

# Building Bridges to Genuine Community Around Christ

Vision Document  
Ashfield Presbyterian Church, Dec 2013

## Introduction:

A committee of our church has described Ashfield Presbyterian, in part, in this way:

*“As a church we have declined numerically over the last five years, and we have struggled significantly to define a clear vision for the growth and purposeful service of the body of Christ in this place. We are in need of a shepherd under Christ to nourish and grow the body in a very dedicated way, to provide a clear and active spiritual direction, and to continue the faithful teaching, pastoral care and God-centred worship that has been a blessing for us for so long.”*

This document is a vision for how, under God, we can move forward to health, growth and vitality.

### At the moment

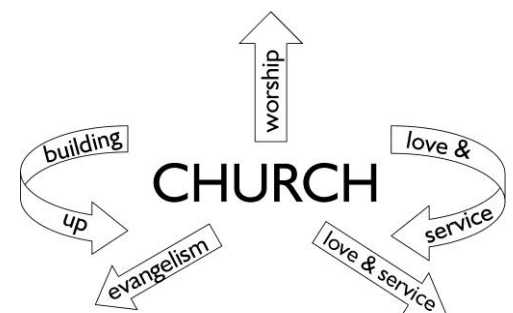
**Let’s be blunt.** In the past Ashfield Presbyterian has been larger, with active Boys and Girls Brigades, Youth Group, Playgroup and English Language school. Many of these ministries no longer exist, and our numbers are dwindling. People come and go, but more people seem to be going than coming.

There is no effective, consistent outreach. We have the message that can transform the world, but we are struggling to work out how we are relevant to the surrounding community. We have a wonderful location, but aren’t using it. **If we were to shut our doors for good, would anyone out there notice?**

At present, our mission statement (?) appears to be;

“Ashfield Presbyterian Church exists to call our city to Christ by honoring God in true worship, by loving one another as Christ loved us and by serving others through evangelism and ministry which builds up the church and commends Christ to the watching world.”

This is a balanced description of the role of the church in the world: actions and words that are God-directed (worship), inwardly-directed (building up, love, service) and outwardly-directed (evangelism, love and service). **How well are we doing at achieving it?**



My observation is that we are doing alright at the God-directed bits, but that the inwardly-directed and outwardly-directed aspects are not as strong. We need to improve the way we live together and love each other, and the way we interact with the community. This document is designed to focus on these two aspects.

God wants us to be more than a “holy huddle”.

- He loves people. 2 Peter 3:9 “He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”
- He commands us to reach out. Luke 14:23 “Then the master told his servant, ‘Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full.’” John 17: 18 “As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.”

- He wants his church to grow. Col 2:19 “From Jesus the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.” Matt 16:18 ‘Jesus said,... “I will build my church.”’

This document is meant to be more than a description of where we want to be. It’s (at least the beginnings of) a roadmap for how to get there. It’s the start of a conversation.

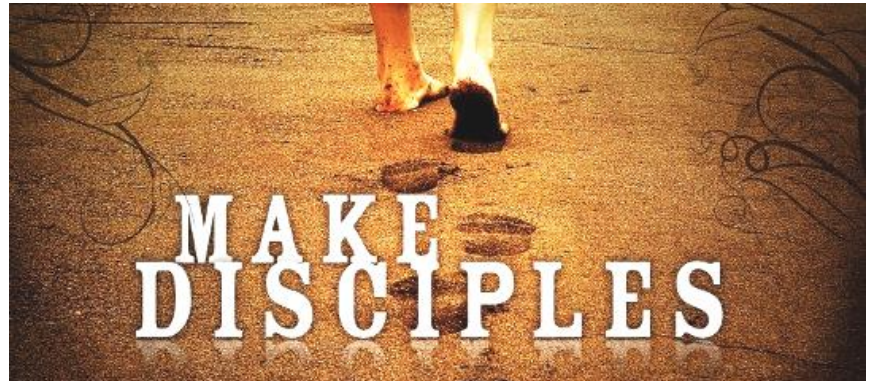
## Making Disciples:

**At its simplest, our job as a church is to be making disciples.**

By raising Jesus, God declares him Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36). The appropriate response to Jesus is to submit to his rule and to worship him in obedience and love. Before his ascension, Jesus taught the

disciples many things to prepare them for life without his physical presence. He called them together on the mountain near Galilee where they worshipped him (Mt 28:17). He then declared that all authority has been given to him, and that therefore, they are to go and make disciples. At its simplest, Jesus calls us to make disciples. On the basis of all authority having been given to Jesus he commands us;

*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. (Matthew 28:19-20)*



There is one imperative (make disciples) and three participles (going, baptising, teaching). **Making disciples is our core business.** We do that by “going, baptising and teaching.” Each of these three actions is part of the total process of making disciples. The whole Christian life of making disciples is saturated with the attitude of worshipping and honouring the risen Jesus (Mt 28:17).

Although there is overlap in the categories, is it too simplistic to see the “going” as pre-evangelism and evangelism, the “baptising” as conversion, and the “teaching” as growing to maturity and service? (Connect, grow, serve is a motto many churches use that reflects this process)

It’s helpful for us to think about all people (both inside and outside the church) as being on a journey towards Christ. We can place everyone we meet somewhere along the continuum from no knowledge of God, Biblical concepts or the gospel through various degrees of knowledge and openness to the gospel through conversion through growth in maturity to service.

### *The journey towards Christ*

No knowledge → some knowledge → openness → conversion → discipleship → maturity → service

Our job of making disciples (going) (baptising) (teaching)

## God's Word is the key

**Discipleship, from evangelism through conversion and growth to maturity and service, happens by God's Word impacting people in the context of relationships.**

(See David Helm, *Reading the Bible One to One*).

*Colossians 3: 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.*



Speaking God's truth to people is a job for everyone

*Eph 4:15-16 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. 16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*

Each one will bring a different skill-set to that task of building up through speaking God's words to each other. That's the way the body works. I can't do it on my own, and neither can the session.

Our members can connect and minister to a whole range of different people better than we can.

*1 Corinthians 14:26 What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.*

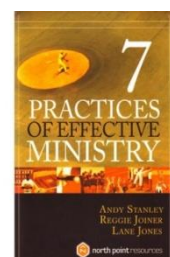
The role of leaders involves (among other things) promoting and encouraging opportunities for people (Christians and not yet-Christians) to engage with God's Word in the context of relationships so that we encourage them to move along in that journey. The activities/ ministries we do should have that goal and measuring stick in mind).

*Ephesians 4:11-13 It was God who gave some to be ... pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

Having a goal and a means of achieving it like this will have concrete effects on what we do, and how and why we do them.

- It will affect the things we focus on – the things we promote and encourage
- It will affect the things we choose NOT to do
- It will help us to select a measurable achievement to determine whether a particular ministry or event has succeeded (Practice #1: Clarify the win)
- It will help us identify small steps for each ministry to take towards our goal of discipling people? (Practice #2: Think steps, not programs)

These last two questions are two of the seven practices of effective ministry described in Andy Stanley's book *7 Practices of Effective Ministry*. Very American, but worth reading nonetheless.



## "Growing followers of Jesus"

A simple, memorable motto that sums all this up is "growing followers of Jesus." It's one way of expressing that the church's job is to make disciples.

*Who are we?* We're followers of Jesus who are growing.

*What are we doing?* We're encouraging growth in people as followers of Jesus.

It's concise, memorable, active, Christ-centred and Biblical.



## Building bridges to genuine community around Christ

A strategy statement for how we can live out, and work towards, this motto is “**building bridges to genuine community around Christ.**” It’s not a summary of everything we do, but an expression of the things we will concentrate on – the direction we will move in - for the next few years.

This strategy is based on the following premises:

**a. Discipleship happens within the context of relationships.**

We need to know each other better. That means **building bridges towards each other**. The goal of that is **genuine community**, where we know, accept, support, encourage and challenge each other.

**b. Our goal in evangelism is also to build bridges.**

We probably won’t get the whole gospel across to someone in one conversation. Even if we could, they would probably have switched off or misunderstood us at some point along the way. Evangelism, normally and naturally, needs to be in the context of relationships.

**c. People are hungry for genuine community**

Non-Christians, particularly in Sydney’s inner-West, are hungry for genuine community – something we can offer them.

“People frequently come to faith in Christ after they’ve been around Christians for some time. Research shows they are more likely to consider the claims of Christ when they are in community with his followers. We help them make the journey toward Christ when we invite them into our fellowship and demonstrate our relationship with him. This is the power of community.” Ed Stetzer & Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned Around And Yours Can Too*.

**d. Jesus Christ is our Lord, focus, goal and model**

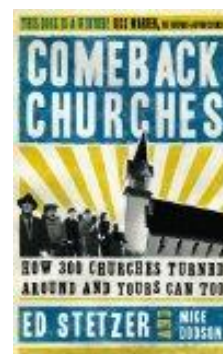
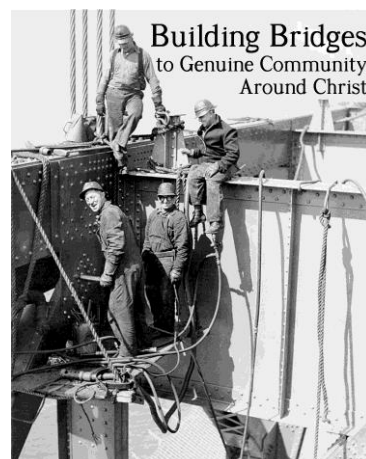
It’s not just ANY community, but community that’s focussed and centred on Christ. He’s the One we worship. Our identity and purpose and direction comes from him. He’s the head, we’re the parts of the body who are connected to each other because we are connected to the head. Growing into him means our fellowship is more connected. A picture of a mature church to aim for is this:

*Ephesians 4:14-16 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. 15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, **we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. 16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.***

## Practical Consequences

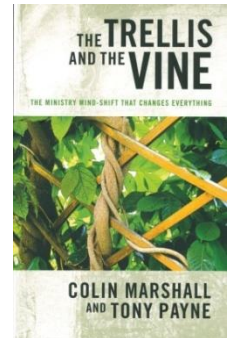
A strategy statement of “building bridges toward genuine community around Christ” will have practical consequences for how and what we do. It will mean we concentrate on:

- a. **Building Bridges with each other:** Fostering genuine community for our church family. So we will
  1. **Encourage one to one Bible reading and prayer relationships for evangelism, discipleship, mutual support, accountability.** Men to men, women to women. Me to



elders plus others. Elders to other selected multipliers. 2 Tim 2:2: “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.”

*“What we are really talking about is a Bible-reading movement- in families, in churches, in neighbourhoods, in workplaces, everywhere. Imagine if all Christians, as a normal part of their discipleship, were caught up in a web of regular Bible reading- not only digging into the word privately, but reading it with their children before bed, with their spouse over breakfast, with a non-Christian colleague at work once a week over lunch, with a new Christian for follow-up once a fortnight for mutual encouragement, and with a mature Christian friend once a month for mutual encouragement. It would be a chaotic web of personal relationships, prayer and Bible reading- more of a movement than a program-but at another level it would be profoundly simple and within reach of all.”* **The Trellis and the Vine, Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, p57.**



2. Promote regular picnics/ BBQ's/ communal meals.
  - Bi-monthly lunches after church
  - Public holiday picnics
3. Establishment of a **Body Life working group** of interested people to enable these things to happen
4. Establishment of a **Pastoral Care Team**, under the direction of Session, to facilitate the meeting of physical needs within our congregation.
5. Develop Home groups, not “just” Bible studies. (Friendship, fellowship, prayer, support, Bible study, encouragement, accountability)
  - Home Groups providing pastoral care for a larger group. These are a crucial part of our life together, not an optional extra. The expectation is that everyone in church is in a Home Group. We need to breed a culture of starting new groups; of training up assistant/ junior leaders and building groups through invitation, then splitting groups.
  - All elders connected to a Home Group, with the elder's district of responsibility being the larger group allocated to the Home Group.
  - Newcomers get introduced by welcomers to an appropriate Home Group representative (the elder or another) for inclusion into their larger group. Small groups are the key to “closing the back door” says Larry Osborne in *Sticky Church*



#### **b. Building bridges in evangelism**

1. This means encouraging people to build bridges, individually, with their friends, neighbours, workmates etc. This is the first step.
 

*“Think for a moment about how you came to faith in Jesus. If you are like 97% of other people, it was through an existing relationship – a friend, an associate, a relative or a neighbour. Using existing bridges of credibility and trust with unbelievers is the most effective way to reach those without Christ.”*

Ed Stetzer & Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches*.
2. They are then introduced, in a variety of bridge-building settings to more of the genuine community of the Christian body to help build the bridge for them to Christ.

3. That means our formal and informal gatherings need to be working well, so that people will be confident and comfortable inviting friends. For example, it means Bible study groups operating as evangelistic tools as well as for edification. Eg BBQ's, picnics that provide opportunities for members to invite their non-Christian friends.
4. Our corporate evangelistic events are about building bridges with people we don't know (yet) and who don't know Jesus (yet). Eg;
  - Mid-week lunchtime evangelistic activity in the church (video, or evangelistic Bible reading)
  - Saturday morning evangelistic stall with free literature and Bibles at the front of church
  - Letter-boxing a list of church activities and aiming to say G'day to some people as we do it.
  - Kids Club and Youth Group aim to meet parents and have something further to invite them to.
  - Homework Club, Playgroup, expanded ESL classes, mid-week lunchtime church...
  - Movie Nights, Christmas Carols. An event that has the aim of Christians building bridges with non-Christians.
  - Spring Fair with free activities for kids and parents. Face-painting, balloon animals, group games, free tea and coffee. Table tennis demonstrations. Giant snakes & ladders, parachute games, giant ten pins etc.
  - Participation in the council multi-cultural fair, Carnival of Cultures, in March each year
5. Establishment of an **Evangelism working group** for interested people to enable these things to happen
6. Establishment of a **Welcoming working group** for interested people to make sure we welcome well those visiting our services.
7. Establishment of a **Mission working group** to make sure we support our missionaries well and keep an excitement alive about the work of the gospel worldwide
8. Establishment of a **Justice & Mercy working group** for interested people to help our church to care for those who need it most in our society and further afield.