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WHY CHURCH PLANTING?

Every church began as a church plant, but with so many established churches across Australia - many of whom don't have full-time pastors - do we really need more? As we start considering church planting, this is a central question both for those who are considering leading or being a part of a church plant, but also for the wider church. So let's consider three reasons for church planting.

Firstly, people in Australia desperately need the Gospel.

If you take the most optimistic figures, about 5% of Australians are part of Bible-believing churches. With Australia's population ticking over the 25 million mark, that only accounts for 1.25 million people and it leaves over 23 million.

There are more churches closing than opening across Australia. For many Australians Christianity is associated with narrow-minded moralism. With the church being haunted by its past failures in caring for those it should have cared for, Christians have gone on the defensive. For many, the rise of secularism and the comfort and apathy that a comfortable life in Australia brings have left them wondering why they would need a God to solve their problems when they seem to be doing pretty well on their own. The societal norm that promotes unexamined tolerance as the basis for our interaction is growing. This has led some church leaders, and some churches, to wind-back the more offensive and controversial aspects of the Gospel, proclaiming a Gospel of acceptance rather than a Gospel of deep repentance at the foot of their creator and saviour.

Yet even with these challenges, people are still searching for meaning, purpose and answers to the brokenness they experience. People don't need Jesus more now than they have before but it's becoming harder for them to encounter Jesus than it has ever been before. There are more people, from more nations, with less exposure to the Gospel in Australia. It's a matter of Gospel urgency. What we've discussed here isn't controversial, but it's worth articulating as it's the reality and groundwork for our second reason.



Secondly, new churches are more effective at reaching new people. There are many things that church plants can do that existing churches find it hard to do. Church plants are often like the R&D department; there's more freedom to try new things and more freedom to innovate. There is also more freedom to fail because there's less risk to the overall structure. The new things that church plants try and that 'work' will often find their way back into existing churches after the kinks have been ironed out, helping to refresh and renew broader church practice with little risk.

While this is true, the central reason for church planting is not to outsource creativity from the established church into a safer environment. The central reason for church planting is because new churches are more effective at reaching new people. The NCLS statistics from Australia in 2011 show that 6% of people in existing churches weren't in church 5 years ago. When we did a study of church plants across Australia in 2016 we found this figure was 33% in church plants. That's 5 times more effective at drawing in people who either have no history with church or who haven't been to church in a very long time. Church planting is not just a good idea. It's a biblical and effective strategy that has and still is today reaching many people who would otherwise remain unreached by existing churches. If we're going to reach Australia, church planting is not optional.

<http://www.ncls.org.au/default.aspx?sitemapid=6988>.

<https://genevpush.com/images/uploads/Australian-church-planting-report-2015.pdf>.

Thirdly, the two options of strengthening existing churches and starting new churches do not have to compete.

It's not an either / or question, it's a both / and question. We must do both. There are more than enough lost people to go around, and we cannot be precious about our patch. The thing we must treasure is the plight of the lost without Jesus. We must be more convicted about their eternal destiny than about our legacy.

Since Australia is in such dire need of the Gospel, we should pursue all available biblical avenues to reach the lost. While we need to strengthen existing churches and help them move towards being healthy, evangelistic and multiplying we cannot neglect the urgency of reaching the lost. And therefore we need more churches planted. Ultimately, under God, church plants are one of the most effective tools we have of reaching the lost.

So if you were going to plant a church, where would you go?

Who would you reach?

Who has no viable Gospel witness?

Where needs a church that isn't a cruise ship but a life-boat?

What would it look like for you to take steps towards seeing a new church planted there?



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