

9th March 2023

To the GBC Congregation,

Attached you will find the Church Health Consultancy Report, prepared by Mr Andrei Mocanu & Rev. Vivian Grice on behalf of Transform Southern Sydney (TSS).

Marc Rader spoke of a desire early last year to be proactive and investigate the culture of the leadership and church in relation to safety [physical, spiritual, emotional], the exercise of power, the capacity for people to exercise a “voice”, and accountability. As a result, the Church Leadership Team (“CLT”) appointed consultants in May 2022, during Marc’s long service leave. The consultants have repeatedly praised the Church for taking this proactive and preventative approach, rather than it being a reaction to a particular issue or problem.

The consultants used three sources to inform their report: a congregational survey, leadership focus groups; and staff interviews. Their findings and further details on the methodology are contained in the attached report.

The report is overwhelmingly positive and the consultants reflected on this during our final briefing meeting. We are not perfect though and, as we have also demonstrated a strong desire to keep improving, a number of recommendations were made. These can be categorised as staff matters, policy matters and strategic matters.

The CLT will be working through the recommendations, beginning with those related to policy. The full set of recommendations are not included in this report but can be released should anyone wish to see them. This is to allow the CLT time to work through the recommendations and determine how, when and in which order to proceed.

In line with the recommendations, there will be an opportunity for those interested to ask questions or make comments. That day will be after Easter and the school holidays: Sunday, April 23 after our morning service and before the evening. More information to come.

It has been an exciting process to be involved in and very encouraging to see a staff willing to engage courageously and openly as well as a Church community so keen to contribute. Please pray that God will show us how to use this report to make GBC a place where all feel safe as they engage with us on their journey of Faith.

Regards

Susan Kusch

(on behalf of the CLT)



Church Health Consultancy Report

Gymea Baptist Church

February 2023

Consultants: Mr Andrei Mocanu & Rev. Vivian Grice

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Introduction

Dear Church Leadership Team,

Thank you for the invitation to partner with you and the Gymea Baptist Church (GBC) in a Church Health Consultancy. We have been made to feel very welcome and are very grateful for the cooperation everyone at GBC has provided. We would also like to thank you for the trust and transparency shown by everyone involved.

Vivian and I are both trained consultants with the Baptist Association and more specifically with Transform Southern Sydney. I am on the leadership team at Georges River Life Church and work part-time as a Church Health Facilitator for Transform Southern Sydney. It has been my privilege to be able to focus my time and energy in helping other churches through varied consultancies.

Vivian is an accredited Baptist pastor. In his semi-retirement he works in professional pastoral supervision of ministers from a number of denominations and also serving as Pastoral Care Pastor at Menai Baptist Church. He also conducts training for intentional interim ministry with churches in transition.

We have been supervised by Rev. Tim Burns, who is the team leader for the Baptist Association's Church Health Team, and we are grateful to him for the advice he has given.

We present this Consultancy Report and Recommendations, trusting that the Lord will use it to further bless the ministry, and witness of His people in Gymea and the surrounding area.

Andrei Mocanu & Vivian Grice

Background

In April 2022, Marc Rader, senior pastor at Gynea Baptist Church [GBC] requested the Baptist Association of NSW/ACT [BA] Consultancy Team to conduct a proactive¹ consultancy. It had the purpose of looking at the culture of the leadership and church as a whole in relation to safety [physical, spiritual, emotional], the exercise of power, the capacity for people to exercise a “voice”, and accountability.

In late May two consultants were appointed: Andrei Mocanu and Vivian Grice.

It is important to note that this was a *proactive, preventative* consultancy, rather than a *reactive* one responding to an identified difficulty. That is, the consultancy was requested by the senior pastor and the Church Leadership Team [CLT] to ensure that the church’s culture, processes, policies and actual operation supported a safe and biblically-aligned environment for all.

In particular, in the light of recent notable leadership failures by well-known Christian pastors, the staff and CLT desired to examine the GBC culture to make sure it did not inadvertently enable such failures through a lack of appropriate accountability, or how power was exercised.

The lead pastor and other staff, along with the CLT are to be commended for this proactive approach.

Between June 2022 and February 2023 the consultancy was developed and conducted with the full co-operation of the pastoral team, other staff, key stakeholders and the wider congregation. The process and methodologies are outlined more fully below.

Objectives

On 15 June 2022, the consultants met with the CLT to clarify specific objectives for the consultancy. In light of that discussion, the following objectives framed by the consultants were confirmed by the CLT:

- 1. To assess the formal and informal culture of GBC around issues of:**
 - a. Safety**
 - b. Voice**
 - c. Agency**
 - d. Power**
 - e. Accountability**
- 2. To identify a process for regular checks on culture in line with objective 1.**
- 3. To recommend themes in regard to the above objectives that may benefit from further reflection within the context of GBC.**

¹ While the consultants commend the CLT and staff for initiating this consultancy, and do view it as “proactive”, there was a small handful of those in the survey who indicated that the idea of “proactivity” was “jarring” to them given their awareness that there was a previous case of staff misconduct that they felt was handled poorly.

Outline of the consultation process

Timeline

2022 May	Initial meetings
2022 Jun – Jul	Finalise objectives
2022 Jul	Planning of the consultancy process by the consultants
2022 Aug	Meeting with the Senior Pastor to discuss the implementation of the processes agreed upon
2022 Sep	Drafting of church-wide survey, interview and focus group questions
2022 Oct – Nov	Distribution of church-wide survey, interviews of staff, conducting focus groups
2022 Nov – Dec	Analysis of data
2023 Jan – Feb	Drafting of the report and presentation to CLT

Methodologies for data gathering

The consultants decided, and the CLT agreed upon, the methodologies outlined below for gathering data. The methodologies were selected in an effort to gain as wide a perspective as possible from the congregation regarding the themes identified for examination. In short, the consultants believed that the methodologies ought to provide avenues for congregational members, as well as staff, to exercise “voice” and “power” on these matters, two of the very themes identified for examination. The validity of methods selected were checked through input from another highly experienced church consultant from outside the BA.

Four key methods were used:

1. an **anonymous church-wide survey** available electronically or in hard copy. The survey sought both quantitative and qualitative information.
 - a. 153 persons completed the survey
2. a set of **interview questions** used with all pastors and other staff in one-on-one conversations.
 - a. 10 of the 11 pastoral and administrative staff were interviewed. The majority of staff have also completed the anonymous survey.
3. a set of questions seeking feedback from **focus groups** composed of key leaders and stakeholders.
 - a. 17 people attended the focus groups, divided into three table groups. The process started with individual (silent) consideration, then group discussion that was recorded at each table, and finally reporting back in the whole group format.
4. review by the consultants of existing relevant **policy and procedures documents**.

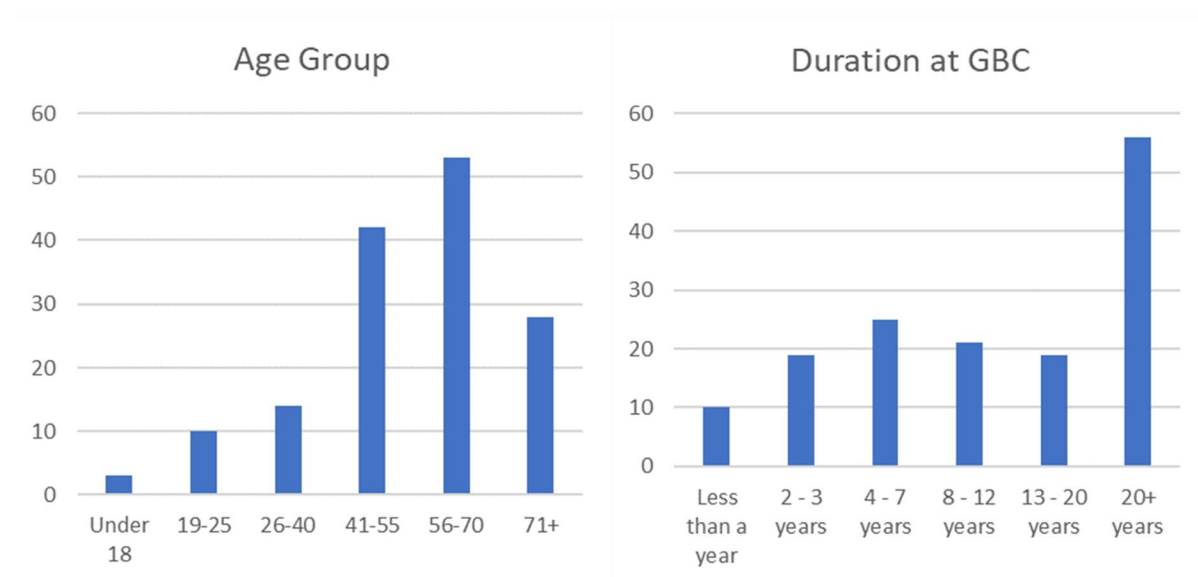
Information provided by GBC leadership

- Size of the congregation and some demographics
- Details of main ministries and their groupings
- Organisational chart
- Policies and procedures
 - GBC Safe Church Policy
 - GBC Safe Church Code of Conduct - Levels One to Three
 - GBC CLT Policy Manual
 - Anti-Discrimination Procedure
 - Affirmative Action Procedure
 - Sexual Harassment Procedure
 - Bullying Procedure
 - Dispute Resolution Procedure
 - Conflict of Interest Procedure
 - Safe Church Procedure
 - Child Safety Procedure

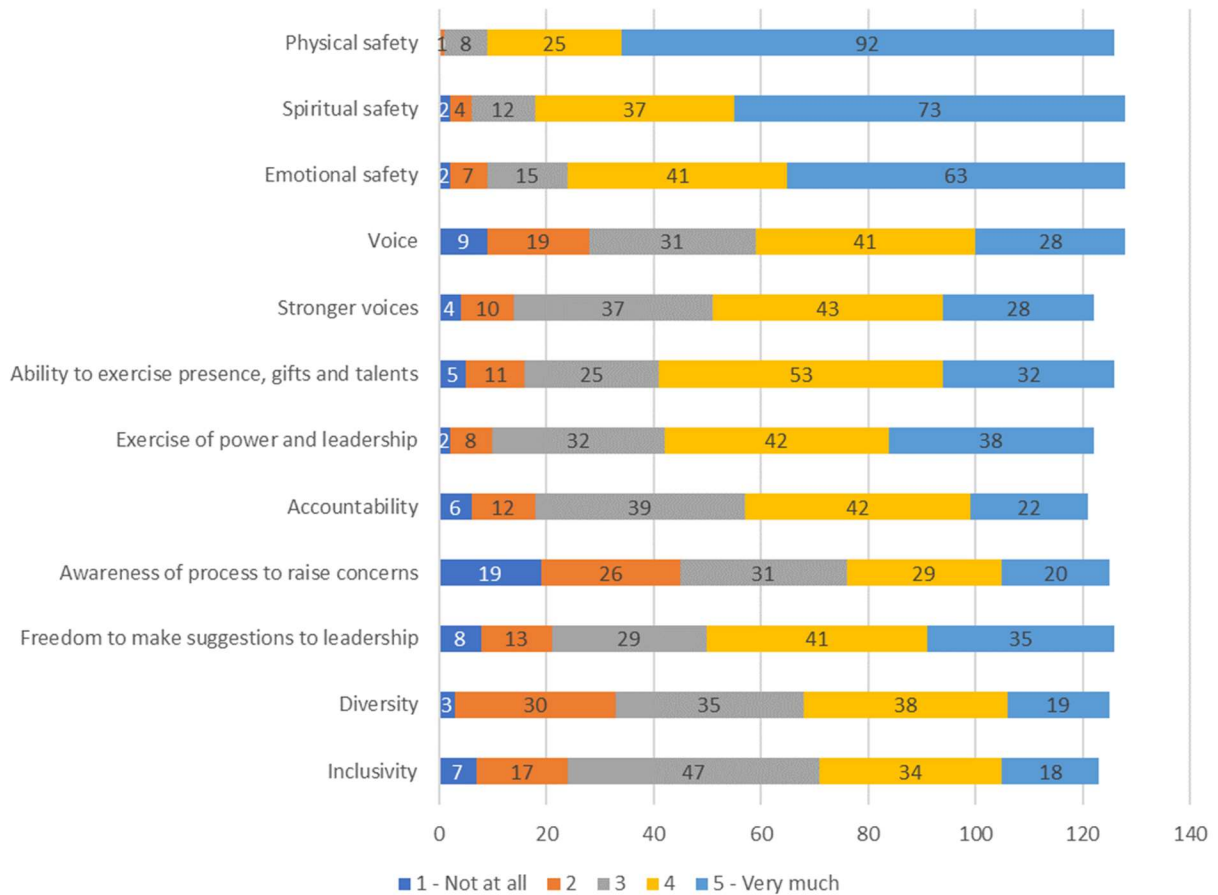
Overview of Survey Quantitative Results regarding Key Themes

There were 153 survey submissions, which is a representative data sample given the size of the congregation.

Some demographic information to note:



Participants were asked to rate their response to the issues on a scale of 1 - 5, where 1 = **not at all**, and 5 = **very much**. Below is a summary to the scaled questions:



Some further data points that we worth noting:

- The answers to the question of gender were 83 female, 65 male, 2 “I’d rather not specify” and 3 which skipped the question
- 66% of survey respondents are involved in a ministry
- For the questions that required rating from 1 and 5, between 25 and 32 people did not answer, the precise number varying by question
- To the question that asked respondents about one thing they would like to change about the overall culture especially in regard to the exercise of power, influence and accountability, 61 respondents had specific suggestions and 83 skipped the question

Observations and reflections

Pleasingly, there was a very wide engagement by the church in the survey. This resulted in a large amount of diverse data, especially qualitative data. However, as with any broadly sourced feedback, there will be varying and sometimes contradictory comments, viewpoints, opinions, perceptions, positions and ideas for solutions. This was certainly the case on this occasion.

So, the observations made below result from efforts by the consultants to identify **key recurring themes** and ideas in an attempt to provide a broadly accurate picture of the data received. They are not an attempt to provide an exhaustive list of all that was said or every view that was enunciated. Extreme or outlying views have not been included in these observations. Rather, the observations reflect themes mentioned repeatedly across all three sources of the data gathered: interviews, survey and focus groups. Such quotations as do appear are to be read as representative of the many other comments we could have utilised.

Areas to celebrate

Staff:

- the positive willingness of staff and congregation to participate honestly in the consultancy
- the SP and staff are generally held in high regard as people of integrity and competence by a majority of the congregation
- the staff generally find GBC a positive place to work
- the staff expressed genuine care for each other
- the staff enjoy their roles
- the staff see what they do as being valued
- the staff are a hardworking ministry team
- the staff are seen as gifted

Two quite representative comments:

- *"I feel everyone on the staff team values my role and what I do"*
- *"Pretty friendly, generally ok, no major issues. Occasional frustrations which would be normal within a workplace."*

Senior Pastor

- generally held in high regard by other team members
- affirmation of his character
- has a strong voice, though not seen as handling power abusively
- respect ["awe"] for his skill and competence
- generally seen as approachable by other team members

A generally positive assessment of GBC's culture² regarding the themes in Objective 1

- All aspects of safety were rated highly by the congregation
- A broad view that people could exercise their gifts and talents, yet as noted further in the report, there is a need for a clear pathway discover and exercise gifts
- Leadership is generally seen to exercise power appropriately
- Most people indicated a freedom to make suggestions, though this perception was more muted and some barriers were identified (explored later in the report)

² For "culture" the phrase "how we do things around here" can be generally substituted.

Examples of the kind of comments commonly expressed about these areas are:

- “I am encouraged but not pressured.”
- “I feel incredibly safe coming from a couple of spiritually abusive scenarios. I have been heard and note the careful way Marc in particular articulates this in various scenarios.”

Generally adequate policies and procedures

- Policies adequately covered areas required for compliance and general church “safety”
- The wording of policies was generally clear

Willing engagement of the staff and congregation to examine culture

- Positive support and widespread engagement in this consultancy
- Openness to reflect on culture with external facilitators
- Keeness to see the outcomes of the consultancy made known

Commonly expressed concerns and areas for further reflection

Accountability for poor behaviour and exercise of power

At both staff (interviews) and general congregational level (survey), a repeated view was that accountability for poor behaviour, inadequate performance or inappropriate exercise of power should be strengthened. Some spoke of historical issues where people were not held to account on serious matters. Further, there was a general view that the culture at GBC, in both staff and CLT, evidenced some avoidance or weakness in the area of accountability, especially with more “informal” and lower- level practice of keeping people accountable.

Awareness of Process to Raise Concerns About Those in Leadership

While there may be processes in place, a solid percentage of people had a relatively low level of clarity around how to raise any concerns they had.

A Culture of Fast Paced Busyness, Action and “Get It Done”

This was particularly expressed by staff team members. Consequences of this culture were identified as:

- Lack of time for “hearing from” the team
- Lack of time for evaluation
- Lack of time for reflection
- Lack of time for celebration
- Hindrances to effective communication

Another comment was that GBC “can be a little bit quick to try and discard things”.

A Sense of “Nothing Changes” and Not Really Being Listened To

Quite repeatedly the view was expressed in the survey that although representations to leadership had been made about various issues, frequently little action resulted. Or, if action did result or there was a valid reason for inaction, these things were not communicated adequately back to people. This generally relates to the issue of having a “voice” at GBC. There was a sense of being asked for input but that barriers existed. Examples of this included:

- decisions made at the top by dominant and skilled voices though congregational opinions were sought
- suggestions not taken up

- staff overload
- a sense that voicing concerns was a “no-no”
- having avenues to express a voice.

Possible Conflict-Avoidant Culture

From both interview and survey the view was expressed regularly enough that, although generally it was okay to raise difficult issues, GBC tended to avoid conflict (which is far from uncommon in Christian churches) rather than have difficult conversations when they were needed. There was a tendency to “work around” rather than “confront”. This links to the concerns around a weakness in the area of accountability touched on above.

The Need for Greater Clarity (Including Visibility)

This was found in a number of aspects of the GBC culture, including:

- varying perceptions among senior staff as to who has input
- lack of clarity around how access to SP is overseen/controlled
- avenues for voicing complaints or ideas
- results of viewpoints expressed or decisions taken
- lack of clarity about what feedback is required from staff by the SP
- pathways for how to exercise gifts
- how some decisions are made
- who has responsibility for certain areas

Communication

It is common for the leadership of organisations to believe they are communicating effectively and sufficiently when that might not be the case. This theme emerged across various dimensions of the data (safety, voice, staff functioning, exercising gifts, power, accountability, making suggestions), touching on modes of communication (e.g., use of CAPS in emails feels like shouting at people) and effectiveness (e.g., lack of awareness of policies/processes). Examples include:

- a perception that emails to staff were not always answered or responses were delayed (in some views the delays were significant)
- lack of clear, repeated and regularly communicated channels for expressing concerns, complaints
- sense of “not being heard” when there was a lack of follow through
- a more structured flow of communication processes in staff team

Power, Voice and Agency

While overall there is confidence in the way that power is handled at GBC, there is not universal confidence that it is operating optimally, especially when it comes to allowing room and “pace” for creativity, reflection, celebration. This emerged in staff interviews and survey in such comments as:

- the limited time for creativity due to “pace” and the work demands
- the capacity, competence and “speed” of the SP can create an atmosphere that (unintentionally) disempowers creativity of other voices; the SP himself sees that “my voice is too loud, my thumb too heavy”
- SP presides over church meetings

Some Voices Seen as Louder and More Influential

Nearly 60% of respondents rated as 4-5 the sense that there were stronger voices at GBC, sometimes seen as unhelpfully so. While many said that it was quite normal in any organisation for

voices to be louder from some due to things such as personality, proximity to leadership, level of commitment, skill, etc., this remains a concern. Some held the view that those who had been at GBC longer had an overly powerful voice in shaping the church's life and future. Sometimes phrases were used such as "favourite people" "cliquey", "only a few voices ...", "inner team", "inner circle".

Language used by the staff quite possibly contributes to this: e.g., "senior vs junior staff", "pastors vs staff", "stakeholders". These may give [possibly falsely], a perception of skewed power. The perception that GBC is a "legacy church" may also grant more power and privilege to those that have been much longer in the congregation.

Diversity and Inclusion

There was a commonly expressed desire for growth in these domains but also an awareness of significant room for improvement.

Pastoral Care

While this was expressed only by a minority of respondents, it did emerge across a number of comments that pastoral care seemed to be less personal and active in recent years.

Additional observations and questions by consultants

Part-Time Staff

There is a component of having so many part-time staff that contributes to complexities of communication and clarity around matters such as accountability, responsibility and accessibility. As a result, extra effort is needed to maximise team cohesion.

Modes of Communication

Is there too heavy a reliance upon electronic forms of communication rather than more directly relational ones? This may exacerbate a sense of disconnect for a minority of people, especially those in older cohorts.

Effectiveness of operational structure and staff roles

The organisation seems to have grown to a point where it is putting pressure on current operational systems. Some of the issues / observations / symptoms mentioned could be amplified by this dynamic rather than being purely a cultural factor. Examples of these include:

- Some staff members' PDs having a significant number of areas of responsibility that are not tightly linked
- Staff taking on roles and functions not always reflective of their PDs for a variety of reasons
- In light of new team members, the impact of COVID and the impact of pace, more attention needs to be given to formal team formation and development.