

## A Tale of Two Churches

Growing Healthy Churches Naturally  
by Jack De Vries

Thirty six hundred kilometres separate these two churches but there are a lot of similarities between them. Both belong to the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia (CRCA). Both are committed to the missional vision of the CRCA to be “a church reforming to reach the lost for Christ.” Both are intentional about becoming a healthy church. Both have engaged the Natural Church Development process. Both became strategic about ministry and implementing changes. And both are growing – naturally. Here then is the tale of two churches.

### Bray Park Community Church

The one church is located in the northern suburbs of Brisbane, Queensland. This church began in the early 1970s as the Everton Park Reformed Church. By 1980 this church outgrew its building which could only accommodate 80 people. They decided to buy a former Uniting church in Stafford and became then known as the Stafford Reformed Church. It had a seating capacity for 190 people. In 1990 the church decided to build a multi-purpose building which could also be used to accommodate a school. On 16 July 1991 the new church and school building was completed on Young’s Crossing Road in Bray Park. Today, 20 years



The multi-purpose building in Bray Park under construction.

later, this congregation, Bray Park Community Church (BPCC) shares a campus with Genesis College where over a 1200 students receive a quality Christ-centred education.



In 1996, Bray Park welcomed their current senior Pastor, John Hoogenhout. Several years later, in May 1999, BPCC took their initial NCD survey. The adult attendance at their Sunday services was around 200 with a total membership of 225. From the results of NCD survey it was evident that *Gift-based Ministry* was a definite strength in the church.



John Hoogenhout

*Passionate Spirituality* (see sidebar) was an area needing attention. The church’s health average scored at 33.4%.

For the next eight years no additional surveys were done. When in November 2008 the second survey was done the overall average grew by almost 8% to 41.2%. *Gift-based Ministry* remained the top strength in the

#### Passionate Spirituality

Effective ministry flows out of a passionate spirituality. Spiritual intimacy leads to a strong conviction that God will act in powerful ways. A godly vision can only be accomplished through an optimistic faith that views obstacles as opportunities and turns defeats into victories. The important issue here is not the way spirituality is expressed, but the fact that faith is actually lived out with commitment, fire and enthusiasm. The methods a church used are really a secondary concern.

church. The area of *Holistic Small Groups* scored the lowest and *Loving Relationships* had the greatest decrease. *Passionate Spirituality* improved its score by 19. By this time the church's membership had grown to 414 with a adult Sunday attendance average of 347. The pastors and leaders knew that NCD was just a tool and not a strategy. A strategic planning day was organised. Key leaders in the church were invited to attend. This meeting was well received, with valuable input given, which helped church leaders focus their energy and resources.

Prior to the NCD survey, in July 2008, there were two church initiatives and an accident which providentially prepared the church to address the results of the survey. An executive pastor, Wayne Crouch, was hired who would assist the church in putting organisational systems in place. The funding of this position was raised outside of the church budget for a 2 year period. This pastor was also able to put energy into developing holistic small groups. Also, the church hired on a full-time youth pastor. Finally, due to a serious accident to one of the church members, a care ministry was birthed to address the area of pastoral care (check out the full story: [http://ministryformation.com.au/attachments/071\\_carebpcc.pdf](http://ministryformation.com.au/attachments/071_carebpcc.pdf)). With the executive



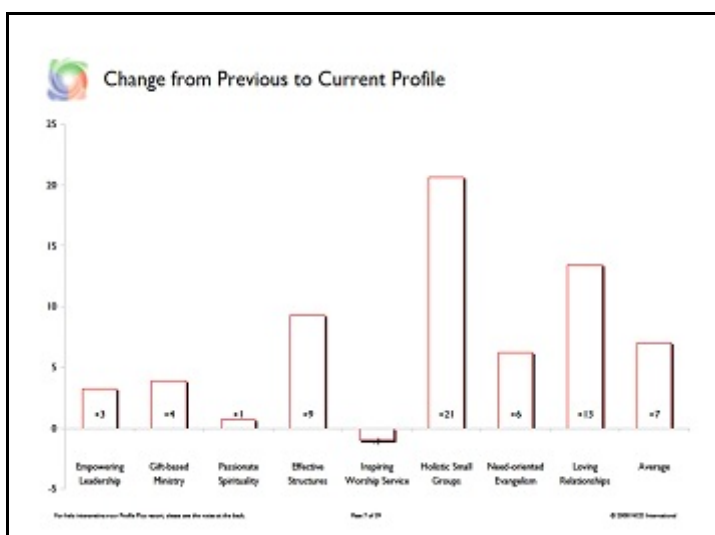
Wayne Crouch

pastor in place and a care ministry begun the church was well positioned to leverage the areas of *holistic small groups* and *loving relationships*.

One year later(2009) another NCD survey was completed and the results were very encouraging (see diagram below). The overall average increased by 7%. *Loving Relationships* increased by 13 and *Holistic Small Groups* by 21. The new initiatives were bearing positive results. *Gift-based Ministry* remained the strongest factor in the church. *Passionate Spirituality* and *Needs Orientated Evangelism* were the two lowest scores. When I asked Wayne Crouch, Operations and Discipleship Pastor at BPCC, why he thought BPCC achieved some of the low results he said: *Passionate Spirituality and Need-oriented Evangelism have been in the bottom end of our 8 characteristics since our first NCD survey in May 1999; this is partly due to the strengths and focus of leadership and the DNA of being [a Reformed church]. We also had a key associate pastor (Worship and Kids Church) in 2009 decide to take a call which created some drag. [This required] some restructuring in our team ministry leadership.*

The church was growing. Average adult Sunday attendance had grown to 389. Total church membership was now at 453. In spite of all positive indications, the leadership at BPCC were committed to continue improving the overall health of the church. As Pastor Wayne reports, "We knew from the NCD report (Story Report and an analysis of the questions with negative growth) that we needed to focus on:

- both individual, group, and corporate prayer;
- on sharing/celebrating what God is doing in our lives, church and community;
- our preaching and teaching also needed to speak into the areas of prayer, hope, God-consciousness, everyday-faith and



multiplication (sharing our faith with un-believers);

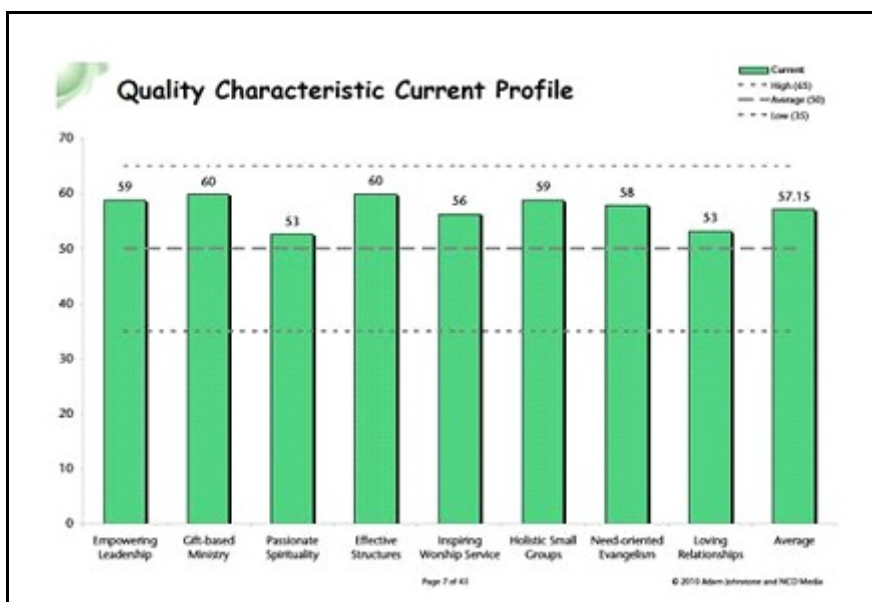
- we needed to see people connect with God in our Sunday Services;
- we needed to be more intentional with our evangelism activities and equipping/empowering leaders; and
- we as leaders needed to model what we preached and what we valued.

BPCC also knew that it was important to get the whole church on board if they were going to make an impact in the areas of *Passionate Spirituality* and *Needs-Orientated Evangelism*. Again a meeting of all key church leaders was organised. The concept of a "Strategy House" was introduced at this meeting. Simply this meant that each area of ministry was given the task to come up with key strategies and SMART objectives that would be both in line with the main church objectives and would improve the overall health of the church. In July there was also a vision day and a time of prayer with all the pastors to review the progress of the Strategy House objectives that each ministry had set in alignment with the church wide objectives. Pastor Wayne admits that they still "need to be more intentional in the area of getting feedback on all the ministry objectives set so [they] can see what is working and what needs tweaking."

In December 2010 the most recent NCD survey was completed and again the results were very encouraging. The intentional commitment by the church to implement changes would increase church health was proving effective (see results below). The overall average increased by nearly 9%. Greater balance was achieved across all ministry areas with the various scores having a difference of 7 or less. The more balance across the eight characteristics, the healthier the church. Every area scored above 50%. In just over 10 years Bray Park has increased their NCD scores by almost 25%. *Passionate Spirituality*, although it still is the minimum factor, has increased from 15 to 53. The church has grown in Sunday attendance to 550 and if BPCC simply maintains their health average, there is the potential of doubling in size over the next 10 years. This is not just about numbers; we are talking about men, women, and children becoming part of God's family at Bray Park. Many of these people were not part of a Christian community, but now are.

When asked what he believed contributed the most to these survey results, Wayne Crouch said: *We made prayer a priority. We created alignment within the ministries around the church-wide objectives; we communicated our objectives, progress and celebrated our*

*wins through various mediums/platforms (Vision Sunday, pulpit, print, e-newsletter, testimonies and congregational meetings); our preaching and teaching (sermon series and sermon-based life groups) focused on areas of prayer, hope, God-consciousness, everyday-faith and multiplication (sharing our faith with un-believers); we brought on two new staff members in the area of young adult ministries and the worship ministry, we planned and began*



*the implementation (pre-launch phase) for a second venue morning service on the Genesis College campus called Café Church with a focus on reaching the unchurched.*

I also asked Wayne Crouch what has changed at BPCC since implementing their plan based on their NCD results. This is what he shared:

- We are praying more in our Sunday services corporately and for individuals after our Sunday services. We have set up a prayer corner in our auditorium. We held two prayer weeks in 2010 where we called the whole congregation to join us for one hour, in one day of the week (Mon-Fri).
- We are more intentional about celebrating wins with testimonies or video clips during the Sunday services.
- We see profession of faith as a great opportunity to celebrate and have become more deliberate with our profession of faith process.
- Sharing our faith with unbelievers is reflected in our value 'Advancing the Kingdom of God' and there is a growing desire to live out the gospel and make disciples. We have seen God move; someone came to Christ in our Alpha ministry and several committed to follow Christ in our Sunday services. We are now launching a 2nd venue morning service on the Genesis College campus called Café Church with a focus on reaching the unchurched.
- We have partnered with Lifechurch.TV and use their sermon series in our PM services alternately with our own. This has helped us be more relevant to our target audience as well as raise our standard of presentation. We have seen good growth in attendance at our PM services. We are also learning from them and others the use of technology for preaching to multi-venue/multi-sites. The new AM 2nd venue am service will be live



worship but DVD preaching from previous week's sermon.

- We have also increased our effort in equipping people for ministry; We had a group of 4 go through one of the RTC's BILD courses; we had 20 ministry leaders attend the Global Leadership Summit; we held 4 training events for our life group leaders and other one-on-one mentorships were carried out.
- Life groups are now common language in our adult & youth ministries and we have 50% of our congregation connected in one.
- We have created a system around aligning our budget to our church-wide objectives which will continue to be tweaked.

The work of established church development will continue at Bray Park. The recent results indicate that there is still more work to be done in the area of prayer, compassion, and pastoral care. But the leadership is committed to leverage the gospel for the sake of the kingdom. With much dependence upon God through his Word and prayer, BPCC is committed to stay connected to God while all the while connecting others to God. Win, Build, Send! That's the vision of BPCC. Win people to Christ, build them up in the faith, and send them out to make disciples of the nations.

## Grace CRC

The other church is also located in the northern suburbs of an Australian capital city. But you need to travel all the way from the east coast to the glorious western shores north of Perth, in Western Australia (WA). This church began in 2004 as a church plant of Willetton CRC, a growing church in the southern suburbs of Perth. Through personal contacts the Willetton CRC had a long association with the Afrikaans Christian Church in Perth, a ministry to newly arrived



South African migrants. This church fulfilled a valuable role in the lives of many new arrivals, by giving them the opportunity to worship in their mother tongue. After a time it became apparent that to function long term as a congregation, it would need to transition to English.

In mid 2004 it was decided by the members of the Afrikaans Christian Church in Perth to disband and to ask the Willetton CRC to plant a new church in the northern suburbs, and that the Afrikaans church



Peter Abetz

members would become part of this new church planting group. The first service of the newly formed Grace Christian Reformed Church was held on Nov 21, 2004 under the leadership of Rev Peter Abetz, one of the two pastors of the Willetton CRC, who has

provided leadership for this group since that time. When Peter Abetz was elected as a Liberal member of the state parliament, Grace called Joe Vermeulen as their pastor.

Grace is committed to grow as a church and they realise that healthy churches are growing churches. So early on in their history Grace engaged in the NCD process to measure church health. In 2007 they had a total membership of 82. Their NCD survey revealed that overall they were a relatively healthy church, scoring an overall average of 57%. Their greatest strength was *Inspiring Worship Services* while they scored the lowest in the area of *Need-Orientated Evangelism*. Subsequent surveys revealed a decreasing overall health: 2008 - 47% and 2009 - 50.5%. When Joe Vermeulen arrived in 2008 church growth had plateaued and the overall church health was decreasing. This was indicated by a greater difference (20) between their minimum and maximum factors (*Holistic Small*

*Groups - 35 and Inspiring Worship Service - 55*). I met with their leadership team to go over the 2009 NCD results and found a high level of resolve to build on their strengths as well as address areas which needed growth.

Joe Vermeulen reflected on Grace's follow up on the 2009 NCD results: *"Our high score was 'Inspiring Worship Services.' At Grace we have what one would call a more 'flowing' style of service, not too heavy on liturgy, but still involving elements of it. We also looked at what songs are in the top 20 CCLI<sup>1</sup> list, and made sure to start introducing as many of them as was appropriate for our church. We always try to include a lot of well known hymns/choruses so that folks can get stuck in and sing with all their heart. We use appropriate PowerPoints with the messages, and also switched over to using the Easy Worship software to give our on screen lyrics a colourful, contemporary feel. We make sure to listen to feedback from our folks regarding service elements. Sometimes they come up with valuable critique. In the preaching I work hard to make the sermons applicable to everyday life, using visual aids and illustrations to drive the points home. We have an approximate mix of 30/70 thematic and expository sermons.*



Joe Vermeulen

*Our low score was 'Holistic Small Groups.' We saw this coming a mile away. The church was growing in numbers, but all these new folks weren't really connecting in a deep and meaning full way. There was a sense of worry about folks joining our church, but then drifting away from because they didn't experience the "glue" of fellowship and community. As a pastor it would be impossible for me to connect with everybody on a*

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<sup>1</sup> Christian Copyright Licensing International (CCLI) was established in Australia to provide churches, organizations and individuals with simple, affordable solutions to complex copyright issues. For more info visit: <http://www.ccli.com.au/>

personal level, and the obvious solution was small groups.

The NCD results confirmed this view. Soon after Jack de Vries met with us as a leadership team to work through the NCD results, and challenged us to take small but practical steps to address our area of weakness. I received permission from my church council to go visit Johann Eloff and Gerhard Oberholzer at the Mansfield CRC (QLD), as I had heard that they have a very strong Small Group ministry. They gave me some much needed inspiration as I felt like this was an area in which I was not competent.



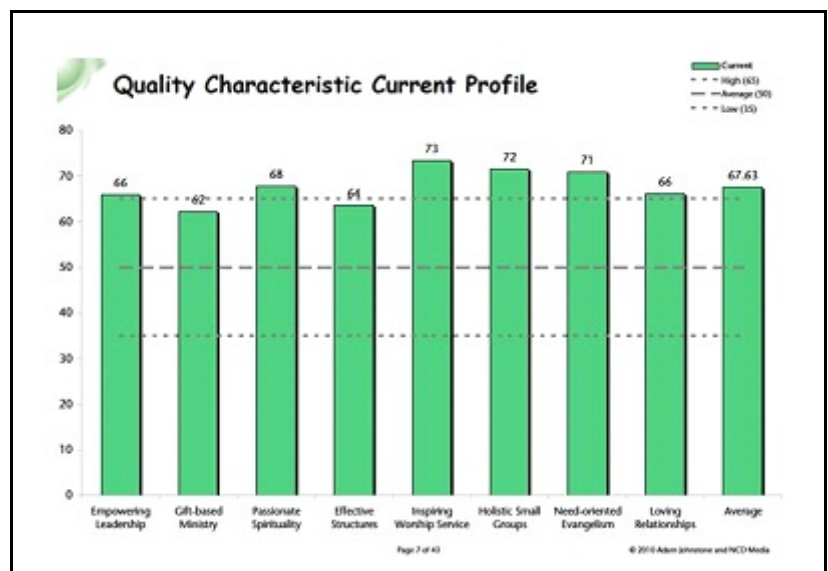
Grace meets in the Seventh Adventist church, North Beach, a northern suburb of Perth

Later that year we launched a campaign called 'ReGroup.' 12 new groups were formed (out of the current 3 we had running at the time). We challenged the whole church to sign up to a small group for 5 weeks as we all worked through the ReGroup material. The Sunday sermons also tapped into the theme, as well as our Newsletter/Facebook updates etc. After the campaign we had hoped to retain at least 6 of the groups. But praise be to God as 10 of the groups decided to continue and form a permanent small group. This year we envision starting the year with another 'groups driven campaign,' aligning it with our current challenges/needs within the church. Group leader training is also high on our to-do-list.

After the campaign, we were hit with the 'now what?' question. All our group leaders got together, and we brainstormed the 'now what.' At the end we felt it would be wise to run 2 or 3 Campaigns per year, with the small groups free to use other material in-between, according to the interest /need of their specific group. Some folks expressed a desire about discovering their God given gifts. It seemed that this was the thing that God was placing his finger on for our church, and it was again confirmed through the recent NCD

results. Jack De Vries pointed me to resources which we will use to kick off our next small group campaign.

Grace experienced dramatic results after implementing these changes within their church. Sunday attendance continues to grow. When the most recent survey was completed Sunday attendance was at 140. Their overall NCD average scored at an all time high of just under 68%, which was an increase of more than 17% in just one year (see below). A greater balance within the church is evidenced by a minimum-maximum difference scoring at 11. All the efforts put into developing *Holistic Small Groups* paid off. This area saw the greatest score improvement, a 36 average increase. But every area in the church grew in health, with *Inspiring Worship Service* remaining the top factor in the church. If Grace maintains this average, NCD research indicates that it has a potential to grow over the next 10 year to about 400 or more. Unchurched migrants will find a warm welcome into Australia as they become part of a church family.



Unsaved many will find Christ. The church will be built up in the faith and the kingdom of God will expand.

Changes are evident at Grace. Joe Vermeulen shares how *“the level of community has been raised. There is a greater care factor amongst our congregation members. It’s been a joy seeing how people start to form friendships beyond just meeting in a small group.”* Ongoing training for their group leaders is a priority as Grace sees the small group ministry expand.

In spite of positive results in the recent NCD survey, the leaders at Grace realise that the work is not done. *Holistic Small Groups* have definitely improved to be a very healthy part of their church. The challenge is, as Joe reports, *“to keep building momentum and to make small groups a primary focus of our church.”* The NCD survey indicated that the area of *Gift-based Ministry* is an area Grace could focus on as they move forward. Joe reports: *“Every year we ask ourselves; “what’s the one big thing we need to really work on this year?” And this year it’ll be to help our folk ‘discover and utilise their God given gifts.’”*

The tale of two churches: two churches many kilometres apart yet their tales are very

similar. Both are growing and reaching more and more people for Christ. A key ingredient to their growth has been the engagement of the NCD process. Among the CRCA churches there is an increasing number of churches engaging the process. But as John Hoogenhout and Joe Vermeulen will tell you, NCD is only a tool. What a church does with this tool makes all the difference in the world and in the lives of the unchurched and unsaved. If all a church does is take the survey and reflect on the results, then there will be little change or improvement in overall church health. Change happens when church leaders take the information of the NCD survey, apply it to their church, and then implement some new initiatives. That’s the tale of the two churches. At BPC and Grace church leaders treated the facts of the NCD survey as their friends, and implemented several new initiatives to address the minimum factor. The results speak for themselves. Improve the overall health of the church and the church will grow – naturally! Grow in wisdom. Grow in faith. Grow in obedience to God’s Word. Grow in community impact. And grow in number – reaching the lost for Christ.

If you would like more information about NCD and how your church could get involved, please contact me. My details are below. Or visit NCD at: <http://ncd-australia.org.au> .

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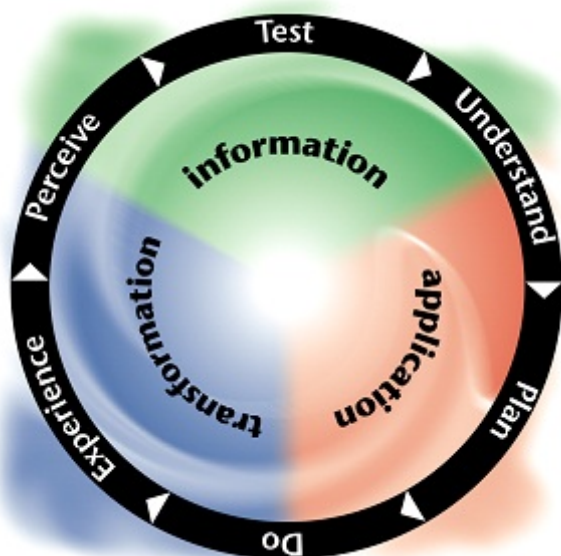
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**The NCD Cycle of Change**