



THE CHURCH REVITALISATION JOURNEY

How it can unlock
your churches
potential

By Gradon Harvey



NORTH.SOUTH
AOTEAROA

Copyright © 2023 by Gradon Harvey

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying recording, scanning, or otherwise without written permission from the publisher. It is illegal to copy this book, post it to a website, distribute it by any other means without permission.

First edition

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

FOREWORD

David MacGregor



I was recently at a conference where we heard the grim statistics of church attendance and Christian belief in New Zealand. The Church is definitely in a very challenging season in our nation. However, amongst the sad statistics, there are exciting signs of fresh, new life and vibrant new works of the Holy Spirit.

In this very practical book, Gradon Harvey inspires the church leader to enter a journey of revitalisation with pages packed full of fresh ideas and examples of how churches can flourish in this season.

Gradon is a seasoned and much-loved pastor in our country with decades of experience in multiple church settings and mission organisations. Having led both small churches and very large churches, Gradon is a well-respected father of the faith who has a passion to see churches flourish and be revitalised. With step-by-step ideas backed up by research and experience, Gradon coaches the church leader to seek God and create new strategies to grow and strengthen our faith communities.

I felt so inspired reading this book and loved the great ideas and tested practices that bring fresh growth and Holy Spirit power to our churches.

I am so excited to endorse this wonderful book, and I thank Gradon for sharing his wisdom and passion with church leaders in every type of church who long to reverse the statistics and see our churches flourish as we bring the hope and power of the Gospel of Jesus.

David MacGregor

National director, Vineyard Churches Aotearoa, NZ
Senior pastor, Grace Vineyard Church, Christchurch

CONTENTS

1.	A Church in Uncertain Times	1
2.	Our Current Reality in the West	3
3.	So What Is a Church Revitalisation Journey?	6
4.	My Stories of Seeing God Revitalise Churches	9
5.	Leading when the Tide Is Out	15
6.	Principles of Revitalisation	18
7.	Meet the Original Vitalised Church	21
8.	What Do We Do on a Church Revitalisation Journey?	27
9.	Three Stories	31
10.	So What Do We Do Next?	39
11.	A Vision of Changing Our Nations	42

CR 2413
CYPRESS VILLAGE

STOP

CHURCH
OF
UNCERTAIN

DOROUGH RD.

WATER LODGE MARINE
BOAT REPAIR
318-655-4461

HOLLOWAY
CARPET
903-938-7911

1. A CHURCH IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

I passed through the town of Uncertain, Texas, in 2019. As I did, I caught sight of a sign for one of the local churches. It read, "Church of Uncertain". The story regarding the town's name was that it was a cartographer's note on a map and that he never got around to changing it.

I felt that this sign was a reflection of the Church in the West as we navigate uncertain times.

The Church is in a very different place than it was thirty years ago when I was starting as a minister. We have so much negative publicity now on social media; we are living in a time where the word *evangelical* is becoming a toxic byword as people associate it with American politics. It is a very complex world in which we are now negotiating woke ideologies. Then there is the competition for time slots on Sunday morning with sports clubs, friends, and family gatherings; some churches now consider “committed” families as the ones who come once every three weeks.

The Church, thirty years ago, had few of these challenges.

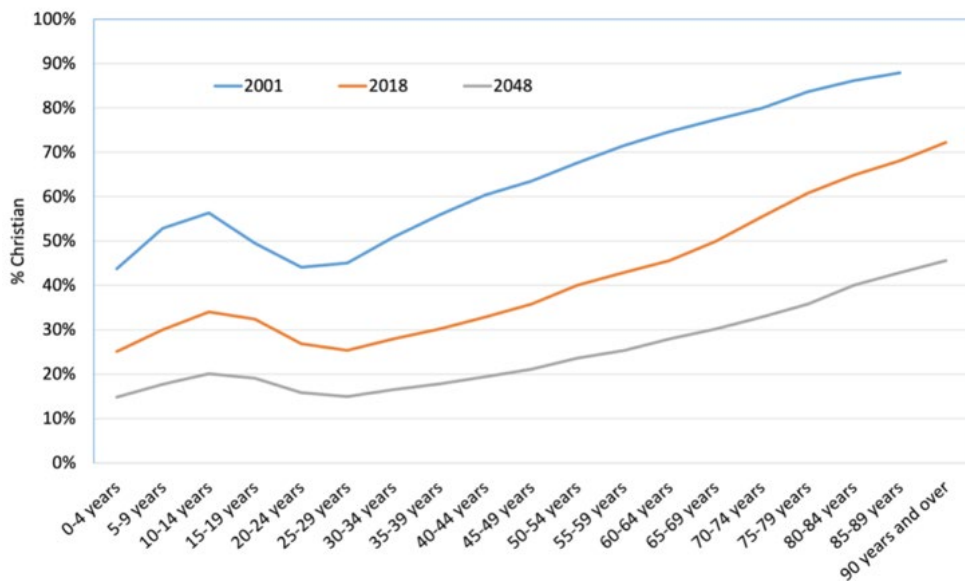
How do we sing the Lord’s songs in a strange and pagan land (Ps. 137:4). How can we thrive and make these days our best days? I believe in these challenging times, the Holy Spirit wants to lead us into times of blessing as we refocus on the unique plan He has for our Church.

In my opinion, the past will not be that helpful in negotiating the future. Still, God has placed all the dreams, hopes, and possibilities in the people He has raised as leaders in the Church – it’s when we help focus those dreams that we can find the blueprint for the future.

2.

OUR CURRENT
REALITY IN
THE WEST

Christian affiliation in New Zealand - in 2048



Graph by economist Peter Crawford, based upon NZ government population predictions.

What is happening in New Zealand is probably similar to every Western nation, given the trends that commentators are suggesting. My theory for the future of each church is that unless we find a fresh, revitalised call, we are in serious trouble.

We have, in the past, gone for "quick fixes" from overseas experts. In New Zealand, pastors of my generation have been quick to adopt the programs for church growth developed in other Western countries, often convinced they will be easily translatable. In reality, they have often worked in churches where congregants are all of a similar culture to one another because they had done some research as to how to make their church effective and alive in that sort of homogenous world.

God calls us who are leaders to work out for ourselves – prayerfully and reflectively – what will work in our current world. Our current mix of worshippers is very different from past times when the Church experienced a high growth period. I believe that with the current mix of people God has given to us, there are just as exciting times ahead as the past “glory days.”

This book is anchored in a belief that God has put all kinds of skills, passions, personalities, values, and people groups in your church – and, if prayerfully and thoughtfully focused, your church could see a serious impact in your community and become attractive to those not yet worshipping with you.

3.

SO WHAT
IS A CHURCH
REVITALISATION
JOURNEY?

The “Church Revitalisation Journey” calls leaders and their identified emerging leaders to explore what might be possible – and then take a few leaps of faith to follow the blueprint they create.

The Church Revitalisation Journey (originally called Church Mobilisation Journey) does have its roots in American evangelical culture but has been slowly adapted to our Kiwi culture over the past three years. Mark Fortney, who is one of those who developed the Journey, has come from a marketing background and has led American evangelical churches. He has master’s degrees in both marketing and theology.

The Journey asks you to reflect on where you are currently, explore dreams and hopes embedded in leaders for the Church, and then translate these into an accountable action plan.

I have had the privilege of working with many churches over the years because of my involvement in four mission organisations across forty nations; I believe the idea of translating hopes and dreams into a new reality will work in any culture – because there is no “one size fits all” as far as outcomes. It is all about a journey that is unique to your church. What Mark created in the USA (along with roughly fifty staff members who helped churches large and small get mobilised/revitalised before Covid) is a process to find answers unique to your church.

It takes some months to go on the Revitalisation Journey. It means leadership can process ideas and challenges that emerge outside of our gatherings, which may be distractions to each new step in the journey. There can be left-field ideas scattered

like seeds that need a while to germinate in the hearts and minds of people responsible for leadership, and then there are those ideas like weeds that are simply a distraction.

This is a journey where the leadership controls the outcomes. It uses an outside facilitator who helps the process and who is largely oblivious to your church's sacred cows and problem conversations of the past. One example recently was a ministry that a church had been involved with for many years. To the surprise of every leader present, they all concurred that it felt the ministry had gone past its use-by date, and there was growing resentment towards it – but no one had ever thought to question its existence.

4.

MY STORIES
OF SEEING GOD
REVITALISE
CHURCHES

There have been times when God has led me so clearly and other times when I was frustrated that I could not find a way forward. I wished that the Church Revitalisation Journey had been around during times when we had plateaued or begun to decrease in numbers – when the way ahead seemed very muddled and murky.

I have never led a megachurch (and never really wanted to – my dream was to lead a thriving church in a provincial city/town). I have led churches for over thirty years in a wide variety of situations as an assistant pastor, as a leader of a rural congregation with a significant Māori community, in a Spanish-speaking church plant in Uruguay, and in a church in a provincial town for eighteen years that grew to an average attendance of five hundred people a week. During my thirty-plus years of ministry, I have led or been chair of four mission organisations that have placed me in the privileged position of seeing tremendous church growth happening in roughly forty so-called “developing” world nations, which often left me wondering, *Lord, why not here in my nation?*

More recently, when speaking across the length of my nation in many local churches as part of my promotion work for a Christian mission/aid organisation that I was privileged to lead, I glimpsed a kind of overview of what was happening in my country – the state of the NZ church (at least in the evangelical or charismatic churches). My visits to these churches created a snapshot. The reality I encountered was that many churches seemed to have plateaued or had moved into decline (as the graph in the previous section suggests), so this is being written as a way forward to how we might respond in our churches.

MY STORIES

When I was invited to lead a rural church in a community of 1,500 people with a significant Māori community, I was unsure at first what to do. I arrived just before Christmas, and everything had shut down for the long summer break. So, for three months, my wife, Annette, myself, and a lady called Rosemary prayed every Wednesday night. We then felt led to run a “Life in the Spirit” course that had come out of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal as a kind of refresher or introduction to the things of the Holy Spirit. About twenty attended, and all but a few who walked out on the “Holy Spirit night” had a fresh experience of the Holy Spirit.

At about the same time, a local city councilor had surveyed all the unemployed youth to see if they wanted to work – which they did – but they all expressed that they didn’t want to leave their hometown. She reported this to a church leadership meeting, and at the same meeting, a farmer said that his farm discussion group lamented that week as well that they couldn’t find any farm workers who had any experience.

We discussed how we might help to be the solution, and within a few months, we had a work-skills program happening with a remarkable Christian youth worker leading the work. We impacted many young lives by finding them jobs, baptising some young people, and building terrific relationships with the local marae. We ended up with three or four staff who primarily came from those impacted by that first “Life in the Spirit” seminar.

After returning from church planting in South America, I led a church with several congregations in a provincial town. This church was keen to get moving, as they had been in transition for quite a while. I felt the pressure to get things moving, so without too much prayer or forethought, I decided to start another unemployment program. It was, on one level, successful – the local mayor gave out training diplomas at a community ceremony and commented to me, “This is the first useful thing your church has done in our community.” Which seemed a bit rich for a church that had been around for 140 years, but that was his perception. It became clear to me that this wasn’t God’s plan because of the many daily problems we had to manage and that it felt, at times, we were pushing water uphill despite the outward success of young people finding jobs.

I had presumed that what worked in one place would work in another, but that had proved wrong, so I began to earnestly seek God for His plan; at the same time, there was a move of God called the Toronto Blessing in the Charismatic Church that attracted many young people and youth leaders. I saw that God was calling us to resource and support these youth leaders and the young people God had sent us. We had buildings that were underutilised that we could offer these leaders to use, and we also had a youth cafe in the town that had nothing happening until after college classes let out each day. One of the overseas-based youth movements we partnered with had a “radical school of evangelism” training for three or four months each year. It brought around thirty young people in their early twenties – mainly from Europe or the USA – to be trained as disciples and hone their skills in evangelism. We just loved their radical lifestyles and their passion for Jesus; it encouraged us to

connect with people from all over the world. At one time, we had fourteen full-time or short-term missionaries associated with our church away on the mission field. We missed them so much when they went home and, after five or six years, when they shifted their training base to Germany.

It seemed there were times we got stuck as a church. We had times of prayer and daily corporate morning prayer, but nothing shifted. It would have been so helpful to have had the Church Revitalisation Journey (which I'm about to explain) to help the leadership and staff look afresh and refocus on what might be God's next steps.

After six years leading the Christian aid/mission organisation I mentioned, I left with a profound burden for my nation's churches; having visited so many while doing promotional work and preaching, I was at a bit of a loss as to what I might do next. I had a friend – a missiologist called Dr. Michael Cooper – with whom I had once traveled to Turkey to visit church planters. He had also just left leading the same organisation in the United States and had joined up with another missions organisation that had a multifaceted approach, including a large team who helped churches nationally get “mobilised for mission.” He invited me to start the conversation with their mobilisation people, and then I went to America to do its mobilisation training. Its founder, Mark Fortney, then mentored me as we began work in my nation. I have discovered that the Church Revitalisation Journey really works, as leadership teams refocus on the call of God that is unique to their church.

I believe it is one of the keys to turning the tide in this current spiritual climate. I dream of seeing churches flourishing again, impacting the lost, and giving hope to the hopeless.

5.
LEADING
WHEN THE
TIDE IS OUT

The principle behind this book is a belief that if you focus on local and overseas missions in your congregation, all the other things that need fixing will sort themselves out – God will create positive change as you get ready to welcome new believers into your midst.

So many factors affect whether a church will grow – for example, when there is a move of God’s Spirit happening in our land, and people seem to flock to church. During the times when this has happened before, everybody loved meeting together, going on camps, and bringing friends to see what God was doing.

We have also experienced the impact of uniquely gifted ministries coming to NZ, such as Smith Wigglesworth one hundred years ago, Billy Graham sixty years ago, and John Wimber in the 1980s. All these men encouraged the Church here and created a fresh vision for growth.

It is not hard to see churches flourish during those times, but what about the seasons when it feels like the tide is out? That’s when church leadership needs to step up because the same deep needs still exist out there, which only Jesus can meet. The same Holy Spirit wants to lead us to meet the needs that surround us.

The things a leadership team needs to focus on during these quiet periods seem counterintuitive, as it is not typically what attracts crowds or what people feel they have energy for. We need a dogged determination to make sure the Church is equipped with these things so that we might, at any time when

the Lord should choose to move, be absolutely ready to capture the fruit that comes from a move of the Spirit.

These include the following:

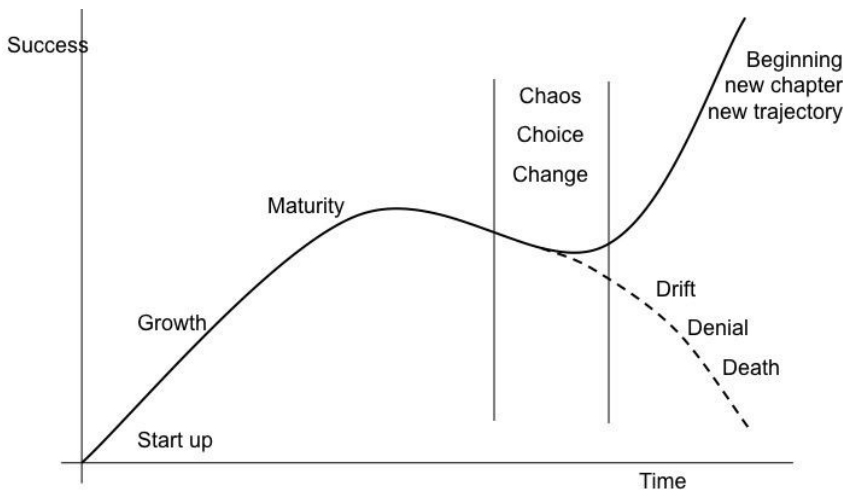
- **Prayer.** The focus and burden of prayer in any church reflect what growth will happen because God loves to answer prayer.
- **Evangelism training.** This is the ability of a congregation to articulate their faith clearly to lead people to know Jesus, helping people join the dots of what's been happening as the Lord draws people to Himself and enabling them to have a life-changing encounter with Jesus.
- **Discipleship.** The Church needs to be ready for new believers and can nurture and disciple new believers beyond the commitment stage.
- **Generosity.** Your church is called to counteract the current worldview, which perceives the Church as no longer relevant, through its good works and acts of care for those who are hurting around them in the community where God has placed that church.
- **Continual development of your vision of growth.** A church will increase if the heart of the leadership wants to bring your community into a transformation. That future vision must be cast with whatever dreams God has laid on your heart.

6.

PRINCIPLES OF REVITALISATION

To go on a Church Revitalisation Journey with no clear prescribed outcomes always seems a bit scary – but with the collective wisdom, experience, and passion of your leaders, the Holy Spirit will reveal the plan, a bit like the tribe of Issachar’s leaders who “understood the signs of times and knew the best course for Israel to take” (1 Chron. 12:32). It’s all there, just waiting to be revealed!

God has led me personally, with clarity, in churches I have led, but also through times when it was just plain hard work with no clear path into the future.



Based on work by Charles Handy, *The Empty Raincoat*

Graph by John Jennings, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/sigmoid-curves-survivorship-bias-m-olatoye/>

Charles Handy, who studied the life cycle of organisations in his book *The Empty Raincoat*, concluded that they all inevitably follow the bell-shaped curve to oblivion unless they do a midway pause and then head in a new direction.

Many churches may not know that they are further down the decline than they realise. A key indicator would be the number of new believers your church has helped to find faith in Jesus recently.

In the past, NZ churches trying to bring growth have brought successful pastors from overseas – who might give perhaps five key strategies and three tactics, promising if you “do it like us,” you will see growth. This might work for some, but, in my opinion, we essentially can’t short-circuit the call of leaders to reflect, refocus, and adapt – finding a way forward that is unique to them as revealed by the Holy Spirit (that the Church Revitalisation Journey offers).

7.

MEET THE
ORIGINAL
VITALISED
CHURCH

The theologian John MacQuarrie once answered his own question (in my paraphrase): “How can we tell if a church is an authentic biblical church or simply a construct of their culture?” He answered that if it resembles the Church the first disciples experienced, it could be called an authentic church.

So if we go back to Scripture, we find the original vitalised Church, which can be identified by the following ten characteristics:

1. **A passion for reading the Word** and spending more time in the Word both personally and corporately (Acts 2:42).
2. **An emphasis on Jesus** – preaching that is centred on Jesus and what He has done (Acts 2:36).
3. **A burden for the lost** by everyone, especially by church leaders (Acts 2:40).
4. **Bold prayer** that the community would want to come to know Jesus, evidenced through days and nights of prayer and regular times of prayer and fasting. There would be times when the Holy Spirit guides the Church into a new ministry direction or a worship service to go completely off-script (Acts 4:29–31).
5. **Compelling priorities**, given by God. On the day of Pentecost, everyone was impacted by the Holy Spirit. They began to centre on caring for their own who were less fortunate as well as for those in need. God has also placed the dreams, hopes, and calling on your congregation to be a transformer of your community and beyond. It is the call of leadership to change your world (Acts 2:44–45).

6. **Abounding generosity** that echoes its care and love for its own, to those in the community around it, and beyond (Acts 2:45).
7. **Vibrant missions culture** that invests resources and people in short- and long-term missions (Acts 13:2–3).
8. **Everyone's involvement** in the ministry – in some way or another. There are no pew sitters. Notice the emphasis on the word *they* in Acts 2:44–46.
9. **The outside community notices what God does** as lives are transformed, needs are being met, and the church lives counterculturally through radical generosity. Acts 2:47 refers to people outside the faith community being drawn into fellowship because they liked what they saw.
10. **Active training** where everybody knows how to share their faith and help new people grow as disciples. In the Early Church in Thessalonica, Paul said that all the members there had reached out beyond Macedonia and Achaia and everywhere! (See 1 Thess. 1:7–8.)

Most churches will say they are doing okay in some of the above areas and not very well in others. The start of a Revitalisation Journey is an honest exercise to create a good starting point.

To go on a Church Revitalisation Journey, you need a coach – an outsider who has no agenda, no bias, and no history with your church. Who is trusted, perhaps, because they bring a lifetime of church leadership experience. Who simply wants you to discover the new thing that God is calling your church to invest its limited resources of time, talent, and treasure into, believing that that is where your church will find its future. We will look at how to find

a coach at the end of this book. I do not think using a business coach or consultant who may be a part of your church or denomination is a good way forward because the Church is an entirely different “animal” in nature and functionality than a corporation.

The principles of church revitalisation start with a clear understanding

- **that God has a plan for your church that is bigger than you can imagine.** Your lack of imagination is what is holding it back. “[God] is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us” (Eph. 3:20 NIV);
- **that your proud history in the past can be a stumbling block.** If God could move powerfully in the past, he can do it again in new ways with the new people God has brought into your midst. So if people stop camping on past triumphs and start dreaming new dreams with the unique mix of people and talent they currently have, then exciting new things will take shape. “But one thing I do: forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:13–14 NIV); and
- **that we might be busy doing ministry but not necessarily doing it effectively or flowing in the calling the church has.** Your every day is full of people's lives and their problems and disappointments, and your church will always have issues that need dealing with that will consume your time, but that's not following the unique call of your church. Jesus, when speaking to the Church in Laodicea, hit them quite hard to get their attention when He accused them of being

“lukewarm” (see Revelation 3:15–22) despite all that was happening in their beautiful building and state-of-the-art sanctuary (as per archaeological findings).

John Mark Comer wrote a bestseller called *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, where he states that hurry is the biggest enemy of the spiritual life. Churches are full of people living hurried lives, who work more than forty hours a week simply to survive financially – some with two or three part-time jobs. This busyness overflows into church life as the world exports its culture into the life of our churches. I believe Jesus wants us to be countercultural – not to try to do everything but for us to find “our lane” where He will pour His favour. Jesus spoke about this in Matthew 11:29–30 in finding the easy yoke, which can apply to churches just as much as to individuals.

I like the image that we don’t need to seek after God in the same way that they had to in the Old Testament. That because of the cross, He is already waiting for us to encounter Him; we simply need to stop, pause, and ask Him to lead us. When a church leadership does that corporately as they seek a new way forward as a church, we know that He will guide them clearly – there will be many listening ears hearing His still voice to lead them on.

Engage Your People Who Will Pray.

Most churches have people who are known to have the gift of prayer, even if your church is without formal prayer or intercessory groups. One of the tasks of those with a prayer gift is committing to pray for open ears to the Holy Spirit’s plans and praying that no distractions from the evil one seek to deter us.

There is a spiritual battle – and I believe the future is bright for those who know that the way forward is a battle so that we might be on guard and aware of the evil one’s strategies. Engaging your trusted prayers is one of your tactics for hearing clearly.

With apps like WhatsApp or Facebook Messenger, it has never been easier to encourage prayer. For example, I am currently on the prayer support team for a church plant in the Hutt Valley. Each week on Messenger, they send out what problems they are struggling with or people concerns they have. It is so encouraging to hear when they report back about how God is faithful in answering prayers.

8.

WHAT
DO WE DO
ON A CHURCH
REVITALISATION
JOURNEY?

There are six sessions in total. Before session one, leaders will work through a short questionnaire, and the facilitator will compile the results for discussion in that first session to paint the picture of where you are now. We use the ten indicators of life we discussed from the original vitalised Church. We record and celebrate high points of God's leadership in the recent past and note the current reality.

Here is an outline of what happens next:

- **Reality Check:** We look at current reality as per the questionnaire.
- **Dream(s):** We start to dream of what might be, answering, "What is the one thing that you long to do – and see God do – in and through your church?"
- **SNAPshot:** We look at Struggles, Notables, Alarms (if things don't change in the future), and Possibilities (if things do change).
- **Mission Statement:** We create a mission statement that is broad, brief, compelling, and yet captures something unique to you about the possibilities and dreams of what might be. It includes the call to reach out locally and internationally.
- **Engagement:** We take a look at your church's values – the emphases that you will focus on to engage others. What are the shared biblical nonnegotiables you are passionate about in this leadership team? What are some hindering values we need to remove from your church DNA?
- **Vision Statement:** We consider what it would be like if all the dreams and possibilities could happen – a vision of what our Church would look like in the next five to ten years. Creating

a word picture with some detail helps others understand the Church's heart. A Holy Spirit-inspired vision attracts people desiring community.

- **Current Endeavours:** Many leaders have no idea at all about the different things a church and its members do in their communities on a day-to-day basis (especially in a lot of medium-sized and larger churches) – or the missions they support and the reason why they are important. We take account of all the outreach with which your church is involved.
- **Evaluation of Congregational Gifts:** We choose a focus area to increase engagement on those things we are already doing. How could we do better? Is there a focus area in the world that God is calling you to work on that has God's unique fingerprints on it?
- **Values:** We ask what is missing in what is being done.
- **Momentum:** What do we need to start, improve, or discontinue to outwork what we believe God has called us to? What are critical areas of church life where you have the energy to see positive change?
- **Clarity:** We ponder where you feel God is leading your church to focus and connect with in your community and the world.
- **Practical Implementation and Involvement:** We ask who the congregational influencers are who aren't in leadership. How do we bring them on board? How do we communicate a change of focus? How can we keep the momentum continuing? How do we create accountability for the ministry plan that we adopt?

- **Draft Plan:** The Revitalisation Journey Coach (the one who leads the conversations) will create a draft plan (usually after a session with the lead pastor) that then gets discussed, modified, and finally adopted. It will contain accountability and dates for when a review of progress will be discussed, as well as the possibility of appointing a monitoring team – a small group from the leadership to manage the process.

This outline is just a summary of the basics, and the detail isn't that important at this point because the big question about the elephant in the room is, "Am I willing to pay the price to see my church flourish? And leaders will pay a price in managing change; for example, there is a time commitment involved in meeting with leaders. And there is conflict management; some people will seek to undermine any change of direction, perhaps actively.

Managing change and moving in new directions are part of the call of leadership. The call to take "the ship" out of the harbour to sail to places yet to be discovered is a wonderful and slightly scary privilege God has given you.

9.
THREE
STORIES

WAIKANAĒ BAPTIST CHURCH

Pastor Nigel Scott



Waikanae has a growing population of 13,700, an average income of \$30,300, and a population of 82 percent European/Pakeha, 9.2 percent Māori, and 4.5 percent Asian. It is a popular retirement area, with 36 percent of the population over age 65.

Where was your church at before the Church Revitalisation Journey?

Our vision and focus energy-wise previously had been getting our internal processes sorted. We had community-facing ministries but didn't see much fruit or engage in much outreach with them.

Two years later, we have grown by a third (that's sixty new people!) To be honest, people have joined us for all kinds of reasons; some have come because they were attracted to our outward-looking community focus, which has validated the Journey we have been on.

What changes happened?

The Church Revitalisation Journey helped us to reconsider the outreach side of the Church, both locally and internationally.

After we developed a plan and a process, we set up an implementation leadership team to encourage and monitor our interface with the community. Most of our community-facing ministries, like 24/7 youth work, Te Hāhi (a community partnership with police, supporting family harm situations), Mainly Music, Vege Coop, and Opportunity Shop, have refocused in some way to make sure the Gospel, where appropriate, is being shared. For example, our Opportunity Shop now has an invitation sign on a screen on the outside window offering prayer – just ask at the counter.

We had some discussions about overseas missions during this time. We felt drawn as leaders to Muslim communities but not sure how we might implement this other than by increasing our support of missionaries already working in this field. Through a series of events, we now are sponsoring two Muslim refugees to resettle in Waikanae, which, when you look back at what we talked about two years ago, is kind of happening before our eyes in a way we could not have scripted. We are excited about welcoming them to our community.

What was helpful about the Journey?

It gave us a process for exploring what was possible, an action plan on how to implement change, and helped us turn a new way forward into a reality.

ABUNDANT LIFE CHURCH, WELLINGTON

Pastor Hamish Thomson



Abundant Life is near the top of Cuba Street in Wellington's inner city. It attracts a wide variety of nationalities, especially those from India and Asia. Most people commute from the suburbs to this church.

Where was your church at before the Church Revitalisation Journey?

We had reached a place where we were comfortable. We were happy where we were, although saying that we were also discontent. We knew we were called to more, yet we were comfortable where we were. It wasn't until Gradon and North-South came and we went on a journey that we could break free from this comfortable place. We encouraged our emerging leaders to come alongside existing ones and start to dream dreams. Emerging leaders have been at the forefront of the changes in our midst.

Two years later, we have grown overall by 20 percent, started a new congregation, and diversified our other two morning congregations, each with a unique focus on outreach to an identified unreached demographic around us. We are expecting to see more growth now we have defined our focus.

What changes happened?

One of the characteristics of a healthy, mobilised church is abundant generosity. One of our churches in Thailand had a crisis in that a child sponsorship organisation was pulling out of the area, leaving many vulnerable children. So we asked our congregation to step up and sponsor a child at \$5 a week, with local church staff covering any administration costs. We got fifty sponsorships on the first Sunday, and more will come. I'm not sure we would have had the same generous response two years ago.

Why do you like the Church Revitalisation Journey process?

Many Kiwi churches looking for a way forward often look to success models from overseas, even though we live in a different cultural context, and people in the program who worked overseas wonder why we don't have the same success. The CRJ took us on a journey of change as to what would work according to our values, our unique local culture, and our local context with the mix of kinds of people we have that worship with us. We developed a way forward unique to us that is ours – we are happy to use overseas programs like Alpha, but only as they serve our purposes as we outreach to our community.

What else was helpful?

Through a series of workshops, we gained clarity and agreement around our five core values, which then determined the future shape of our ministry. It helped us see that there were some things that we needed to let go of and things we needed to pick up if we were to be true to ourselves and the Great Commission of Jesus. Because of the kind of journey, we had been on, it was a lot easier than I thought to bring about change. People had already seen the

positive changes that had begun to happen. This generosity was not about rearranging the furniture but changing our priorities to become the Church God called us to be.

So if you had anything to say to pastors who were considering going on the Church Revitalisation Journey, what would it be?

Trust me. Your church is going to go from strength to strength. You will go on a journey of discovery to bring about things you didn't know were there. It will give you the confidence to deal with some things that you are already aware of that need to change. You will find yourself in the new place God has already prepared for you and your church.

FOXTON SALVATION ARMY

Major Steph Herring



Foxton has a population of 3,360 and has two distinct communities (town and beach). The population is 35 percent Māori, 60 percent European/Pakeha with a median income of \$23,000.

Major Steph Herring's thoughts:

As the pastor of this church, I highly recommend "Church Revitalisation" to all. It's a fantastic way to set our eyes with purpose on God's agenda in a way that accomplishes significance in people's and communities' lives.

We are a small Salvation Army Corp at Foxton, at present, where we are doing okay, but when our leadership team came together with Gradon to work on how we saw our community, the make-up of this, and our church people, what talents and gifts we had amongst our people was a real eye-opener into what and who we had on our doorstep.

Gradon made it fun, and that helped with the team, who had a great sense of humour anyway. It opened our eyes to what we could do in small but significant ways for our church and our community.

Looking back on three months since this time, we have done so many little things that are turning out to be significant steps. We are seeing our team looking out of the box. For example, we have put in place four Celebration Sundays, where we do Sundays very differently to bring our fringe people closer and to build those relationships deeper. We have done the first and had very significant results with all who attended. Looking at our goals and making these work, we have already seen five of our tactics in place (to bring change) being used and done. It has set us a pathway that is easily navigated for the future.

As a woman with a sense of humour, we loved Gradon's relaxed way of doing this. We will be forever grateful to God for sending him to us.

10.
SO WHAT
DO WE DO
NEXT?

First, talk with others who lead with you and look at who else might be your church's emerging leaders. In one church, the emerging leaders stepped up and pioneered new pathways; the existing senior leaders were glad to encourage and welcome the next generation as they stepped up and began to find their feet as future leaders. Then:

1. **Work out what times might work best for the six sessions of the Church Revitalisation Journey.** Some churches preferred midweek sessions, some preferred Saturday mornings to cover two sessions at a time, and others preferred a mix of weekdays and weekends. Normally, the church is too busy in New Zealand from November until after Easter for anything extra.
2. **Choose a coach for the Church Revitalisation Journey.** I dream that we will raise a network of competent coaches in this nation and elsewhere to help not just your church but others in their communities and beyond. Please note the following regarding coaches/facilitators:
 - i. Coaches are those who have a rapport with your church already but are not members of it and have no agenda other than helping it reach its fullest potential. Pastors or leaders are discouraged from leading the Journey in their church because they have too much invested already in the outcomes.
 - ii. The church is a different "animal" than the business world, so business leaders will not easily understand the different dynamics that a church faces, even if they have been church leaders in their own right.

- iii. Coaches need to have had some years of leadership in a church and a good track record that has earned your church's respect.
 - iv. This new coach needs to be coached with the material and PowerPoints we use on the journey. I hope that I might give the coach the same kind of outstanding support my mentor, Mark Fortney, gave me after sessions, helping me interpret what was being shared.
 - v. Coaches need to be on-site. Church Revitalisation Journeys done via Zoom during Covid were difficult for both parties, as it is very hard to "read the room" and see if more time is needed on an exercise, for example, or if everyone has finished and is just being polite.
- 3. Recruit prayer partners.** Choose those who will pray for revelation and insight as leaders take counsel together. The pastor will need to send updates before each session, encouraging them to set time aside to pray for the sessions. It's not hard to overstate the power of prayer in this journey. It is not an academic exercise but a spiritual journey. Invite a two-way conversation with your prayers.
- 4. Note that the minimum number of leaders is six, and the maximum is around fifteen.** Smaller leadership teams move faster, but larger groups create more possibilities.
- 5. Plan for six sessions.** However, sometimes churches cover the Journey in less time.

11. A VISION OF CHANGING OUR NATIONS

Imagine if every church had someone coaching it through to the next stage of its journey – a journey that would bring much fruit and blessing not only to your church but the community in which you serve. Whatever transformational change is going to come, it is not going to come from politics – it will come from living out the promises of God and obedience to the call of Jesus to go into a very needy world.

INTRODUCING GRADON HARVEY



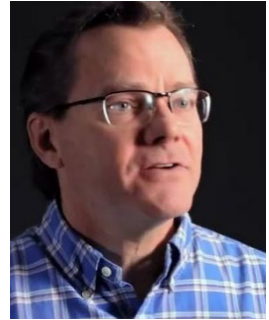
Gradon has been a minister for forty years. His last appointment was for eighteen years as a senior pastor in a town of ten thousand people, where the congregations averaged five hundred each Sunday. He also led a short-term missions agency during this time that mobilised one thousand people into short-term missions. Most recently, he spent six years serving as the executive director of an international missions organization. He has worked in forty different countries with various mission organisations, including three years of church planting in South America. His last pastoral appointment was the interim leader (for the past two years) of Raumati Beach Church (Vineyard) on the Kapiti Coast.

North South was started in September 2019 by Gradon and two businessmen, John Bank and John Roche. We have been well supported by Mark Fortney, who developed the Church Mobilisation Journey in the USA (now called Church Revitalisation Journey here in New Zealand) and who trained Gradon in its method. Leanne Mallinder oversees our finances. These folks also serve as trustees and management.

Gradon desires to revitalise the New Zealand Church to fulfil her God-given mission to transform our society. Contact Gradon at **gradon@northsouth.nz**

AFTERWORD

Mark Fortney



As a pastor and missions leader, I've travelled widely in New Zealand. In visiting with church leaders, I've heard their desire to make a difference for the kingdom – to see their neighbours trust Christ. But when they survey their current situations, they feel overwhelmed. "Where do we start? The task is so big, it seems daunting!" And then discouragement sets in. And the demands of daily ministry press down, and community outreach falls by the wayside. Perhaps you can identify.

Let me say this: I both feel and understand your frustration and discouragement. But I also want to encourage you. Your situation is not nearly as hopeless as it might seem. First, you've got this book in your hands, which is a good start. Next, you can begin the turnaround process even now by taking a few minutes to thoughtfully answer two questions:

1. **What does the Bible say about God's mission for our church?** This will help you answer the question about your church's purpose – why you exist in the first place.
2. Then, cast aside any current discouragements and take a moment to dream. **What's God's vision for our church? Where do we ideally see ourselves in five years?** This will give you a glimpse of the future, providing a sense of hope and a determination to get there.

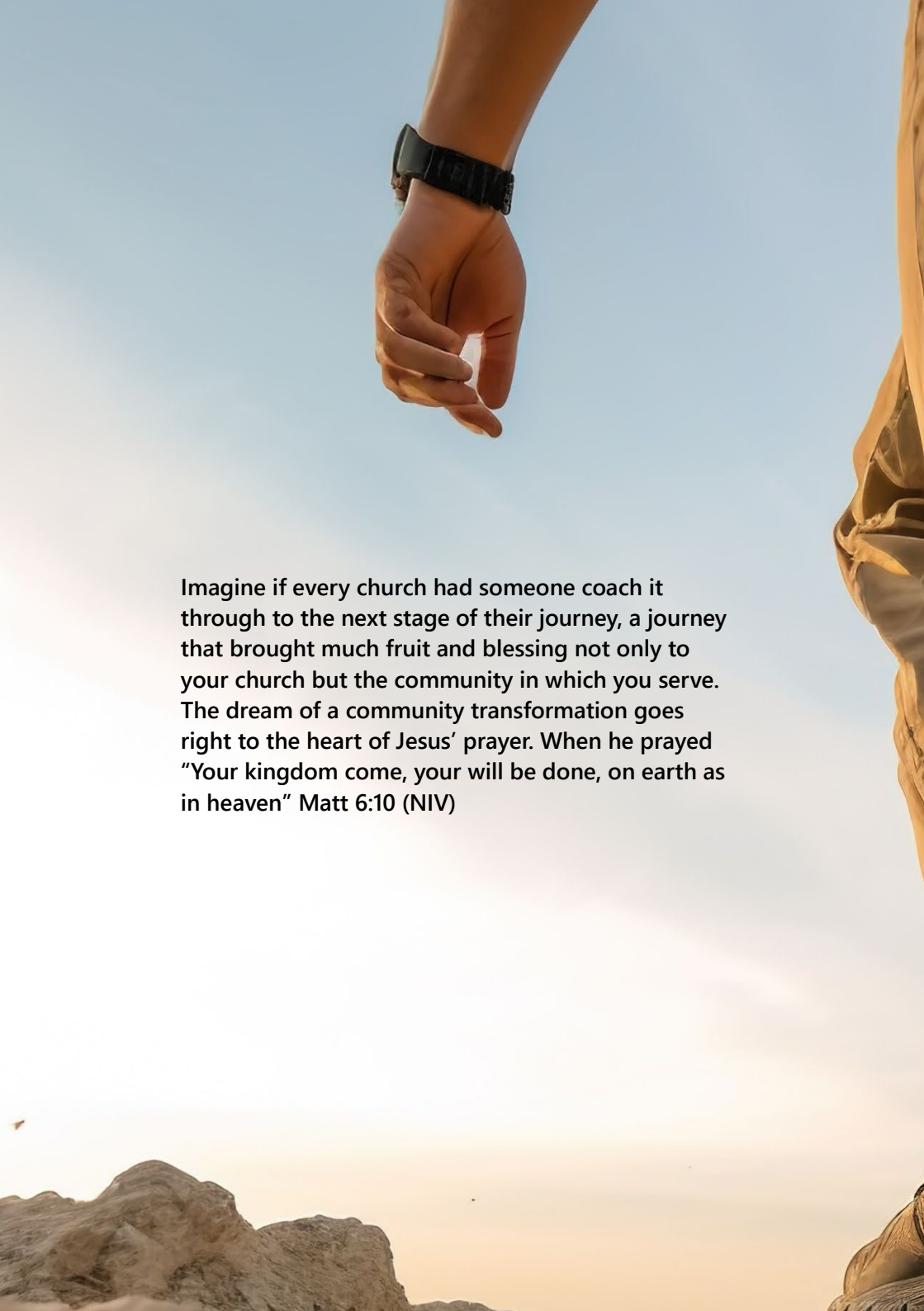
Now what? You are not alone in this! God has raised up some wise church advisors who want to help you break through the status quo and move forward. The ministry of North-South can help you on this journey of church revitalisation. Once you've worked with your North-South coach to better understand your current reality, calling, and preferred future, you'll work together to build a bridge (that is, a plan), which will help you cross the chasm between where you are and where you want to be.

I want to assure you that the North-South coaching process is a highly individualized journey, not a one-size-fits-all solution. And your North-South coach will help you navigate the complexities, always speaking the truth in love. As pastors and passionate lovers of Jesus Christ and His Church, Gradon and his team at North-South are called to bring their many years of church leadership and outreach experience to bear, helping to revitalise the Church of Aotearoa. Their ultimate goal is to help you and your church thrive by remaining on mission in a changing, complex world – all while remaining true to the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19–20) and the unique character of your local church.

To that end, this book recounts several stories told by New Zealand church pastors regarding their journey from doing okay to thriving. Their churches went about the turnaround with the leading of the Holy Spirit and the help of a North-South church coach. I wholeheartedly commend Gradon and his team to you. And let me encourage you to reach out to Gradon, should your interest be piqued by what you read, and see how God might be leading you to take the next step on your own revitalisation journey.

Mark Fortney

Co-creator of the Church Mobilisation Journey in the USA
President and co-founder of Cross Roads Asia

A close-up photograph of two hands clasped together, set against a soft, golden sunset sky. The hand on the left is wearing a black wristwatch. The background shows a bright sun low on the horizon, casting a warm glow over the scene. The bottom of the image shows the silhouettes of rocky terrain.

Imagine if every church had someone coach it through to the next stage of their journey, a journey that brought much fruit and blessing not only to your church but the community in which you serve. The dream of a community transformation goes right to the heart of Jesus' prayer. When he prayed "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven" Matt 6:10 (NIV)