries, Allowah Presbyterian Children's Hospital, the Presbyterian Counseling Service, work with refugees, children's services, disability advocacy and the work of the Conduct Protocol Unit. The Gospel, Culture and Society Committee assists our Church in making informed decisions regarding contemporary issues such as creation care and same-sex marriage. Our schools are led by leaders with a clear Christian commitment and vision, while our school chaplaincy program is strong and growing³. Finally, there has been greater theological unity and harmony within Assembly in recent years.

How did these positive changes emerge from such a troubled period in our history? God has been good to us. The risen Lord Jesus promised to build his Church (Matthew 16:18), a task he has been overseeing for 2000 years. As Christ's People, he has entrusted us with the task of calling men, women and children to repentance and faith in Jesus⁴.

Jesus promised to build his Church, therefore we can be confident that he will continue to do so. But as God normally works through means generally⁵, and leaders in particular⁶, it is worth asking the question "*How can we cultivate the conditions in which Jesus' Church can flourish over the next 40 years?*".

¹ Murray K. (2015) how did we get to now? The Address to the Assembly by the Moderator. *The Pulse*. Sydney: PCNSW, 8-9.

² (2017) Christ College: Moving with the Ages. Ibid. March-April ed.: The Presbyterian Church of Australia in NSW, 6-9.

³ Powell M. (2015a) A Year in Review. Ibid. NSW: PCNSW, 17.

⁴ Murray K. Ibid. how did we get to now? The Address to the Assembly by the Moderator. Sydney, 8-9.

⁵ (2003) Chapter 5: Of Providence. *Westminster Confession of Faith*. Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications.

⁶ Laniak TS. (2006) *Shepherds after My own Heart: Pastoral traditions and leadership in the Bible*, Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP. Page 248. See also the many references to shepherding in the Old and New Testament. For example, the instructions given to the Elders in Acts 20:17-38 and 1 Peter 5:1-4. Empirical evidence for this argument is cited in Appendix 1.

Although God has been good to us, our Church faces 10 urgent challenges that we must confront now (see further Appendix 1):

1. We are shrinking while the Australian population is growing;
2. We are rapidly ageing and experiencing a net loss of people under the age of 55 years;
3. We struggle to equip our people to follow Jesus in all spheres of ordinary life;
4. We are in poor health;
5. We close more congregational locations than we open;
6. We are not sufficiently innovative for our task and context;
7. Our greatest asset and yet greatest weakness is pastoral leadership;
8. We do not adequately train or support pastoral leaders;
9. Our presbyteries are not functioning effectively; and
10. We lack a shared and compelling vision for our future.

These challenges have an impact upon four important groups within our Church: ordinary Christians (1-3), local congregations (4-6), pastoral leadership teams (7-8), and presbyteries (9). The last two challenges affect them all.

The collective impact of these 10 urgent challenges is consistent with what some academics have called a 'death spiral'⁷. The cost of us not changing in response to these urgent challenges is likely to be far greater than the cost of change, as great as this may appear to some.

Our Church has been shaped significantly by its past. Yet under Christ and new leadership, we have the opportunity to be shaped just as significantly by a shared and compelling vision for our future, accompanied by a series of intentional change projects designed to bring this vision into reality.

We have started a new denomination-wide conversation about where we are and who we could be under Christ. But we need your support to cultivate the conditions in which we can flourish under Christ, so we can leave our Church and our world in a healthier state for the generations to come.

Will you join us?

Jonathan Pratt
5 April, 2017

⁷ Nadler DA and Shaw RB. (1995) Change Leadership: Core Competency for the Twenty-First Century. In: Nadler DA, Shaw RB and Walton AE (eds) *Discontinuous Change: Leading Organizational Transformation*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.pp. 12-13.

APPENDIX 1: 10 URGENT CHALLENGES THE PCNSW MUST CONFRONT NOW (UPDATED)

The arguments that follow have been developed in light of the most current data available regarding the present state of the Presbyterian Church of Australia in NSW. This updated case for change could be refined further if and when additional relevant information about our Church is obtained. The NCLS surveys that were conducted in our congregations in late 2016 could provide this kind of data later in 2017.

In calling for change, we shouldn't attempt to apportion blame to individuals or groups. That's not constructive. Instead, we should attempt to take action now that will help cultivate the conditions in which Jesus' Church can thrive over the next 40 years.

There are no less than 10 urgent challenges now confronting our congregations and presbyteries. As will be noted later in this paper, the dynamics arising from these urgent challenges are consistent with a 'death spiral'. The cost of us not pursuing change to address these urgent challenges is likely to be far greater than the cost of supporting proposed changes now and in the future.

The nature of these 10 urgent challenges is explained in further detail in the next section of this Appendix.

10 URGENT CHALLENGES CONFRONTING THE PCNSW NOW

1. We are shrinking while the Australian population is growing

Over the last decade to 2011, the proportion of Australians identifying Christianity as their religion has declined from 68 to 61 percent⁸. At the last Census, 22 percent of Australians selected "no religion". The majority of these could be classified as "spiritual not religious", with only 2 percent of the "no religion" respondents indicating "atheistic", "agnostic", "humanist" or "rationalistic" as their worldview⁹.

This decline in religious affiliation is part of a larger trend experienced among mainline protestant (but not Pentecostal) churches¹⁰. Pentecostal churches, by contrast, are now the second largest denominational grouping of church attenders after Catholics (46 percent), and ahead of the Anglicans (11 percent)¹¹.

Within the states of NSW and ACT over the last decade to 2011, the number identifying as Presbyterian or Reformed fell across Sydney (-2 percent), Regional NSW (-5 percent) and the ACT (-4 percent)¹². This decline occurred during a period of general population growth (11 percent). A graph illustrating these changes is found in Figure 1.

⁸ McCrindle M. (2014) *A Demographic Snapshot of Christianity and Church Attenders in Australia*. Available at: http://www.mccrindle.com.au/resources/A-Demographic-snapshot-of-Christianity-and-church-attenders-in-Australia_McCrindle.pdf.

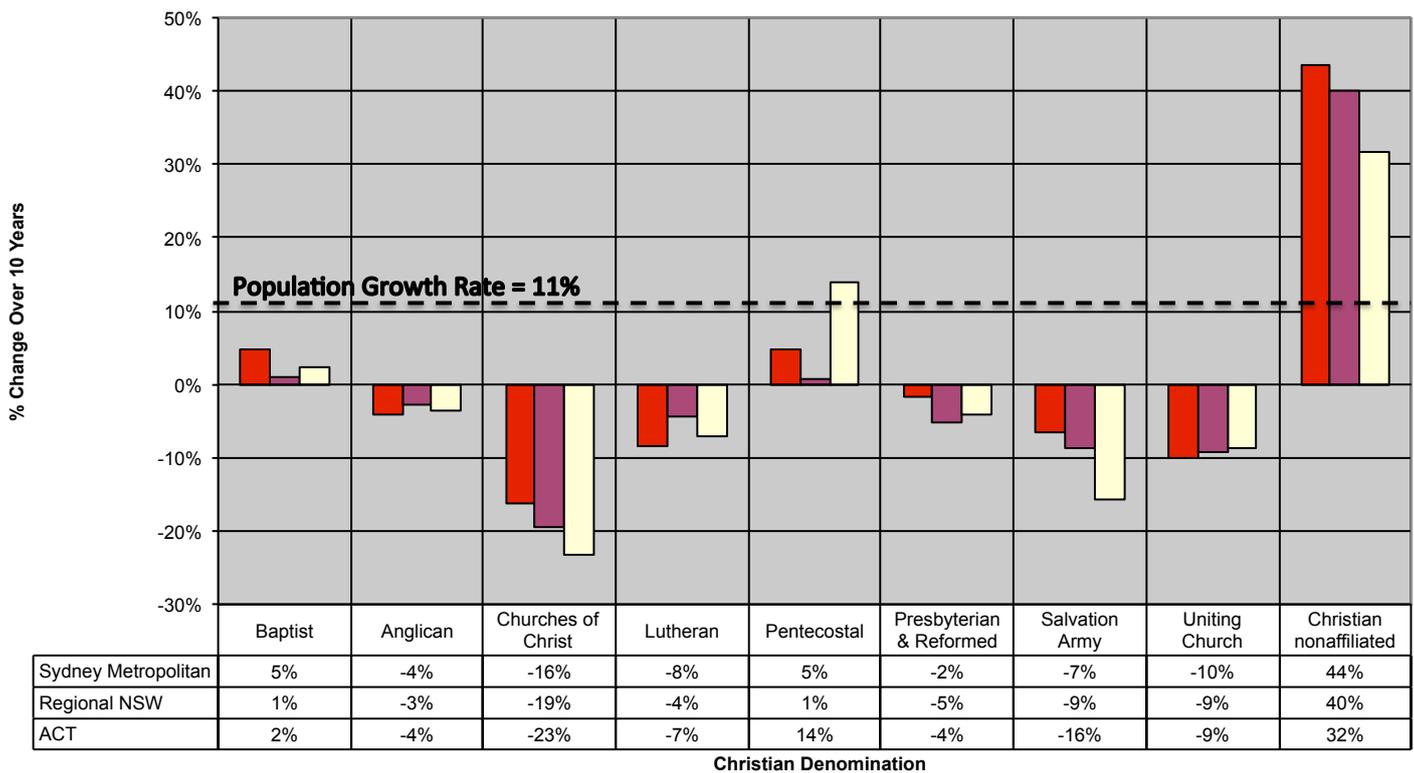
⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Powell R. (2015b) Trends in Australian Church Vitality: Denominational Leaders Briefing. North Sydney: NCLS Research, Australian Catholic University.

¹¹ McCrindle M. (2014) *A Demographic Snapshot of Christianity and Church Attenders in Australia*. Available at: http://www.mccrindle.com.au/resources/A-Demographic-snapshot-of-Christianity-and-church-attenders-in-Australia_McCrindle.pdf.

¹² Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2001) Census of Population and Housing. (accessed August 12, 2008), Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2006) Census of Population and Housing. (accessed August 12, 2008), Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2011) Census of Population and Housing. (accessed 15 July, 2013).

Figure 1: Nominal Church Growth by Denomination Over Time: 2001-2011¹³



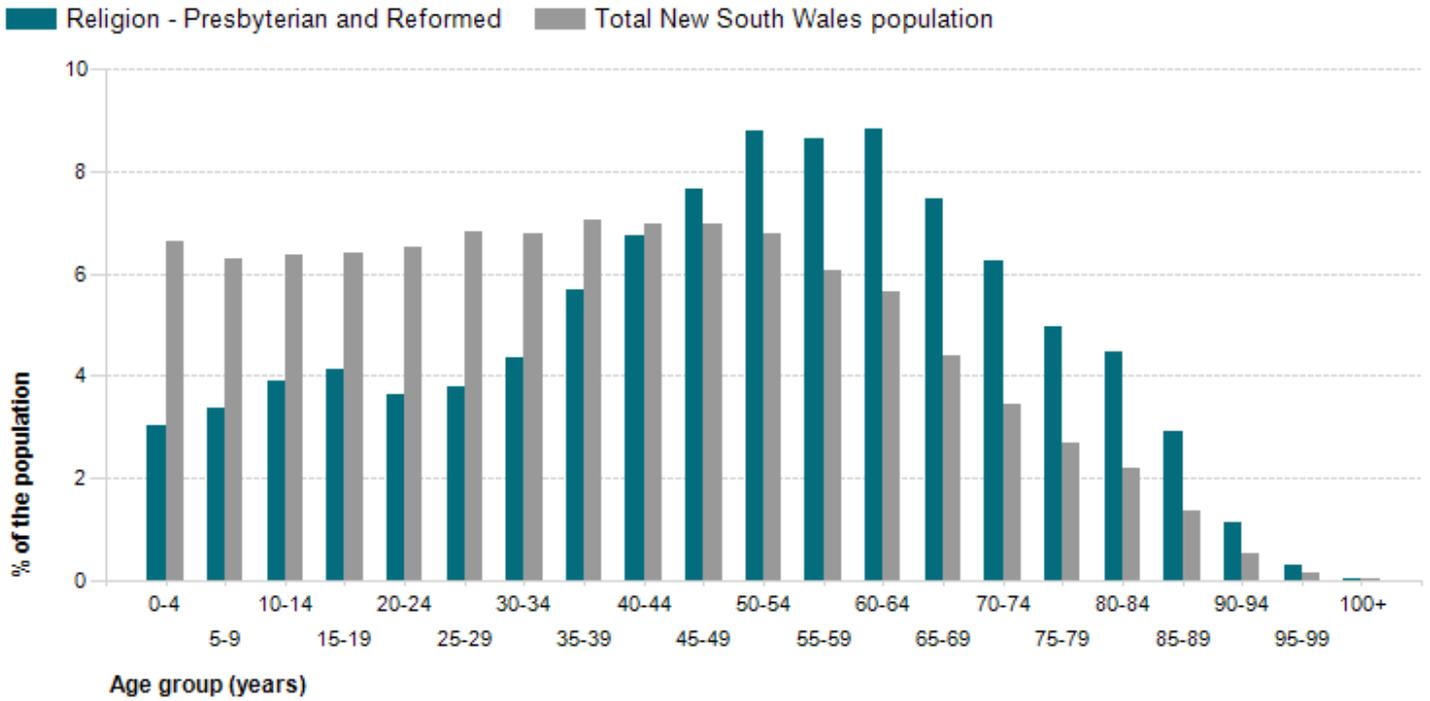
2. We are rapidly ageing and experiencing a net loss of people under the age of 55 years

Across Australian congregations in 2011, the average age of adult church attenders was 53¹⁴. Those in the 70 plus age group were over-represented, comprising 25 percent of all church attendees, but only 12 percent of the population¹⁵. Those under 50 years were under-represented, with 20-39 year olds who make up 34 percent of the population comprising just 21 percent of church attenders¹⁶. This trend is bucked only by the Pentecostals whose average age is much lower at 39¹⁷.

Within NSW over that same period, a similar phenomenon can be observed. Among those identifying as Presbyterian and Reformed, those aged 55 years and older made up 45 percent of our congregations but only 25 percent of the general population¹⁸. Put another way, those aged under 55 make up 55 percent of our congregations but 75 percent of the general population¹⁹. Similarly, those aged 20 to 39 years make up just 17 percent of our congregations but 27 percent of the general population²⁰. A graph illustrating these contrasts is shown in Figure 2.

¹³ Adapted from Census data supplied by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2001, 2006, 2011).
¹⁴ McCrindle M. (2014) *A Demographic Snapshot of Christianity and Church Attenders in Australia*. Available at: http://www.mccrindle.com.au/resources/A-Demographic-snapshot-of-Christianity-and-church-attenders-in-Australia_McCrindle.pdf.
¹⁵ Ibid.
¹⁶ Ibid.
¹⁷ Ibid.
¹⁸ Ibid.
¹⁹ Ibid.
²⁰ Ibid.

Figure 2: Age Profile of PCNSW Attenders v NSW Population in 2011²¹

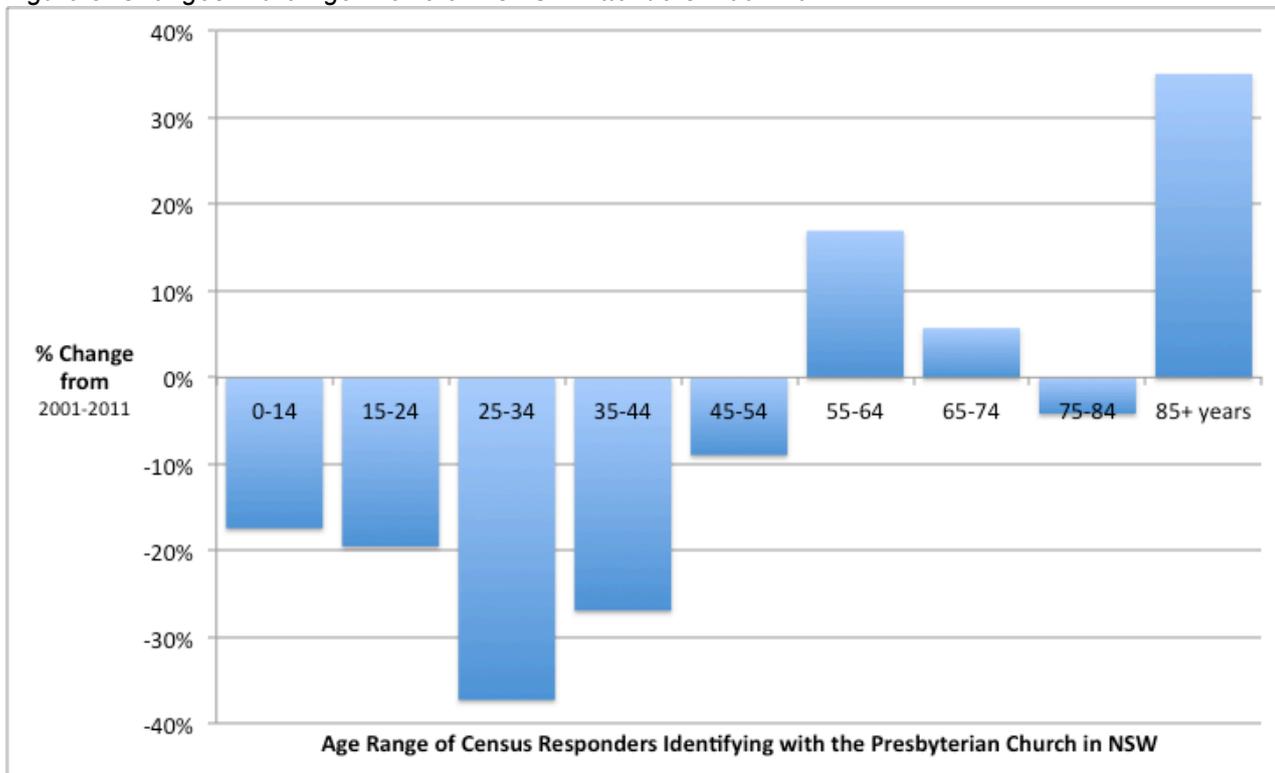


Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing, 2011 (Usual residence data)
 Compiled and presented by .id, the population experts.



Figure 3 shows the changes in our age profile over the last decade. Our Church experienced a net loss of people across all age ranges less than 55 years, with a significant decline among those aged 25-34 years (-37 percent). We did, however, experience modest growth among those 55 years and older²².

Figure 3: Changes in the Age Profile of PCNSW Attenders: 2001-2011²³



²¹ Ibid.

²² Australian Bureau of Statistics.

²³ Adapted from Census data supplied by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2001, 2006, 2011).

3. We struggle to equip our people to follow Jesus in all spheres of ordinary life

According to NCLS surveys conducted within our Church in 2011, our second greatest weakness is evangelism. This weakness does not refer to evangelism by the pastoral leaders of our congregations, but 'faith-sharing' among ordinary Christians in their ordinary life contexts²⁴. Training and equipping our people to follow Jesus in every sphere of life (the home, workplace, local community and church) is the primary responsibility of Church leaders (Ephesians 4:11-16). Our weakness in everyday evangelism is symptomatic of a low commitment to church-based training among our congregations. It is difficult to see how we can honour Jesus' commission to make more disciples (Matthew 28:19-20) if we do not address this issue.

4. We are in poor health

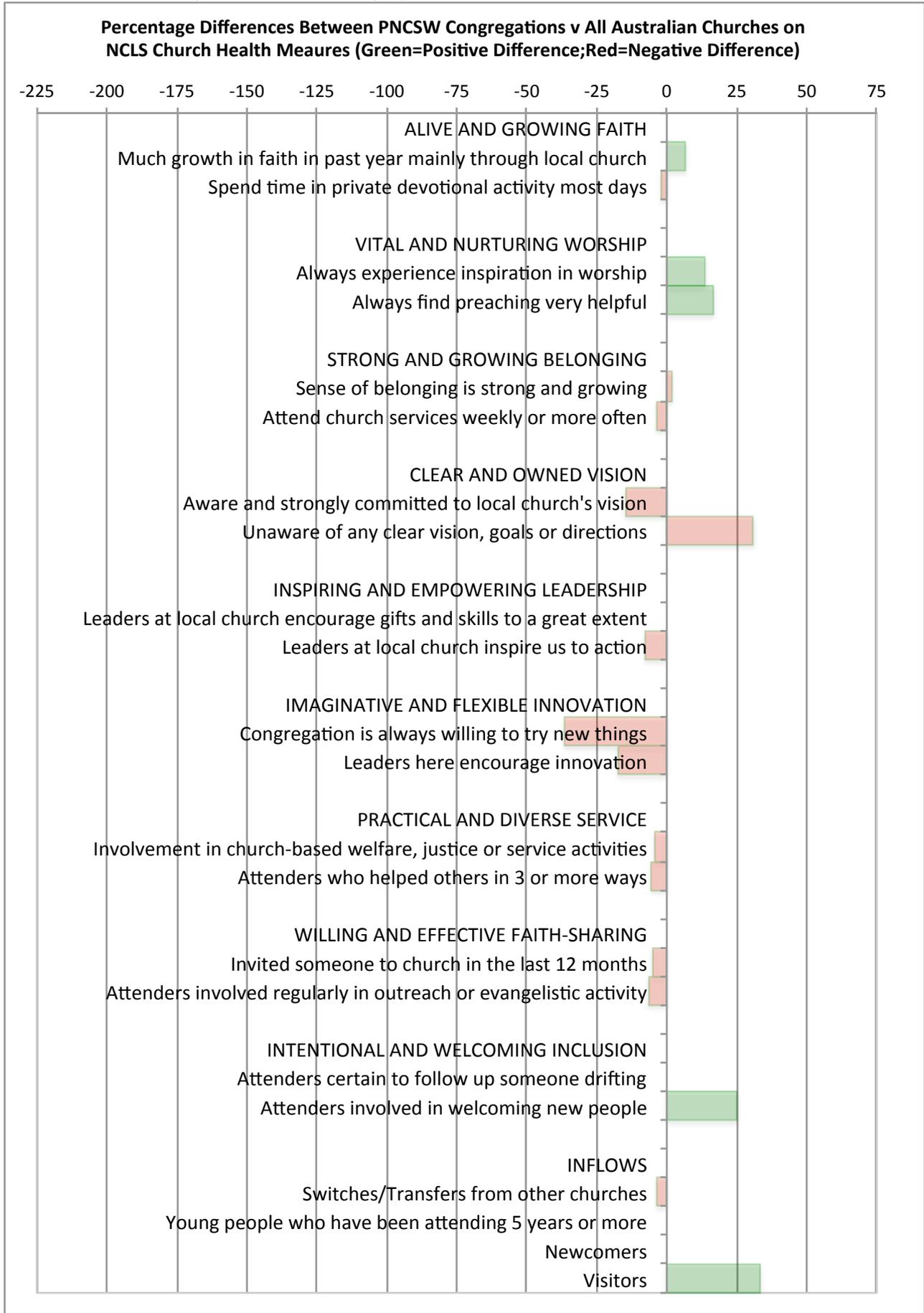
Figure 4 shows the performance of PCNSW congregations (176 pastoral charges across NSW and ACT) compared to the average of all participating Australian congregations during the 2006 survey. Compared to all other Australian congregations, PCNSW congregations were better at:

- Promoting a growing faith;
- Engaging in helpful preaching and inspiring worship;
- Welcoming new people; and
- Receiving visitors

Whilst this comparison might comfort some, it is worth remembering that most Australian churches experienced negative nominal growth during this period. That is, the average Australian church is hardly the benchmark against which we should assess ourselves.

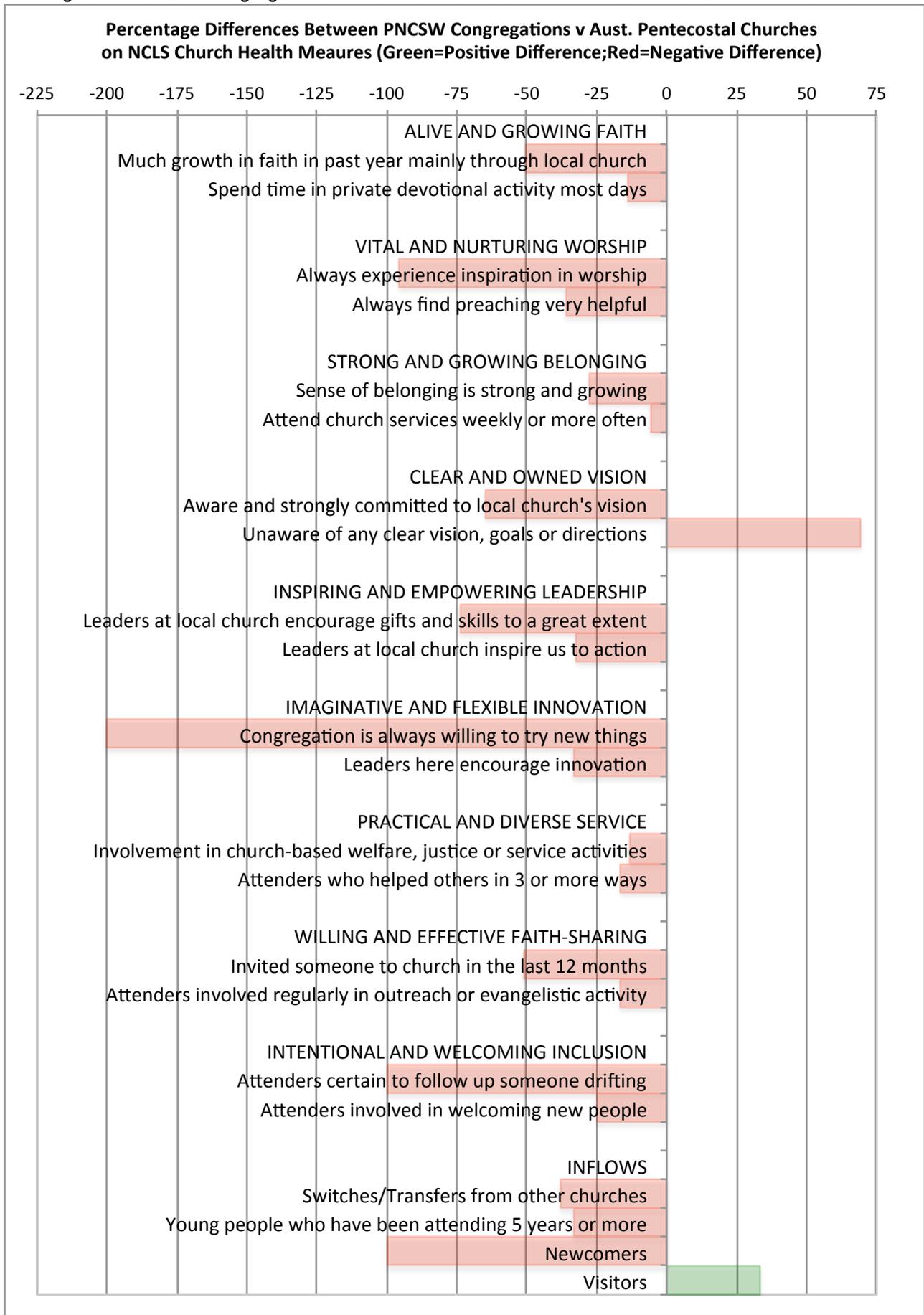
²⁴ NCLS Research. (2012) National Church Life Survey. Sydney South: NCLS Research.

Figure 4: PCNSW Congregations v All Australian Churches: 2006²⁵



²⁵ Adapted from NCLS National Church Life Survey (2006).

Figure 5: PCNSW Congregations V Australian Pentecostal Churches on NCLS Health Measures²⁶



²⁶ Adapted from NCLS National Church Life Survey (2006)

Compared to the average of all Australian churches, PCNSW congregations were worse than the average when it came to:

- Spending time in regular devotions most days;
- Attending church services weekly or more often;
- A clear and owned vision;
- Inspiring and empowering leadership;
- Imaginative and flexible innovation;
- Practical and diverse service;
- Willing and effective faith-sharing; and
- Transfers from other churches

Empirically, the church to benchmark ourselves against is the Pentecostal Church (not the Sydney Anglicans). Figure 5 compares the performance of PCNSW congregations with the average of all Australian Pentecostal congregations during this same period. Apart from attracting visitors (perhaps a function of a longer church history), Pentecostal congregations outperformed PCNSW congregations on every NCLS health dimension. We may have concerns about aspects of their theology, but when it comes to their practice, based on empirical indicators of health linked to growth, their congregations are typically much healthier than ours.

According to NCLS Research²⁷, their three leadership factors (vision, leadership, and innovation) are the catalysts that drive all other factors. PCNSW congregations were weak in all three of these critical areas compared to the average of all Australian congregations, particularly in relation to innovation (a necessary response to changes taking place in our local communities). The contrast is even more marked in relation to Pentecostal congregations in Australia.

Unfortunately, the state of PCNSW congregations five years later was no better (and probably worse). There were too few participating Presbyterian congregations in NSW, as well as the rest of Australia combined, to generate a statistically robust and comprehensive profile for the PCNSW or PCA Church. The refusal of many congregational leaders to collect appropriate feedback on the health and growth of their congregations is surely an additional sign of poor health (quite apart from legitimate concerns they may have with NCLS surveys).

While a survey does not improve the health of a congregation directly, it does provide pastoral leaders with a valuable source of feedback to evaluate the present state of their members, their congregation, and their own leadership. Although other empirical health frameworks are available²⁸, reports from Ministry and Mission staff suggest their adoption and use is rare.

5. We close more congregational locations than we open

Over the 20 year period from 1991 to 2011, the number of congregation locations across Australia among Catholic and Protestant churches dropped by 1000 from a high of 11,700²⁹. These aggregate numbers would be much lower but for a significant *increase* among Pentecostal congregations during this same period. This fall in the number of congregation locations has been felt most among mainstream Protestant churches.

We are experiencing a similar phenomenon within our Church. Between the years 2000 and 2013, the number of pastoral charges or home mission stations declined from 198 to 181 (a fall of 9 percent)³⁰. Despite a 23 percent increase in the number of inducted ministers over this same period (120 to 147)³¹, along with reports of ongoing church planting across the denomination³², we are closing more congregational locations than we are opening.

²⁷ Bellamy J, Cussen B, Sterland S, et al. (2006) *Enriching Church Life: A Practical Guide for Local Churches*, Adelaide: Openbook Australia.

²⁸ For example, Natural Church Development (<http://ncd-australia.org.au/welcome/>).

²⁹ Powell R. (2015b) Trends in Australian Church Vitality: Denominational Leaders Briefing. North Sydney: NCLS Research, Australian Catholic University.

³⁰ Meller B. (2015) Ministry & Mission Committee (Report to the State Assembly). Sydney: PCNSW.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

6. We are not sufficiently innovative for our task and context

Our congregations are embedded within a wider culture that is becoming increasingly volatile and unstable³³. In response to these emerging conditions, senior organisational leaders around the world are changing their organisations so they might proactively lead change, rather than passively react to their environments³⁴.

Even organisations that don't try to change still end up changing, albeit reactively. Estep Jr.³⁵ notes that change occurs naturally within an institution's life cycle, even in churches. Ministries and organisations are born through active, intentional and progressive change to pursue a desired dream. They grow through purposeful planning and advancement. Yet organisations cannot maintain *existing* levels of effectiveness unless they commit to ongoing and intentional change. Without re-casting the vision and re-engineering the organisation, the organisation or ministry will be driven by entropic pressures and slide towards gradual decline and eventual death. The organisation thus institutionalises and begins to work for its own existence, and not the fulfilment of its original vision. A lack of change does not perpetuate a ministry; it kills it.

It is an institutional myth that organizations can simply maintain their current levels of effectiveness without any significant change occurring. In reality, one may have to change the program, ministry, or organization just to maintain present levels of achievement. The maintenance myth has led to ineffectiveness and the eventual death of many congregations and Christian organizations³⁶.

The capacity to manage organisational change with success is now regarded by many organisations as business-critical and central to their survival. Yet most organisations find it difficult to manage change successfully. Research has found consistently that approximately two thirds of major change initiatives end in failure, not meeting basic project objectives around time, budget and quality constraints³⁷. In other studies, this rate of failure has been as high as 80 to 90 percent³⁸, although some researchers have queried this claim³⁹.

Change within congregations is not much different. Similar rates of change failure have been observed among studies of US churches⁴⁰. It is probable that comparable rates of change failure are found among Australian and PCNSW congregations too.

In light of these challenges, we should expect congregations interested in the future to develop their capacity for innovation. Unfortunately, Presbyterian church attenders in 2011 claimed that the willingness of their congregation and pastoral leaders to try new things was the third greatest weakness within our Church⁴¹.

Our congregations have become too cautious and too mechanistic. According to the most recent NCLS Research survey, over three quarters of Australian church attenders shared a similar personality profile. Most church attenders are 'Guardians'⁴². Using a Myers-Briggs personality framework, they are predominantly introvert, sensing, feeling and judging types (ISFJ). Individuals with this personality type value stability, security, and a sense of community. They trust hierarchy and authority, have an orientation towards past experiences, and like things that are sequenced and structured⁴³.

Interestingly, NCLS Research has found that the most common personality type associated with pastoral leadership is exactly the same⁴⁴. Church leaders with this profile⁴⁵ will generally have a preference for

³³ Reeves M and Deimler M. (2011) Adaptability: The New Competitive Advantage. *Harvard Business Review* July-August: 135-141.

³⁴ IBM. (2008) IBM CEO Study.

³⁵ Estep Jr. J. (2005) Ministry Leaders as Change Agents. In: anthony Mj and Estep Jr. J (eds) *Management Essentials for Christian Ministries*. Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 201-221.

³⁶ Ibid.. page 202. See also Stetzer E and Dodson M. (2007) *Comeback Churches: How 300 churches Turned Around and Yours Can Too*, Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group.

³⁷ Henrik Jorgensen H, Owen L and Neus A. (2008) Making Change Work. IBM Global Services, Armenakis AA and Harris SG. (2009) Reflections: our Journey in Organizational Change Research and Practice. *Journal of Change Management* 9: 127-142, Higgs M and Rowland D. (2005) All Changes Great and Small: Exploring Approaches to Change and its Leadership. Ibid.5: 121-151. Beer M and Nohria N. (2000) Cracking the Code of Change. *Harvard Business Review* May-June: 133-141. page 133.

³⁸ Gilley A, Dixon P and Gilley JW. (2008/2010) Characteristics of Leadership Effectiveness: Implementing Change and Driving Innovation in Organizations. In: Perry JL (ed) *The Jossey-Bass Reader on Nonprofit and Public Leadership*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 479-501.

³⁹ Hughes M. (2011) Do 70 Per Cent of All Organizational Change Initiatives Really Fail? *Journal of Change Management* 11: 451-464.

⁴⁰ Stetzer E and Dodson M. (2007) *Comeback Churches: How 300 churches Turned Around and Yours Can Too*, Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group. pp. 18-29.

⁴¹ NCLS Research. (2012) National Church Life Survey. Sydney South: NCLS Research.

⁴² Powell R. (2015b) Trends in Australian Church Vitality: Denominational Leaders Briefing. North Sydney: NCLS Research, Australian Catholic University.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Kaldor P and McLean J. (2009) *Lead with your Strengths*, Sydney: NCLS Research. Page 149

⁴⁵ Page 150.

conducting worship, administering the church, and visiting and helping people. They are quite suited to pastoral caring roles and preserving the status quo.

This very type is the exact *opposite* of the personality type most commonly found among leaders of healthy and growing churches. Extrovert, Intuitive and Perceiving types (ENTP and ENFP) are more likely to gravitate towards roles that involve the development of a vision for the future, the training of people for mission and ministry, convert others to the faith, and cultivate greater involvement in the local community⁴⁶.

These dominant personality profiles of our congregational attenders and leaders are likely to reinforce our adoption of overly mechanistic church structures. Mechanistic organisational designs are bureaucratic in nature, and tend to emphasise order, logic and coordination based on formal rules and positional (or role/office-based) authority. Like a large oil tanker, mechanistic organisations can be highly efficient but difficult to change. Mechanistic structures are more appropriate for:

- Certain or stable environments;
- Simple environments with few stakeholders;
- Strategies based on stability or efficiency; and
- Routine tasks performed on uniform “products” which are highly standardised.

Organic designs tend to emphasise flexibility, self-organisation and responsiveness to changing internal and external conditions. They are usually more expensive at face value (from an efficiency perspective), but are more innovative and nimble, and therefore in some environments more effective. Organic designs are generally more appropriate than mechanistic designs in the following conditions:

- Uncertain or dynamic environments;
- Complex environments with many stakeholders;
- Hostile environments with resource scarcity and intense competition;
- Variety of tasks performed in unique situations with little opportunity for repetition;
- Strategies based on change or innovation; and
- To promote development of human talent through empowerment and delegation.

A summary of the major differences between mechanistic and organic designs is found in Figure 6.

⁴⁶ Page 151.

Figure 6: Mechanistic Versus Organic Designs⁴⁷

	Mechanistic Design	Organic Design
Authority	Centralised	Decentralised/devolved/distributed
Spans of control	Narrow (few reports)	Wide (many reports)
Hierarchy	Tall (many layers)	Flat (few layers)
Roles	Narrowly defined with few tasks and much specialisation	Broadly defined with many tasks and less specialization
Teams and task forces	Few	Many
Coordination	Many formal, specific rules which are followed strictly	Informal coordination based on core values and general principles. Few formal rules.
Leadership style	Command-and-control	Flexible and context-dependent, with a strong bias towards empowerment of every member
Attitude towards control	Own and control everything	Own and control core components, otherwise outsource to trusted others
Attitude towards collaboration	Within organisational boundaries through internal divisions (i.e. within hierarchies)	Across organisational boundaries through external networks (i.e. via collaboration)

Our Church needs to cultivate a greater capacity for ongoing innovation to engage with our changing culture. This will require us, in part, to pursue more organic approaches to organisational design more fitting to our task and context. Our congregations should also work towards empowering every church member to serve Christ and his body according to their character, gifts and capacities (Romans 12:3-8, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4:11-16, 1 Peter 4:7-11). Except for the specific role of pastoral leader (ministers and elders) that the Bible limits to qualified men only⁴⁸, our Church should actively encourage and equip men and women to serve in every relevant ministry of our Church, according to their character, gifts and capacity. Finally, our Church should also work towards creating new opportunities for a range of congregational members to have a voice in relevant church decision making processes under the authority of Session.

Our Church also needs to recognise, recruit, develop and cultivate a broader diversity of leader types. For example, our pastoral leadership teams will be much better off if we can learn to value and draw upon other leader types in addition to ‘Guardians’ serving in paid and unpaid pastoral leader roles. These include ‘Pioneers’ that value possibilities and focus on the big picture, ‘Drivers’ who value challenge and like to tackle problems head-on, and ‘Integrators’ who value connection and draw teams together⁴⁹.

7. Our greatest asset and yet greatest weakness is pastoral leadership

Leadership matters because God has designed His good world, now fallen to sin, to respond to our derivative rulership. From the beginning, God entrusted the ordering and rule of his good creation into the hands of his image-bearers. In Genesis 2:15, God placed Adam in his good garden to work it and take care of it. In 2:19, God presented the various creatures he had made before Adam for *him* to name. And in 2:21-22, God created

⁴⁷ This table, and much of the content from this sub-section and the next, were drawn from the following texts: Clegg SR, Kornberger M and Pitsis T. (2008) *Managing and Organizations: An Introduction to Theory and Practice*, London: Sage Publications, Linstead S, Fulop L and Lilley S. (2009) *Management & Organization: A Critical Text*. Hampshire: Palgrave macmillan, Schermerhorn J, Davidson P, Poole D, et al. (2011) *management*, Milton, Qld: John Wiley & Sons Australia, McShane S and Travaglione T. (2003) *Organisational Behaviour on the Pacific Rim*, Boston: McGraw-Hill, Quinn RE, Faerman SR, Thompson MP, et al. (2011) *Becoming a Master Manager: A Competing Values Approach*, NJ: Wiley.

⁴⁸ See especially 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. The draft Theological Vision for the Presbyterian Church of Australia in NSW deals with this issue in greater detail.

⁴⁹ Johnson Vickberg SM and Christfort K. (2017) Pioneers, Drivers, Integrators and Guardians. *Harvard Business Review* 95: 50-59.

a suitable helper to assist him “rule over” the fish, birds and every living creature in God’s good world, a task that would require them to be fruitful, increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it (1:28).

Laniak’s observation of God’s initiative is noteworthy.

The God of Scripture passionately seeks humans to enlist in his mission, risking it regularly in their hands. This predilection is rooted in an ideal whereby human rule is a derivative extension of divine rule. Our theology of leadership is informed by this breathtaking choice of God to grant royal prerogatives to his creatures. To be made in his image is to rule with him and for him⁵⁰.

It was God’s initiative to entrust the state of his world at large, and the health of his Church in particular, to his image bearers by granting them real authority to bring order to God’s creation. Preaching Christ is fundamentally important. But preaching Christ requires more than just preaching; it also requires broader-based leadership (the former being a subset of the latter).

Empirically, leadership is the single greatest influence on the health and output of an organisation. This finding has surfaced again and again in research conducted among for-profit organisations⁵¹, not-for-profit organisations⁵², and churches⁵³. Pastoral leadership within our congregations is our greatest asset.

When Mike Dodson and I were researching and writing Comeback Churches...we wanted to find what factors led to church revitalization. We expected to find prayer, preaching, evangelism, etc. We researched and we studied more than 320 churches. We called them and did multiple interviews with dozens of them. Do you know what we found? Everything rises and falls on leadership⁵⁴.

Unfortunately, attenders in our congregations claimed that leadership was our single greatest weakness. Figure 7 displays the NCLS health variables for participating PCNSW congregations in 2011. It is ranked from strongest (largest circles) to weakest (smallest circles) across the sample pool of congregations. Our three greatest weaknesses, in order of priority, are leadership, faith-sharing (evangelism among ordinary Christians) and innovation.

In his book *The Conviction to Lead*⁵⁵, Mohler claims modern Christianity is divided into two groups: believers who can’t lead, and leaders who don’t know what they believe. On the basis of the data presented, I think we are clearly in the former group (i.e. we are believers who can’t lead).

⁵⁰ Laniak TS. (2006) *Shepherds after My own Heart: Pastoral traditions and leadership in the Bible*, Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP., p 248.

⁵¹ Green R. (2009) *Management Matters in Australia: Just how productive are we?* Canberra: Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, Collins J. (2001a) *Good to Great: Why some companies make the leap...and others don't*, London: Random House, Collins J. (2001b) *Level 5 Leadership: The Triumph of Humility and Fierce Resolve*. *Harvard Business Review* July-August: 136-139, Kouzes J and Posner B. (2012) *The Leadership Challenge: How to Make Extraordinary Things Happen in Organizations*, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

⁵² Collins J. (2006) *Good to Great and the Social Sectors:* , London: Random House Business Books.

⁵³ Pratt J. (2010) 'Growing Healthy Churches': Voices from the Churches. *Directions 2012 Research Project*. Epping: NSW & ACT Baptist Churches, Rainer TS. (2005) *Breakout Churches*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, Stetzer E and Dodson M. (2007) *Comeback Churches: How 300 churches Turned Around and Yours Can Too*, Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, Bellamy J, Cussen B, Sterland S, et al. (2006) *Enriching Church Life: A Practical Guide for Local Churches*, Adelaide: Openbook Australia, Keller T. (2011) *Corporate Renewal Dynamics*. New York: Redeemer City-to-City.

⁵⁴ Stetzer E. (2016) My Love/Hate Relationship with Leadership. *Christianity Today*, April. (accessed 13 April).

⁵⁵ Mohler A. (2012) *The Conviction to Lead*, Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers.pp. 19-20.

Figure 7: Aggregate Strengths and Weaknesses of the PCNSW Church in 2011⁵⁶



8. We do not adequately train or support pastoral leaders

Our current approach to training and supporting pastoral leaders (i.e. ministers and elders) is not adequate, given the previous discussion. This is not a judgment of the competence of our present or past leaders or institutions per se, but the broader paradigm they have operated under⁵⁷.

Our governance frameworks and practices (including those embodied within The Code) have encouraged sub-biblical and ineffective approaches to pastoral leadership. In contradistinction to the qualifications for pastoral leadership outlined in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9, many of us can tell stories of PCNSW congregations that have appointed unregenerate, spiritually immature and/or stale elders. We have congregations that have appointed masons and those who have never read personally the Westminster Confession of Faith⁵⁸. Given that the biblical qualifications for eldership are listed twice in the New Testament, we may infer that these qualifications are of special importance⁵⁹.

We need to be slower to appoint prospective pastoral leaders (1 Timothy 5:22), and we need to make it easier to remove quickly pastoral leaders (ministers and elders) who fail to maintain the foundational biblical qualifications for pastoral leadership. If Christ rules his church through his 'under-shepherds' (1 Peter 5:1-4), and if leadership of the church is the single greatest influence on our Church under Jesus by His Spirit, then the issue of who is eligible and competent to serve in these roles is a hill that more of us need to be prepared to die on. This is not, strictly speaking, a gospel issue. But it is an issue so fundamentally linked to the effective and perpetual proclamation of the gospel, in word and deed, through the Church to the world (Ephesians 3:10), that it represents an issue we should fight strongly for.

God has given us an office of pastoral leadership in His Church. If he is Lord, then he gets to set the rules within which we operate, especially when His Word addresses such issues more than once⁶⁰. The Bible is not merely descriptive of pastoral leadership and church polity, but establishes a paradigm that it then regulates⁶¹.

⁵⁶ Graphic supplied by NCLS Research (2013)

⁵⁷ It is my understanding that this paradigm is commonplace among Reformed theological colleges around the world.

⁵⁸ The Subordinate Standard for our Church, read in the light of the Declaratory Statement contained in the Basis of Union. The Supreme Standard is nothing less than the Word of God contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, and which this Church regards as the only rule of faith and practice.

⁵⁹ Witherow T. (1873) *The New Testament Elder*. *The British and Foreign Evangelical Review*: 201-228., page 204.

⁶⁰ The biblical qualifications for pastoral leadership are stated twice in nearly identical ways in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, thus making a strong case for a prescriptive regulation. See further *ibid*.

⁶¹ See further the draft Theological Vision for the Presbyterian Church of Australia in NSW and Smith M. (2016) *Shepherds and Servants*. Sydney: PCNSW Special Committee for Elders and Deacons..

The role set for pastoral leaders is frequently truncated among our congregations. Shepherd was a common designation used for prophets, priests and kings in the Old Testament, as well as elders in the New Testament⁶² (e.g. Acts 20:17-31 and 1 Peter 5:1-4). The term *pastor* is simply an anglicised form of the Latin/French word *shepherd*⁶³. The role set for biblical shepherds/pastors/elders has been described consistently by various authors, albeit with different terminology. For example:

- Laniak describes the responsibility of shepherds as *providing, protecting and guiding*⁶⁴;
- Witmer summarises the task of shepherding as *knowing, feeding, leading and protecting*⁶⁵;
- Strauch identifies the work of shepherds as *protecting, feeding, leading and caring for the flock*⁶⁶; and
- Smith describes the role of shepherds as *leading, teaching, praying, and setting an example*⁶⁷.

Our Church has created and institutionalised an artificial and non-biblical dichotomy between so-called 'teaching elders' and 'ruling elders'. We do not expect the latter to teach the Bible or to complete any basic training whatsoever in theology or leadership. This is despite these roles carrying significant leadership authority within our Church courts⁶⁸, and the biblical expectation that these individuals must be able to teach (1 Timothy 3:2) and give instruction in sound doctrine (Titus 1:9). Shepherds are meant to 'lead' and 'feed' their sheep as part of the same flexible role set in order to serve them effectively.

We ought to open up the way for the appointment of appropriately qualified men and women who wish to serve in non-teaching leadership roles as deacons (see further Acts 6:1-7 and 1 Timothy 3:8-13). And we should encourage the appointment of more elders who meet biblical qualifications to share the pastoral burden with their minister/s of leading God's people; teaching God's word and discipling God's people; praying with and for God's people; and modelling the ordinary Christian life to a watching Church and world.

Some Committees of Management have members whose character and doctrine is not consistent with the biblical standard for deacons. When this phenomenon is combined with the appointment of elders whose character and doctrine are also sub-standard, this opens up our Church to false teachers and dysfunctional leadership. Until we make changes in these important areas, our Church is unlikely to secure the leaders it needs to properly shepherd all of God's people.

The fact that pastoral leadership is our greatest asset and also our greatest weakness demands a rethinking of the attributes we are seeking to cultivate in our future pastoral leaders (paid and unpaid). Our Course of Training for ministers needs to be scrutinized again in light of our theological convictions and the needs and opportunities of our present context. Clearly, we are not developing the leaders our Church needs under the present paradigm and configuration of the Course of Training. We also need to be more intentional in recruiting individuals with the requisite character and gifts to pursue training of this kind, as well as turning away those who fail to conform to the biblical standard for eldership.

The initial training of ministers through the Course of Training is only part of the solution. There is no formal and recognised training program designed for non-vocational pastoral leaders (i.e. 'elders'). The absence of such a program in our polity is indefensible.

Our Church also has no expectation of ongoing professional development. Other comparable industries with professionally trained staff (e.g. law, engineering, medicine, accounting and teaching) insist that their leaders engage in ongoing and compulsory professional development every year to maintain technical competence and to enhance their effectiveness. For example, Continuing Professional Development for Australian Engineers involves 150 hours over a three-year cycle. This time must be apportioned across three domains, with a minimum of 50 hours in the particular technical area of practice, 10 hours in risk management, and 15 hours in business and management skills. Approved learning that contributes to these hours can take various forms, including formal study of an accredited course, short courses and seminars, workplace learning activities, private study, contributions to the profession, presentations at conferences and seminars, and other

⁶² Laniak TS. (2006) *Shepherds after My own Heart: Pastoral traditions and leadership in the Bible*, Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP., page 247.

⁶³ Laniak, page 21.

⁶⁴ Laniak, page 247.

⁶⁵ Witmer TZ. (2010) *The Shepherd Leader: Achieving Effective Shepherding in Your Church*, Philipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing.

⁶⁶ Strauch A. (1995) *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Eldership*, Littleton, CO: Lewis and Roth Publishers.

⁶⁷ Smith M. (2016) *Shepherds and Servants*. Sydney: PCNSW Special Committee for Elders and Deacons.

⁶⁸ Namely sessions, presbyteries and Assembly.

structured activities that contribute towards these ends⁶⁹. In a similar manner, the Baptist Union of NSW has an expectation of 90 hours of professional development over a three-year cycle, or ongoing reflection under a mentor/supervisor. This development is mandated across three key areas: personal and spiritual formation, professional and academic formation, and denominational involvement⁷⁰.

Our pastoral leaders also lack appropriate decision support systems. Our Church requires annual reporting on key operational statistics and financial data every year. Many pastoral leaders perceive these systems to be cumbersome, lacking in transparency, and irrelevant to their local decision-making context. Evaluation systems should provide a feedback loop on decision-making, and create an important check on the health of the organisation and the assumptions underpinning the organisation's strategy. Although the most critical issues are also sometimes the most difficult to measure, there are ways of constructing appropriate frameworks for evaluation, even in not-for-profit contexts⁷¹. A failure to monitor progress made against agreed measures of performance (especially the organisation's mission), along with appropriate interventions to correct deviance from these standards, is a sure way to promote organisational mediocrity, inertia, and in time, the organisation's own demise.

9. Our presbyteries are not functioning effectively

Presbyteries sit immediately above local sessions. They are made up of the inducted ministers and at least one elder from the congregations within their boundaries⁷², along with a range of other possible members.

Within our federal polity, presbyteries are the linchpin. They are not mere 'para-church ministry', or a distraction from 'real ministry' at the local congregational level⁷³. They are the authoritative higher courts of our very same Church⁷⁴ that are vested with the formal responsibility and authority to cultivate more and healthier pastoral leaders (ministers directly, and elders indirectly) and congregations within their boundaries. Other committees of Assembly may assist them in their work, such as the PTCC in providing training to pastoral leaders (ministers and elders), and the Ministry and Mission Committee in regulating ministerial terms of settlement, regulating ordinary visitations, and providing supplementary support to pastoral leaders. Yet it is presbyteries that are charged with explicit⁷⁵ and discretionary⁷⁶ power in The Code to:

- Oversee the health and growth of new⁷⁷ and existing pastoral charges and home mission stations⁷⁸;
- Oversee the ordination, induction, translation, demission and removal of ministers of these congregations⁷⁹;
- Receive, sustain and reject calls⁸⁰;
- Approve terms of settlement and refer them to the Ministry and Mission Committee⁸¹;
- Supervise theological students and sustain their candidature year to year⁸²;
- Try and license candidates to preach the Gospel⁸³; and
- Deal with all questions referred to it by sessions and congregations subject to its jurisdiction⁸⁴.

Problems within and across local congregations, including those experienced by ordinary members and their leaders, are the explicit legal responsibility of presbyteries. Staff from Ministry and Mission can provide significant support to Assembly, presbyteries, local congregations and their leaders. And the General

⁶⁹ See further <https://www.engineersaustralia.org.au/Training-And-Development/Continuing-Professional-Development>

⁷⁰ See further <https://nswactbaptists.org.au/continuing-ministerial-development/>

⁷¹ Sawhill JC and Williamson D. (2001) Mission Impossible? Measuring Success in Nonprofit Organizations. *Nonprofit Management & Leadership* 11: 371-386.

⁷² P2, S5.01, 4.76.

⁷³ I am addressing here a congregational paradigm of church that is foreign to, and at odds with, the oaths taken by ministers and elders at their ordination and induction. They agreed to "own the Presbyterian form of government to be founded on the Word of God and agreeable thereto...and to the utmost of your power, in your station, assert, maintain and defend the same" (Question 4 put to both ministers and elders at their ordination and induction).

⁷⁴ The Code, Pt 2, S5.01.

⁷⁵ Pt 2, S5.02.

⁷⁶ Pt 2, S5.03.

⁷⁷ Pt 2, S5.02 (e), (g), (h) and (p).

⁷⁸ Pt 2, S5.02 (a)-(e).

⁷⁹ Pt 2, S5.02(n).

⁸⁰ Pt 2, S5.02(m).

⁸¹ Pt 2, S5.02(l).

⁸² Pt 2, S5.02(i).

⁸³ Pt 2, S5.02(j).

⁸⁴ Pt 2, S5.02(o).

Assembly of NSW, the supreme court of the Church immediately above presbyteries⁸⁵, can require presbyteries to ensure that the instructions of the General Assembly of Australia and General Assembly of NSW are faithfully observed by ministers, sessions, committees of management and congregations within its bounds⁸⁶. However, within our legal framework, presbyteries alone bear the primary burden of overseeing our congregations and their leaders. Ongoing problems of the kind raised in this paper are the primary responsibility of presbyteries.

In addition to the prior-stated responsibilities, presbyteries are also required to conduct ordinary visitations for all pastoral charges in rotation at least every five years⁸⁷. The aim of these visitations is to promote the health and effectiveness of pastoral leaders, other office bearers, and the wider congregation. They are also intended to cultivate closer relationships between our congregations and presbyteries⁸⁸. Ordinary visitations are conducted according to the schedule approved by the Ministry and Mission Committee⁸⁹. Special visitations are also available to make special inquiries and/or to provide a remedy for particular evils or difficulties found to exist⁹⁰.

Given the expectation that every pastoral charge will be visited and reported on at least every five years, there should have been between 30 to 40 visitation reports received by Ministry and Mission in the 2015-2016 financial year. Instead, only 6 reports were received⁹¹. These reports varied widely in content, form and rigour. Ministry and Mission estimate that of the six reports received:

- 5 out of 6 followed the procedure set out in The Code;
- 2 out of 6 identified and engaged with the fundamental issues impacting upon that church; and
- 1 out of 6 should result in positive change

In the 2016-2017 financial year, 20 ordinary visitation reports were received by Ministry and Mission⁹². Although this is “a dramatic improvement on the previous year”⁹³, this number represents only half the total number of reports that should have been received⁹⁴. Further, half (8) of our 16 presbyteries failed to submit even a single ordinary visitation report⁹⁵.

Inadequate visitation reports may be explained, in part, by the lack of an agreed upon framework for assessing congregational health⁹⁶. They are also complicated further by a lack of independently verified data available to inform visitation teams prior to their visits. Anecdotal reports also suggest that some members of presbyteries experience difficulty speaking the truth in love to their peers.

A completely redesigned ordinary visitation schedule based on a theologically-driven attender survey is being piloted by Ministry and Mission in two presbyteries during 2017. This new schedule is likely to produce better outcomes than the present schedule, and should be available for use across all presbyteries towards the end of 2017. After this new schedule is tested properly and made available for all presbyteries, our Church should consider moving towards requiring ordinary visitations for all pastoral charges at least every *three* years. This change would be consistent with best practice quality improvement and accreditation frameworks adopted by other industries around the world⁹⁷. This change would also recognise that most of our congregations are embedded in environments that are increasingly volatile and unpredictable, within which five-year assessment cycles are likely to be less effective in promoting healthy congregations and leaders than three-year cycles.

Beyond these process issues, presbyteries may not be functioning effectively as a result of further challenges unique to their particular contexts. For example, in 2016 the Superintendent of Ministry and Mission⁹⁸ assessed many of our presbyteries as being in a poor relational and/or operational state (see further Figure 7).

⁸⁵ Pt 2, S8.01.

⁸⁶ Pt 2, S5.68.

⁸⁷ Pt 2, S5.67.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Pt 2, S5.65.

⁹⁰ Pt 2, S5.66.

⁹¹ Meller B. (2016) Data Request. In: Pratt J (ed). Sydney: PCNSW.

⁹² Meller B. (2017a) Ministry and Mission Committee (Report to the State Assembly). Sydney: PCNSW. page 11.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ This is what the draft Theological Vision for the Presbyterian Church of Australia in NSW attempts to address.

⁹⁷ For example, ISO 9001:2015 Quality Management System certification.

⁹⁸ Meller B. (2016) Data Request. In: Pratt J (ed). Sydney: PCNSW.

This qualitative assessment was offered in the absence of suitable quantitative measures. Given this limitation, few individuals are better placed or more qualified within our Church to make such a global assessment of the effectiveness of our presbyteries than the long-serving Superintendent of Ministry and Mission.

Figure 7: Current Assessment of NSW Presbyteries by Size⁹⁹

No.	Presbytery	# People	# Churches	# "Charges"	% of Total Charges	Cumulative %	Relational Assessment	Operational Assessment	Overall Assessment
1	Sydney	63	30	25	13%	13%	Poor	Poor	Poor
2	Sydney North	50	25	24	13%	26%	Poor	Poor	Poor
3	The Hawkesbury	34	19	17	9%	35%	Poor	Poor	Poor
4	Sydney South	33	20	17	9%	44%	Poor	Poor	Poor
5	The Northern Rivers	26	21	15	8%	52%	OK	Poor	Ok
6	The Illawarra	19	15	12	6%	59%	Good	Poor	OK
7	Wagga Wagga	23	13	11	6%	64%	OK	Good	Good
8	The Hunter	20	19	10	5%	70%	Good	OK	Good
9	Central Tablelands	17	19	10	5%	75%	OK	OK	OK
10	The Mid North Coast	17	14	9	5%	80%	Good	OK	OK
11	New England	14	13	8	4%	84%	OK	Poor	OK
12	Central West	15	13	7	4%	88%	Good	OK	OK
13	Canberra	12	13	7	4%	91%	OK	Poor	Poor
14	North West NSW	11	12	7	4%	95%	OK	Poor	OK
15	Central Coast	10	5	5	3%	98%	OK	OK	OK
16	The Riverina	7	7	4	2%	100%	OK	OK	OK
	Total	371	258	188					

The 16 presbyteries in NSW and ACT range in size from as few as four pastoral charges and/or mission stations (The Riverina) to as many as 25 (Sydney). Allowing for the fact that home mission stations normally don't contribute a ministerial member of presbytery, and that pastoral charges with more than one inducted minister may contribute more members to the presbytery, and allowing for the involvement of various appointees (theological lecturers, chaplains, etc.), there will usually be two people from every church attending each presbytery, plus appointees. This means that our largest presbyteries could have up to 63 members (Sydney).

Of these 16 presbyteries, four (25 percent) were assessed as having a "poor" relational state¹⁰⁰, while nine (56 percent) were assessed as being in a "poor" operational state¹⁰¹. Overall, only two (13 percent) presbyteries were assessed as being in a "good" state, with just over half (9) being evaluated as "OK", while five (31 percent) were deemed to be in an overall "poor" state.

Figure 7 shows clearly that the largest presbyteries in NSW and ACT were also our most problematic. The five largest presbyteries in the PCNSW oversee over half (52 percent) of our pastoral charges and home mission stations. The two largest presbyteries oversee one quarter (26 percent) of our pastoral charges and home mission stations. Yet all five of these largest presbyteries were rated as "poor" in one or more categories, and all but one were rated as "poor" in every category.

Interestingly, none of the eleven presbyteries with 12 or less pastoral charges and home mission stations was rated as "poor" in their relational dynamics. And only four of these received a "poor" rating in operational assessment. The two smallest presbyteries in the state (The Riverina and Central Coast), with four and five charges respectively, received no "poor" ratings at all.

Clearly, there appears to be a strong correlation between the size of presbyteries and their effectiveness. This relationship between size and effectiveness has long been recognised in the not-for-profit governance literature. The most recent surveys of U.S. not-for-profits have reportedly found the average not-for-profit

⁹⁹ Ibid., Meller B. (2017b) Presbytery size data. In: Pratt J (ed). Christ College.

¹⁰⁰ Defined as members who do not strive to bear one another's burdens and seek to encourage each other, while also not calling one another to account and spurring one another on in love and good deeds.

¹⁰¹ Defined as having individual members who were regular and diligent in their attendance, and a body that takes a lively interest in the welfare and work of each congregation within its bounds. Practically, this means weak churches will be helped towards wellness, or required/compelled to take decisive action to promote improved health.

board size is 10 to 13 members, with a median size of 9 to 11¹⁰². This is consistent with other research on effective leadership teams that recommends smaller team sizes of no more than 10 members¹⁰³.

Many not-for-profit governance boards are reportedly seeking to reduce their size in order to¹⁰⁴:

- Increase opportunities for engagement for each member;
- Reduce the costs generated by these groups; and
- Delegate work to relevant standing committees and advisory groups.

Most not-for-profit boards in these settings have specified terms of office for their members¹⁰⁵, with two thirds of boards limiting consecutive re-election to a maximum of three terms, and 40 percent imposing a limit of two consecutive terms¹⁰⁶. In our Church, we have no specified term limits on ministers or elders serving in our Church courts.

A review of the not-for-profit governance literature suggests that effective not-for-profit boards are characterised by the following¹⁰⁷:

- They understand that their collective effectiveness is based on forming healthy relationships among and between their own members, between the people and the organisation/s they oversee, and with external stakeholders;
- They organise their collective work to make effective use of limited member time;
- They recognise that the best way they can use limited member time is to provide leadership, strategic direction and oversight to the organisation/s they are responsible for, rather than wasting member time by involving them in irrelevant activities that divert their attention from the most important work they could do;
- They match effectively the skills, abilities and interests of their members with the work that needs to get done, and they prepare members to actually do this work;
- They create relevant infrastructure to support their members to accomplish their work effectively and efficiently (e.g. systems to provide information to support the board doing its work, along with various communications technologies and information systems); and
- They reflect on what they do well and what could be improved, then use this information to improve their performance and the quality of each member's experience as a board member.

Many of our presbyteries, especially our five largest presbyteries, are simply too big to carry out the full range of their responsibilities effectively. They are not contexts where pastoral leaders can realistically know, love, respect and trust each other.

Our Church ought to consider reviewing again the boundaries for all existing presbyteries to accommodate no less than four pastoral charges and home mission stations, and no more than seven. This would result in a typical presbytery having between 8 and 14 members. This change would trigger new opportunities for renewal within most presbyteries. Presbyteries could also consider adopting some of the effective not-for-profit board practices noted earlier.

Consistent with the advice noted above, our presbyteries could be assisted further by the recognition of other possible officer roles in addition to the Moderator and Clerk. These could include, for example, a Visitation Convenor, Training Convenor and Dispute Resolution Convenor. Term limits for all roles could be explored, along with specialised training for new and existing presbytery officers to support further the promotion of more effective presbyteries.

Our Church rises and falls on the health and growth of local congregations. Yet in our state Assembly, most of our time seems to be taken up by other matters relating to parts of our Church that are less fundamental to our core mission and survival. For example, hearing reports from the various committees of Assembly, and

¹⁰² See further Renz DO. (2016) Leadership, Governance, and the Work of the Board. In: Renz DO and Herman RD (eds) *The Jossey-Bass Handbook of Nonprofit Leadership and Management*. Fourth ed. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 127-166.

¹⁰³ Wageman R, Nunes DA, Burruss JA, et al. (2008) *Senior Leadership Teams: What it takes to make them great*, Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press.

¹⁰⁴ Axelrod NR. (2005) Board Leadership and Development. In: Herman RD (ed) *The Jossey-Bass Handbook of Nonprofit Leadership and Management*. 2nd ed. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 131-152.

¹⁰⁵ Renz reports that three year terms are the most common.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ See further Renz (2016).

engaging with a limited number of specific appeals arising from lower courts. With the exception of specific appeals to Assembly, presbyteries are not the subject of Assembly's primary and systematic focus, even though constitutionally they are the coordinating centre for our congregations, and the entities charged with overseeing ongoing church health and growth. As a result, presbyteries are not being held to account by the 'supreme court' of Assembly, even when they fail consistently to comply with their explicit legal obligations (e.g. ordinary visitations). If Assembly does not hold to account the officers of these lower courts, based on Assembly's existing power to do so¹⁰⁸, there will be little reason to expect presbyteries and the pastoral leaders and congregations they oversee to change quickly. Assembly should hold the officers of presbytery to at least the same level of public scrutiny as they do the officers of our schools and committees. The PCQ Assembly appear to be moving in this direction already¹⁰⁹.

Our Church could explore setting aside significant blocks of uninterrupted time during Assembly (e.g. one whole day, or several major blocks of time throughout the week) to focus exclusively on assessing the effectiveness of our presbyteries. In the same way that all pastoral charges and mission stations should have an ordinary visitation conducted regularly (ideally every three years in the future), so every presbytery should also be required to present to Assembly. During this time, the presbytery Moderator and/or his delegate/s could be required to:

- a) Summarise the current state of health and growth of the congregations they oversee, based on data collected from the new ordinary visitation process.
- b) Identify the major challenges facing their congregations and the actions they have taken in the last 12 months to address these challenges.
- c) Present a high-level summary of the ministers and elders that are in various stages of being trained, examined, ordained, set apart, evaluated, demitted and disciplined across the presbytery.
- d) Present a summary of the major initiatives presbytery will pursue over the next three years to plant new congregations, promote the health and growth of existing congregations, and close dead congregations.
- e) Present a summary of their ordinary visitation plan for the next three years.
- f) Answer questions and receive encouragement from Assembly.
- g) Comply with directions given by Assembly, including the possibility of being required to speak again the following year, or in extreme cases, the appointment of multiple assessor elders¹¹⁰ and/or the spilling of all executive roles¹¹¹.
- h) Be prayed for by Assembly.

As the coordinating centres given explicit and discretionary authority in The Code to oversee the health and growth of our congregations and their leaders, presbyteries are the lynchpin within our polity. There are few more strategic ways that Assembly could spend its limited time than evaluating intentionally and systematically the effectiveness of our presbyteries.

We need to confront the challenge of ineffective presbyteries now. We need to pursue aggressive reform, especially in relation to our five largest presbyteries located in the Sydney Metropolitan Area. The difficulties associated with reforming our presbyteries are not a satisfactory excuse to postpone needed changes in this area if we wish to see Christ's Church flourish over the next 40 years. We will all be held to account by Christ himself for our stewardship of His resources when He returns (e.g. Matthew 25:14-30). We should therefore strive to fear Jesus far more than it sometimes appears we fear each other, especially when confronting dysfunctionality and declining performance in Jesus' Church.

10. We lack a shared and compelling vision for our future

As noted at the beginning of this paper, the stories that dominate our collective conversations and culture are those from our past¹¹². Until we add an element of 'futures'¹¹³, our identity and decisions will continue to be

¹⁰⁸ Pt 2, S5.68.

¹⁰⁹ For an overview of the Presbyterian Church of Australia in Queensland Assembly timetable in 2016, see further http://www.pcq.org.au/pcq_pdf/pcq-state-assembly-leaflet-2016.pdf

¹¹⁰ Pt 2, S5.05.

¹¹¹ Pt 2, S5.68.

¹¹² I was first alerted to this by Hutchinson M. (2001) *Iron in our Blood*, Sydney: Ferguson Publications.

¹¹³ Ford CM. (2002) The futurity of decisions as a facilitator of organizational creativity and change. *Journal of Organizational Change Management* 15: 635-646.

shaped by events that took place nearly 40 years ago. What we need is a shared, compelling and comprehensive vision for multiple aspects of our Church that will serve us for the next 40 years.

Visions create positive discrepancies¹¹⁴ that can help to alter the sensemaking processes for individuals and organisations¹¹⁵. They push organisations towards a greater focus on the future, counteracting the pull of history in many established organisations¹¹⁶.

A clear vision, a picture of the organisation's mission/purpose accomplished, has been described by at least Kotter¹¹⁷ as having six key criteria: It is imaginable, desirable, feasible, focused, flexible and communicable. Such visions need not always be short snappy statements capable of being produced on a t-shirt. They can also be presented as detailed descriptions of the future¹¹⁸, written in the future perfect sense.

At the present time, no such vision exists for the Presbyterian Church of NSW. Individual congregations, presbyteries and departments may have compelling visions of their own. But as a broader Church, nothing of this kind exists currently. This represents a major lost opportunity, and a final urgent challenge to be addressed.

THE COST OF INACTION

Some of us may be tempted to ignore the claims outlined in this paper in pursuit of a superficial and temporary form of peace. Our history is littered with bitter wars fought over doctrinal and political ground. So it is understandable that some of us may have become 'battle-weary' and risk-averse. While it may appear costly at first sight to pursue change of the kind advocated, it should be remembered that the cost of NOT pursuing change by addressing these urgent challenges is far greater.

The dynamics previously described are consistent with what some academics have called a 'death spiral'¹¹⁹. When declining performance is followed by denial and 'more of the same', death cycles can continue unabated. This is the unpalatable future of our Church if we do not act decisively.

Fortunately, we still have time and positive choices that we can make to influence our future under Jesus.

A WAY FORWARD

Although we have much to be thankful for, we also have much to fight for. If leadership is *cultivating the conditions in which others can flourish*¹²⁰, then it is more and better leadership that our Church urgently needs now.

How can organisations like ours break free of 'death spirals' and 'active inertia'? Sull¹²¹ suggests leaders should ask "**What hinders us?**". This question focuses attention on four common ways that organisations like ours can adopt a rigid devotion to the status quo:

1. *Strategic frames become blinkers*. The mental models that shape how people see the world at one point in time can seduce people into believing that only the things seen through these models matter. Peripheral vision in subsequent periods is shut down, and we can stop seeing some or all of the urgent challenges that must be addressed.
2. *Processes harden into routines*. Established processes can become ends in themselves. People follow these, not because they are effective or efficient, but because they are well-known and comfortable.

¹¹⁴ See especially Armenakis AA, Bernerth JB, Pitts JP, et al. (2007) Organizational Change Recipients' Beliefs Scale: Development of an Assessment Instrument. *The Journal of Applied Behavioural Science* 43: 481-505, Armenakis AA and Harris SG. (2009) Reflections: our Journey in Organizational Change Research and Practice. *Journal of Change Management* 9: 127-142.

¹¹⁵ Gioia DA and Thomas JB. (1996) Identity, Image and Issue Interpretation: Sensemaking during Strategic Change in Academic. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 41: 370-403, Kezar A. (2013) Understanding sensemaking/sensegiving in transformational change process from the bottom up. *High Educ* 65: 761-780, Maitlis S. (2006) The Social Processes of Organizational Sensemaking. *Academy of Management Journal* 48: 21-49, Weick KE. (1995) *Sensemaking in Organizations*, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc.

¹¹⁶ Ford CM. (2002) The futurity of decisions as a facilitator of organizational creativity and change. *Journal of Organizational Change Management* 15: 635-646.

¹¹⁷ Kotter JP. (1996) *Leading Change*, Watertown, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

¹¹⁸ Levin IM. (2002) Vision Revisited: Telling the Story of the Future. *Journal of Applied Behavioural Science* 36: 91-107.

¹¹⁹ Nadler DA and Shaw RB. (1995) Change Leadership: Core Competency for the Twenty-First Century. In: Nadler DA, Shaw RB and Walton AE (eds) *Discontinuous Change: Leading Organizational Transformation*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. pp. 12-13.

¹²⁰ This is my definition of leadership that I use in all my leadership subjects within the Leadership Development Program at Christ College.

¹²¹ Sull DN. (1995) Why Good Companies Go Bad. *Harvard Business Review* July-August: 42-52.

Once processes become routines (and in our case, written into The Code), alternative processes that may be more biblical, effective and/or efficient don't get considered.

3. *Relationships become shackles*. The need to maintain existing relationships built in one period can limit flexibility and hinder organisations developing new products or focussing on new markets.
4. *Values harden into dogmas*. As organisations age, their values often harden into rigid rules and regulations that have legitimacy simply because they are enshrined in precedent. As values are replaced with dogma, it is common that these values no longer inspire, and for their unifying power to degenerate into “a reactionary tendency to circle the wagons in the face of threats”¹²².

Rather than pursue radical revolution, it is possible to build on the foundations of the past while helping people to recast old strategic frames, processes, relationships and values to meet our present challenges. In our particular context, we need to **develop a new and comprehensive theologically-driven vision**¹²³ for our Church, and redefine what it means to be Presbyterian Christians in our post-Christian society. Specifically, we need to outline our vision for:

1. Ordinary Christians;
2. Local congregations;
3. Leadership teams; and
4. Presbyteries and assemblies.

Finally, we need to revisit the question of leadership in our denomination. To help challenge the forces of active inertia, Sull recommends **recruiting new leaders** from within the organisation (so they know the heritage), but from outside the core business (so they are not beholden to the status quo)— so called ‘insider-outsiders’¹²⁴. Changing the makeup of the most senior leadership teams overseeing major change initiatives is a foundational recommendation in organisational changes of this kind.¹²⁵ These new leaders can then work out together how best to move our Church forward, taking into account our present challenges, a proposal for a new theologically-driven vision, and the obstacles that hinder its fulfilment.

We need more ‘insider-outsider’ leaders who will challenge the status quo and take responsibility for driving difficult but necessary change for Jesus’ sake. Our courts are designed to welcome these very challenges, whether from the margins or the centre of our denomination. Real change is not beyond us. It can and will happen when enough of us decide to pursue it.

We have started a new denomination-wide conversation about where we are and who we could be under Christ. But we need your support to cultivate the conditions in which we can flourish under Christ, so we can leave our Church and our world in a healthier state for the generations to come.

Will you join us?

Jonathan Pratt
5 April, 2017

¹²² Page 49.

¹²³ See further Keller T. (2012) *Centre Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centred Ministry in Your City*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

¹²⁴ Page 50.

¹²⁵ For example, Nunes P and Breene T. (2011) Reinvent Your Business Before It's Too Late. *Harvard Business Review* January-February: 80-87, Collins J. (2001a) *Good to Great: Why some companies make the leap...and others don't*, London: Random House, Collins J. (2001b) Level 5 Leadership: The Triumph of Humility and Fierce Resolve. *Harvard Business Review* July-August: 136-139, Collins J. (2006) *Good to Great and the Social Sectors*, London: Random House Business Books.

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