



CONGREGATIONAL CHARACTER

PART 1: LEADERSHIP



In our BUV devotional series on Flourishing Churches, our Pastoral Leadership, Support and Development Team have taken the lead on the “Congregational Life” sections of our framework – and they’ve done a great job in focusing on Discipleship, Engagement, Hospitality and Diversity. (The links are here if you’ve missed any.) Next up, our Church Health and Capacity Building Team are going to lead you as we consider the “Congregational Character” aspects of the Flourishing Church framework.

BUV Flourishing Churches Devotions Congregational Character Part 1 – Leadership by Rev Mark Wilkinson

Recently, when I was reading in Luke’s Gospel, I came across again the incident where Jesus takes Peter, James & John to Jairus’ house to raise his daughter from the dead. (See Luke 8:51-56) Then in the very next chapter, the same 3 disciples are brought by Jesus to a mountain – which we call the Mountain of Transfiguration – where Jesus was to pray. And they had the amazing experience of seeing “clothes became as bright as flash of lightning. Two men, Moses & Elijah appeared in glorious splendour, talking with Jesus.” (Luke 9:28-30) There is a third episode where Jesus takes Peter, James & John with him – which is when he prays in the Garden of Gethsemane (See Mark 14:33).

Why does Jesus take just three of the Twelve for these episodes? Given that the text doesn’t tell us, we can’t be definitive but it seems likely to me that there were key times when Jesus was investing in the 3 key leaders who would be most influential in taking the Gospel forward. We know that the 3 of them were – along with Andrew – the first disciples to be called. We know that Peter was always first mentioned in the lists of Apostles – indeed in Matthew’s Gospel he was actually specified as first (10:2) – and became the key spokesman in the early chapters of Acts. And John was right alongside him in leadership in Acts 8:14 and became a key writer of a gospel, letters and the book of Revelation.

There is an important function of leadership that is vital for a church to flourish. Both pastoral leaders and lay leaders who serve in ministry and governance are vital in seeing Churches flourish. And both pastoral and lay leaders need to work together – neither are more important than the other. Sometimes the pastoral leader is seen to be the most important for they have the more public role and at times get too much credit for the church when it’s going well and too much blame when it’s not!

I'm a big AFL fan and the head coach is the equivalent of the lead pastor who is the public face of the team. When a team is going well the call is, "sign the coach to a longer contract" and when a team is going badly; "sack the coach"! And it might only be a couple of years in between – think the Adelaide Crows right now. I follow Geelong and when they won 3 Premierships in 5 years, it wasn't just about the head coach but the off field leaders of the President (Frank Costa) and CEO (Brian Cook) who were equally important. More recently Richmond have been the dominant team of the past 3 years and their stable off-field leaders – CEO Brendan Gale and the AFL's first woman President Peggy O'Neal – have been instrumental to their success.

I have seen over a long period of time the critical nature of good church leaders to go along with good pastors. Church leaders are called to rise in pastoral transition and conflict and then work well in the background in governance and empowerment when the church is flourishing under positive pastoral leadership.

How do leaders flourish? Firstly by looking to and keeping connected with Jesus. It's no coincidence that "Spirituality" is at the core of the Flourishing Churches model for we know all 12 aspects fit around the core of our relationship with Jesus. All of us need to connect to and nurture our relationship with Jesus. How you do that will be as individual as you are; but the necessity of doing that is common to all leaders and followers of Jesus.

Secondly, keep short accounts within your leadership team; both ministry leaders and governance leaders. I see teams thrive and I see teams struggle – and the common theme of both situations is relationships! When relationships are strong churches tend to flourish; when relationship fracture churches tend to struggle. Invest in relationships and don't be afraid to have difficult conversations.

When Jesus chose the 12, Mark's Gospel tells us that Jesus "appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach." They were firstly called into relationship with Jesus and each other and then sent out in ministry. Relationship with Jesus precedes ministry for Jesus.

Church leadership – both pastoral and lay leaders – are high callings to partner with Jesus the Master Builder as he builds his church and they are both vital to a flourishing church.

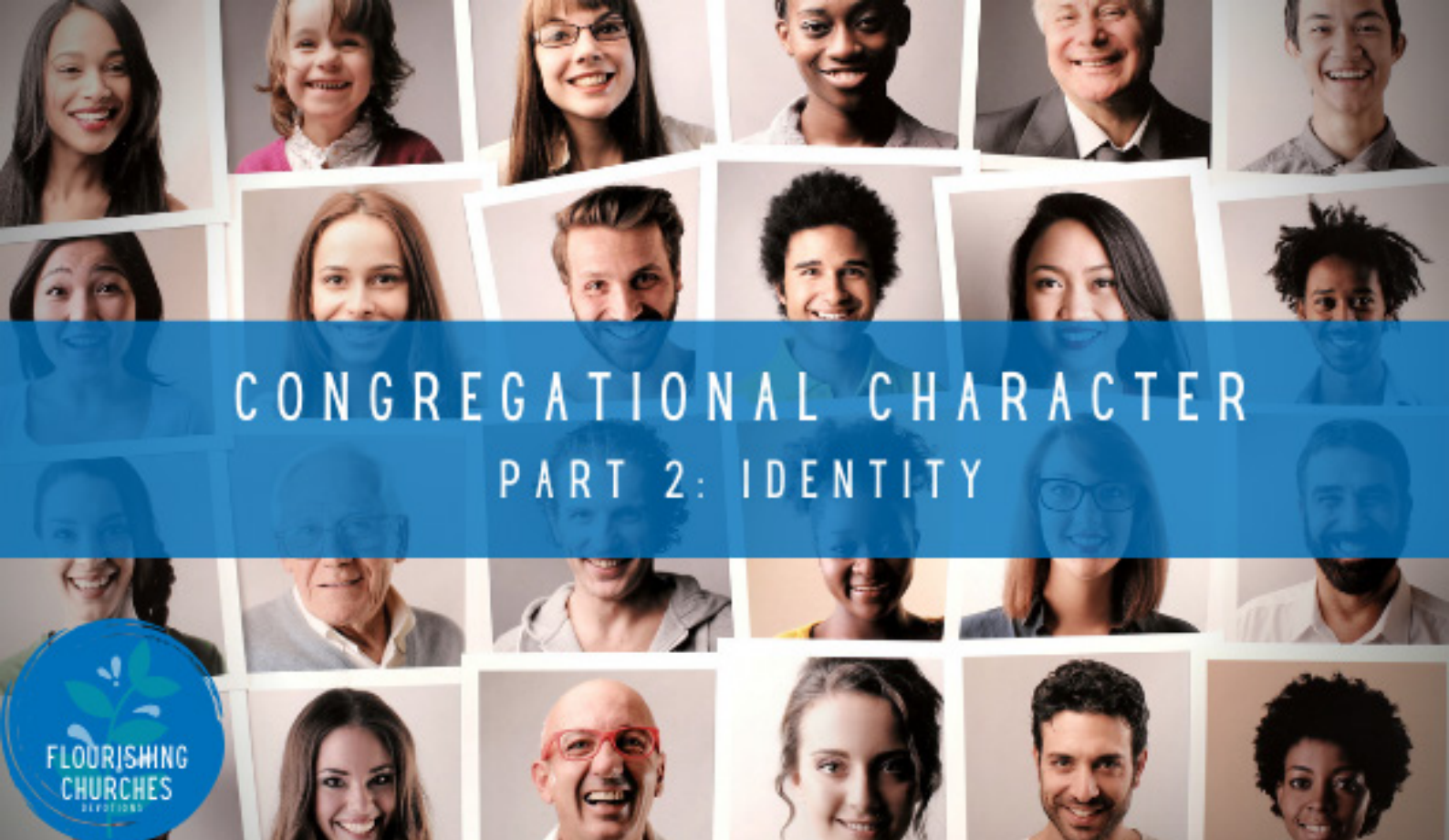
Questions for reflection

1. How are you doing in your walk with Jesus? Is there a need for you to re-prioritise that afresh?
2. How are you going with relationships amongst the key leaders in your church?
 - How can these relationships still be fostered in lockdown (as it is for our Melbourne – based churches)?
 - Are there any difficult conversations that you are procrastinating about?
3. Are there some leadership resources you could invest in at this time – books to read; podcasts to listen to; on-line training you could access? Keep checking our BUV website for opportunities to learn and grow.
4. What do you sense God saying to you about your church in this strange season of COVID-19 that we are all in?

Blessings,

Mark

BUV Church Health Consultant



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PART 2: IDENTITY

BUV Flourishing Churches Devotions Congregational Character Part 2 – Identity by Rev Marc Chan

9But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 10Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Peter 2: 9 – 10, NIV)

The pandemic that we are currently facing is causing us a lot of anxiety – when will we see the number of cases dropping, when will it all end? However, it is also providing us with the wonderful opportunity to evaluate where we are at as Churches and what the months ahead will look like for us.

In the Melbourne metropolitan area – and the Mitchell Shire as well – we have to wear a face covering whenever we go out, except for some very specific reasons. One of our friends told us that she was having her daily walk (with face mask on) when she saw a couple (also with face masks on) walking their dog.

She sort of recognised the dog but, because dogs of that breed look quite similar, she was not sure since she was only able to see the eyes of the owners. Suddenly, she heard the man saying “Hello” to her and she recognised the voice of her Pastor – whom she had known for years and whom she used to meet every Sunday before the lockdown happened.

The face masks have taken out all the features that allowed our friend to recognise her Pastor – most of the face was covered, she could not see any smile or expression of the face or even the shape of the face.

COVID-19 is causing our Churches to be like a person with a face mask on. Our identity is masked because we are not able to fully demonstrate who we are as a Church. Our services are all online and that is the only part of our face that is exposed. The rest is all under the face mask.

This leads to the pertinent questions we can ask ourselves: What is the community we are supposedly serving missing from our Church being restricted in what we can do? Is there something unique that clearly identify who we are in the community? Or no one is really missing our presence in the community?

It is a timely reminder that we are “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession”, and

also “Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God”. The face mask can take away some of our features but there are others that can still make us recognisable – like our voice.

As God’s special possession, in our wish to see the Church flourish, are we doing what He is calling us to do? As a flourishing Church, we have a clear sense of who we are – a sense of being the people of God called to achieve what He wants us to. We know where we come from, where we are at now and where we are going. Our identity is in Christ and we are part of His body knowing what role we are playing as part of that body.

As such, even though we may be wearing a face mask at the moment, with part of our identity covered, we are still able to stand out and be recognised through our voice – the Hope, Love and Care that we can bring to those around us.

At the same time, we have the opportunity to re-evaluate where we are now and prepare ourselves to be ready to go forward when our whole identity as the people of God can be fully revealed post-lockdown. Let’s join together in a union of flourishing Churches with Christlike followers, that redeems society and brings transformation to Victoria.

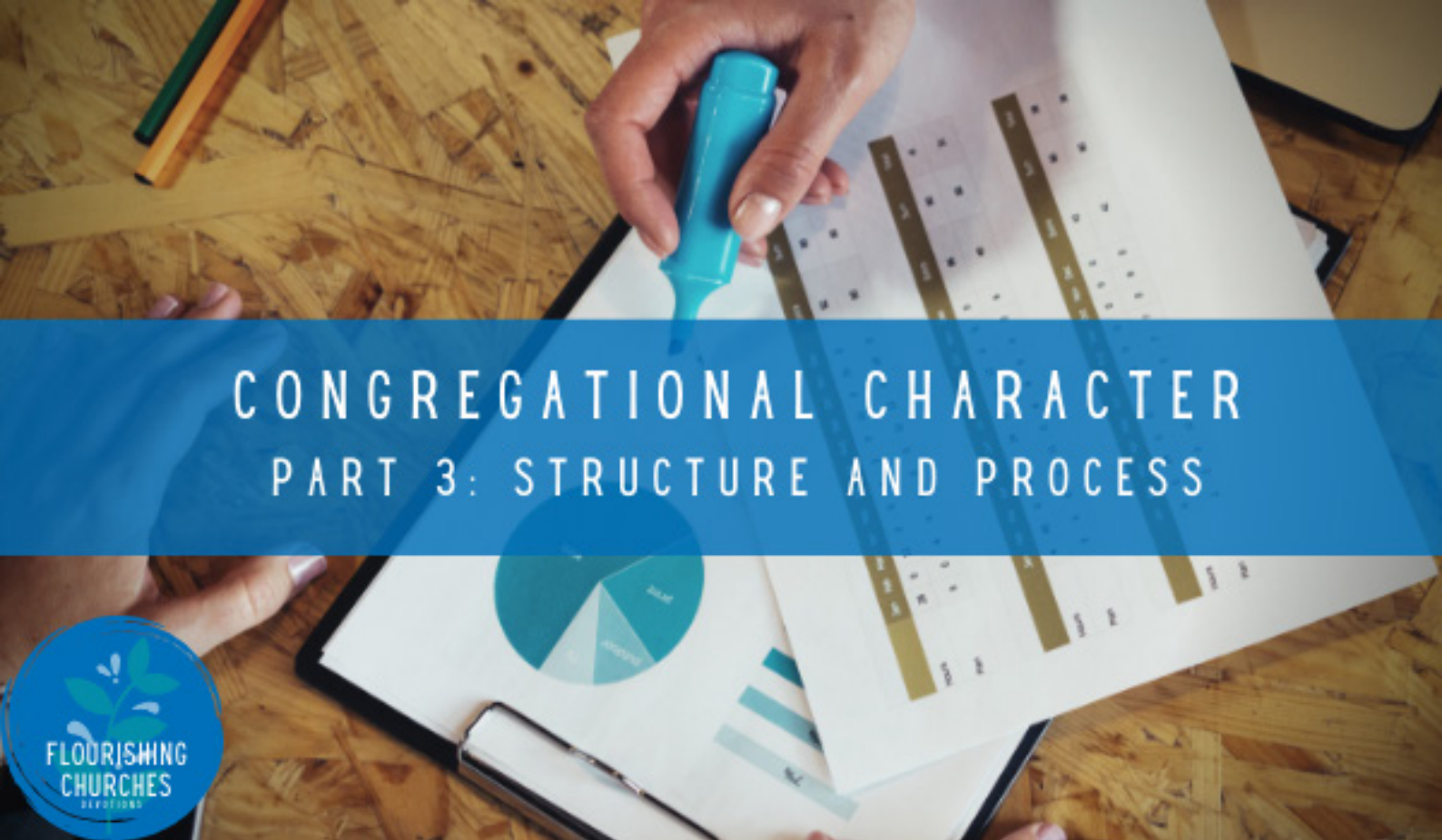
Reflection:

1. What is the community we are supposedly serving missing from our Church being restricted in what we can do?
2. Is there something unique that clearly identify who we are in the community? Or no one is really missing our presence in the community?
3. As God’s special possession, in our wish to see the Church flourish, are we doing what He is calling us to do?
4. How can we prepare ourselves to be ready to go forward post-lockdown?

20 Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. 21 Glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever! Amen. (Ephesians 3: 20 – 21, NLT)

Blessings,

Rev Marc Chan
Multicultural Consultant



CONGREGATIONAL CHARACTER

PART 3: STRUCTURE AND PROCESS



FLOURISHING
CHURCHES
DEVOTIONS

UV Flourishing Churches Devotions Congregational Character Part 3 – Structure and Process by Rev David Devine

Recently both my wife and I have been receiving treatment for cancers. This is a very personal and extreme reminder that not all growth in our bodies is healthy. Some organic activity drains the body's energy and disrupts its intended structures and functioning.

This also applies in the Body of Christ, one of the Apostle Paul's favourite images of church (Rom 12:5; 1Cor 12:12ff; Eph 4:11ff; Col 1:18). Typically Paul uses this image to teach the church's unity in Christ and functioning in faith and love. He emphasises the church's orderly structure and coordinated activity as determined by Christ and enabled by the Holy Spirit. The Body is both organic (alive in Christ) and organised (arranged by the Spirit).

A flourishing church will not simply be busy, with members all doing their own thing; it will be strategic – intentionally doing the right things in the right way – and will organise its structures and processes to enable its members to do those things efficiently and effectively. This is not introducing human managerial approaches into the church; but rather it is the church reflecting something of God, who is both orderly and intentional (eg 1Cor 12:11, 18, 28; 14:33). Healthy church structures and processes are an outworking of our Spirituality, for they reflect God and express relationship with God.

Paul's most developed discussion of this is found in Ephesians 4:1-16. He begins in vv1-10 with the relationship with and in God that is given to each and every Christian. Then in vv.11-16 he outlines the practice and purpose of this within the church. He refers to three relationships that must be maintained if churches are to flourish.

First, Paul notes that while every believer is part of the church (v7) and has a part to play in its life and growth (v16), Christ has given some to lead and serve the Body in various ways (v11) – apostles and prophets who lay foundations (Eph 2:20); evangelists who proclaim the Gospel (6:15) and pastors/teachers who equip God's people for works of service. Flourishing churches give attention to building on these apostolic and prophetic foundations (honouring God's Word), releasing and supporting those sent into mission, and allowing pastoral leaders to equip others to serve rather than being distracted by doing things that others can do.

The word translated 'equip' (katartismos) had a range of meaning including repairing (Matt 4:21), completing (1Thess 3:10) and training (Lk 6:40). In New Testament times it was used in medical texts to describe setting broken bones to

knit and function properly. Given the physiological language in Ephesians 4, I think this is what Paul was referring to. Primarily through teaching, Pastoral leaders set their fellow believers in right relationship with God and one another, so that they can function in truth and love as God intends us to. As Israel Galindo writes, 'Leaders who are committed to empowering the members for ministry will create the structures and processes that will help the members to (discern and) respond to God's call and acquire the necessary ministry skills (and relational qualities) to actualize their spiritual gifts.'[1]

This introduces the other two relationships that are key to flourishing churches – relationship with God and one another. Paul declares that each and every believer has direct relationship with Christ. We are all called to grow in our knowledge of Christ – not drifting along with the latest idea (v14), but sticking to the truth of the Faith laid down in Scripture (v13, 15), pressing into Christ in prayer (v15), and becoming more like Christ, individually and together, as we reflect his nature and will by serving one another in love (v16). Each and every member has a part to play in this growth in faith and love as we serve one another, and to the extent we all do that, our churches will be built up and flourish.

The structures we set up and processes we follow in our churches should support the three relationships Paul outlines in Ephesians 4 – allowing leaders to lay foundations, move into mission and equip others for faith and service; encouraging believers to develop their relationship with God; and empowering members to discern and respond to God's leading as they serve together in love and unity. To what extent is your church organised to flourish and grow as God intends it to?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. Read Ephesians 4:1-16. What words does Paul use in this passage to describe a church that is flourishing? What actions does he identify as contributing to those things?
2. How does your church encourage you and others to grow in relationship with Christ? How have you grown in faith and love over the past few years?
3. In what ways do your church's structures and processes help or hinder members to use their gifts to contribute to its life and growth? If you could change a few things about the way your church functions, what would you change?
4. Paul writes about the church growing into maturity marked by unity and Christlikeness. What are some practical steps that you and your fellow members could take to help your church to become more united and Christlike?

Blessings,

Rev David Devine

Head of Church Health & Capacity Building

[1] Israel Galindo, *The Hidden Lives of Congregations: Discerning Church Dynamics*, Herndon, Alban Institute, 2004, 194.



CONGREGATIONAL CHARACTER

PART 4: INNOVATION



BUV Flourishing Churches Devotions Congregational Character Part 4 – Innovation by Christine Wanstall

I wonder sometimes if it can be hard to decide to be innovative. Do you just wake up in the morning and think “Today I am going to innovate”? Or is innovation an expression of our natural personality, so there are some people who are naturally innovative and some who are not?

Developing this article has been an interesting process of unpacking what it means to innovate. We would probably all agree that for a church to flourish we need to innovate, to try new ways of being church, but this can be hard when it seems to disrupt the settled rhythm and cherished traditions of our church life. So, let’s explore some key questions that I have about innovation and how it relates to church life. I figure if I have these questions, then some of you will have them as well.

The word innovation means the act of creating a new method, idea or product or improving something that already exists. It has been defined as ‘change that adds value’. It is generally agreed that in a changing world, businesses can only survive by continually innovating. This happens by improving what they already have and finding new products or markets in which to grow. Apple is a classic success story of constantly innovating and improving their own product.

vation is not a new concept to God. The biblical narrative commences with an act of innovation “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” (Gen 1:1). The gospels remind us that “No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the patch tears away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made..... But new wine is for fresh wineskins.” (Mark 2:21-22). Our Christian life begins with a new birth (Jn 3:3) and our daily walk with Jesus is an ongoing process of innovation as the Holy Spirit improves us each day as we grow as disciples of Jesus (2Cor 3:18).

When we consider innovation in our church life, it seems that this becomes more complicated as we find tension between people who want to pioneer new things and people who prefer to keep things the way they are. We seem to see innovation as disruptive and chaotic but it doesn’t have to be that way. Innovation is actually about inviting our creative God to continue to renew His church. Jesus reminds us that He will build his church (Matt 16:18) and therefore we just need to be willing to cooperate with God in how He wants to do that.

Innovation does need us to be open to new ideas. Our faith and hope in God help us with this. Be encouraged that God is creative and has innovative ways for His church to flourish. As disciples of Jesus, we need to be willing to try new things and risk failure as we follow his leading into innovation.

Our current restrictions have forced us to be innovative and we have many stories of how God has met us in our need. We can take courage and confidence from this in this unusual situation so that when we return to more 'normal' life we can continue to explore different ways of being church.

Let us press into God and allow Him to innovate in our lives and the life of our church.

1. Start on a personal level:
 - How does God want to renovate my heart today?
 - What are the areas of my life that God wants to improve?
 - How can I engage with God as He leads me through this process of change
2. Reflect on your church:
 - Where are the areas in our church that we are seeing life?
 - Are there small improvements we can make to build on this life?
 - Are there parts of our church life that are inhibiting life and growth?
 - How might God be calling us to make changes in those things?
3. Engage with new material or methods of being church:
 - Read some blogs or books written by authors other than your favourites.
 - Make contact with churches that seem to be continually innovating with fruitful outcomes and chat with their leaders – what did they do, how did they do it
4. Make contact with the BUV Church Health and Mission Catalyst to discuss how they might support your church in innovation.
5. As you consider innovations, talk with your church leaders about which ideas you might explore or pioneer and who can help you to do that.

Blessings,

Christine

BUV Church Health Consultant