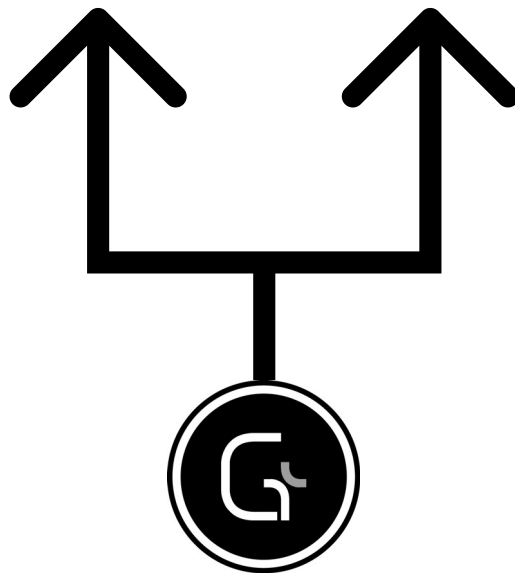


OUR JOURNEY TOWARDS TWO GATHERINGS

Tim Clemens



This document is designed to give a fairly detailed (though not exhaustive) account of why we are going to become a church with two gatherings, when in the next year this will take place, and what times they will each meet. My hope and prayer is that it brings an appreciation of the reasons behind the decision, some encouragement from the way that these decisions were made, and most of all, excitement for the journey ahead.

*The plan is that in **October 2018** we will close our 10am service and start two new services in its place: one at **9am** and the other at **11am**.*

So... how did we end up with this decision?

There are two approaches that I could take in answering this question:

1. To outline a summary of our reasons for doing this and leave it there. I suspect this would be sufficient for many of us, particularly those who have joined us more recently and are really only hearing about these plans now.
2. To describe the three stage journey that I and the leadership team have been on over the last 12 months that finally led us to settle on this decision.

This document takes the second approach. I think there are many people in our church who would love (and deserve) a more detailed explanation. After all, not only did I first suggest that we'd start the new service in October 2017 (an entire year earlier than we're actually going to do it), but many of our members have provided valuable input and feedback along the way that influenced our decision to push back the start date and I feel this should be communicated

As I said above, the decision-making process has been a three stage journey:

Stage 1- October 2016

In week one of the *Passionate Church* series last year, and then in the 2016 Annual Report, I boldly declared that our one big goal for the next 12 months would be:

To plant a second congregation on site in October 2017 with a launch team of at least 40 adults focused on reaching 20-40 year olds living, working or studying in and around Green Square and the City South.

In hindsight, I think that may not have been a wise announcement, in the Proverbs sense of the word. In Proverbs, wisdom starts with the fear of the Lord, but it's also about paying attention to and living in light of the order that God has placed into his

world. The unwise person ignores this order to his or her own peril and so this is the sense in which I think the announcement was not wise. Having said that, I think it is helpful to describe the heart behind the announcement.

The heart behind the October 2016 announcement was our burning desire to see thousands of disciples throughout Sydney and beyond radically committed to the cause of Christ. In case you missed it, that's our vision as a church! But we didn't just want to start a new service because our vision said we had to. The vision itself is fuelled and shaped by some deeper convictions that we have as a church.

Four are worth mentioning explicitly:

- 1. Harvest Sized** - our vision as a church is set by the size of the harvest, not the size of our barn. A barn sized vision looks at an auditorium and says, 'Our goal is to fill this room. Once we're done, we can kick back and take it easy'. A harvest sized vision looks out at the world and asks, 'What do we need to do to reach as many people as possible?' That's why our prayer has always been to see 1000's of disciples throughout Sydney and beyond.
- 2. Eternal Realities** - heaven and hell are pretty awkward topics to talk about, however Jesus seemed pretty confident that both were real. In fact, he urged and pleaded with people to do whatever was necessary to escape hell and enter heaven. So let me be clear, while Christianity is not just a 'get out of hell free' card, and this life is not just a waiting room for heaven, the fact that people will spend eternity in one or the other is a reality we cannot ignore. Our prayer has always been that God would use our church to change as many eternities as possible.
- 3. Deep Discipleship** - large churches are not always deep churches. We want to be different. When Jesus commissioned his Apostles to make disciples of all nations, he told them not just to baptise, but to 'teach them to obey everything I have commanded you' (Matt 28:20). Our desire is not just to get people in the front door of the Kingdom, but to teach and grow them! We don't want little shoots that spring up and wither when things get hard, but giant oak-like disciples who can weather the fiercest storm and still say, 'it is well with my soul'.
- 4. Radical Commitment** - a lot of Australian Christianity is comfortable, middle class, 'don't impact my life' kind of stuff. It's limp and pathetic. That's not biblical Christianity. Jesus called his followers to deny themselves, take up their crosses daily, and follow him. Our prayer has always been that men, women and children would be so captured by the cause of Christ that they would joyfully pour themselves out to love their church deeply and serve their city boldly, even at great cost to themselves.

These are the convictions that led us to want to start a new service. So let me say it again. Even though I now think it may not have been a wise announcement, I remain firmly convinced that the heart behind it was (and continues to be) right. At Grace City we are passionate about making deep disciples of Jesus in ever increasing numbers and I felt that starting a new service would increase our capacity to do just that.

Why was it an unwise announcement?

There are three interrelated reasons that I now think this was a little unwise to make this announcement:

1. The rule of critical mass

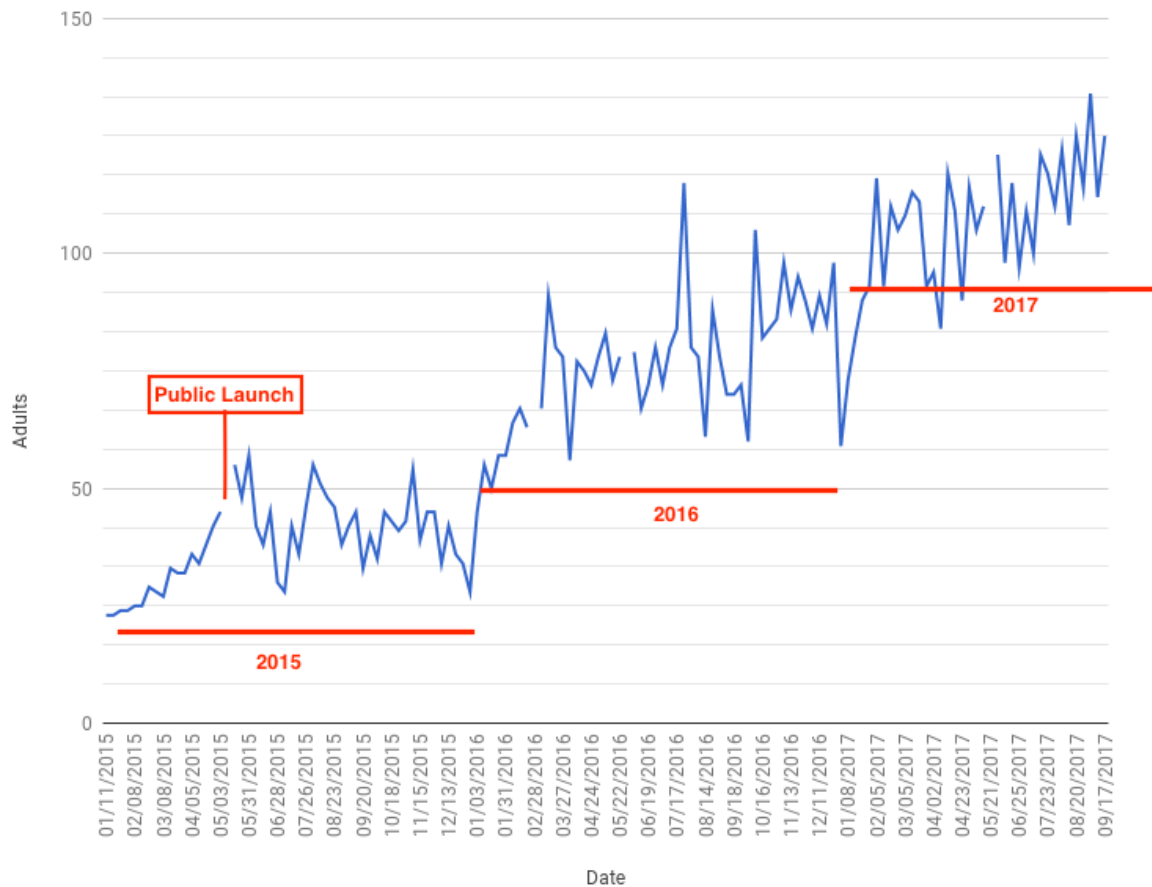
In my original announcement I suggested that a new service could be planted with 40 people, however it is widely documented that for a new church or new service to be successful, it needs to begin with a critical mass of people. While the literature tends to differ somewhat over what the actual figure for 'critical mass' really is (some suggest as high as 200!), it *never* drops below 50. I should have remembered this! Charles Arn writes:

'Fifty people seems to be the minimum number for insuring a successful new service, regardless of any other variable. To put it simply, most new services that begin with less than fifty people don't survive the first year. Most new services that begin with more than fifty people do survive.'¹

It's worth saying, when Grace City started we did so with *less than 50 people*. Now this certainly wasn't our desire, it was just that we couldn't get more people to join us before we started. On the one hand, you could say 'Ha! That disproves the rule!' On the other hand, I think it is probably safer to assume that we are the fortunate exception that proves the rule. In fact, even though we did start growing eventually, our first year together as a church was really quite slow. Most of the people who visited us in that first year (both Christian and non-Christians alike), just didn't stick around. You can see this illustrated in our normalized attendance graph below:

¹ Arn, "How to start a new service," 186. (1997)

Normalised Adult Attendance Since Inception



Interestingly, once our average attendance finally *did* break that critical mass barrier of 50 on a regular basis, we started to see steady growth from month to month. Now to be fair, there were other factors at play here. For example, not only were we heavily disrupted by having to move locations twice in 2015, we also gained a big leg up in February 2016 when we moved into our church building. We will never know how much these factors either limited or aided our ability to gain traction with the Christians and non-Christians alike who visited us. Nevertheless, I remain convinced that a significant factor that inhibited our ability to retain new people in 2015 was that we just didn't have a critical mass of people.

So why is this 'critical mass' thing so significant? Well, again, there is no exact science, but let me offer some possible answers:

- **Visitor expectations** - at least in the West, most people expect a church to be over 50 adults in size. Any smaller than this and it feels like you are intruding on a family event or large bible study. In short, a church of under 50 people cannot meet the unspoken social contract of what a church is supposed to be and offer. This means that when a visitor or new person comes along, there is an immediate disconnect between what they were expecting and what the church actually is. It's

also far more difficult for a new person to blend in. They tend to stick out like a sore thumb, which can be offputting for the person who just wants to take things slowly.

- **Ministry resourcing** - this is related to point one above, but the less people you have at a service, the less ministries you can typically offer. Again, this makes it difficult to meet the social contract. For example, a church with less than 50 people just can't consistently offer an engaging service, a great kids ministry, and a welcoming community experience before and after church. In fact, *it's still pretty hard to do this with 50 people*, particularly with the kind of resource heavy operation that we run at Grace City! It's obviously not impossible (as we know from experience), but it does require a fair degree of commitment from the initial launch team and a willingness to go hard for a season while you wait for new members to join the church and start serving.
- **Member burnout** - one of the primary reasons that small services end up closing down so soon after they launch is that the launch team burns out. The smaller the launch team, the less people there are to carry the burden of serving in all the ministries that a church should and is expected to provide. This is sustainable for a season, but not forever. Therefore, the smaller the initial team, the longer it will take to reach critical mass and start growing, and thus the longer the initial team will be called on to go hard. While it's right for us to go hard for God's kingdom, the wise church will try to avoid starting a new service without critical mass so as to care for and protect its members.
- **Morale and momentum** - there is also something about a gathering of 50 or more people that makes the experience of attending it and belonging to it quite powerful. When there are less than 50 people around, people tend to wonder, 'Where is everyone?', or, 'What's wrong with this group that so few people belong to it?' On the other hand, when a critical mass of people gathers, there is a contagious sense that something powerful is happening, which new people want to be a part of. Again, this is not an exact science, and we can't discount the power of God's Spirit to work through *any* environment, but our own growth patterns would strongly suggest that it would be foolish to ignore this dynamic entirely.

So in short, the first reason I think the announcement was unwise is that 40 adults probably isn't enough to start a new service. Now of course, if we'd gone ahead with the plan, God could have (and may well have!) blessed our efforts and enabled us to reach new people anyway, but it probably wouldn't have been the *wisest* move.

OK... so why didn't we just decide to start the new service with 50 or 60 people? Wouldn't that (under God) give it a greater opportunity for success and save our

members from an otherwise unnecessary burden? Yes, but this is also where the second and related reason comes in.

2. Threatening the health of our existing gathering

The second reason I think it was an unwise announcement is that even if we *did* decide to start the second service with 50-60 people (the minimum needed to achieve critical mass), doing so in October 2017 probably would have threatened the health of our existing gathering. After all, while God has brought some remarkable growth to our church over the last 12 months (through both existing and new Christians), we haven't really grow *enough* to be able to start an entirely new service and keep running our present service in the way that we currently do.

For example, over the last term our average attendance was 116 adults, which was roughly the same as our adult membership (109). If we started a second service now, it could have left us with two pretty small gatherings (about 55 in each). Again, if we'd gone ahead and just done it, God could have (and may well have!) blessed our efforts and helped us to reach more people anyway, but trying to start a new gathering when our present gathering is still relatively small just probably wouldn't have been the wisest move.

3. Unclear terminology

The third and final reason I think it was an unwise announcement is that by phrasing it as 'planting a second congregation' I probably unhelpfully set the expectation that we would be starting an entirely separate service in the afternoon/evening. While this was certainly a possibility at the time (and continued to be a possibility until the very end), it failed to communicate that an equally valid option was to close our 10am service and start two new services at 9am & 11am in its place.

Stage 2- June 2017

It wasn't until about June this year that we really began to appreciate the risks of the October 2016 announcement. As a result, we decided the wisest action was to postpone starting our second service until February 2018. Remember, I use 'wise' not in the right vs wrong sense, but in a sense that the wise person pays attention to the order and patterns that God has built into his world.

Why February 2018?

There are two reasons we thought February 2017 was probably the wisest time to start our second service:

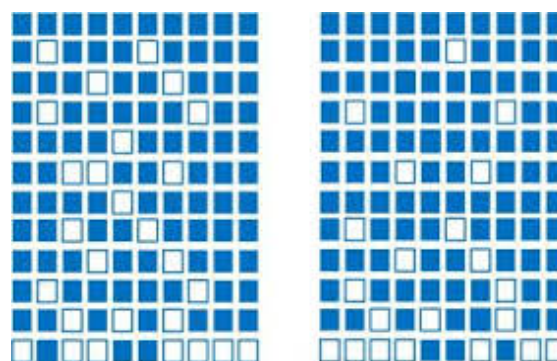
1. Church growth and the calendar year

Most experts suggest that the two best times of the year to start something new in a church are October and February. This is because (1) they tend to give you the longest growth periods before the next predictable attendance slump (i.e. January [when lots of people go on holidays] and Winter [when people tend to get sick more often]) and (2) starting something new in a growth period gives the new thing the best opportunity under God to succeed. As a general rule, October is better than February (which was why we originally wanted to start the new service in October), but February isn't bad either. As an aside, it was encouraging to see that in 2017 (unlike 2016) we defied the usual 'winter slump' and managed to reach increasing numbers of people in both term 2 and term 3.

2. The 80% rule of building capacity

We were concerned that our building would be close to 80% capacity by February 2018. It is widely documented that once a church fills its building to about 80% capacity, it's growth will be significantly constrained, and unless addressed quickly, will eventually cease. While a church building may fill beyond 80% capacity for a time, unless you create more space (either by building a bigger auditorium, moving to a new auditorium, or by taking people out of the auditorium to start a new gathering), then it will eventually drop back down to about 80% capacity.

The image below gives a visual representation of what being filled to 80% capacity would actually look like. This auditorium is a little larger than ours, but notice that it looks (and would feel) pretty full!



240 seats with 48 vacant (80%)

Practically, this 'rule' means that we should start a second gathering around the time that our building reaches 80% capacity if we don't want to let it prevent us from reaching more lost people.

In summary, in June 2017 our thinking was that because we can presently fit about 190 seats in our auditorium, it meant that 80% capacity would be 150 adults. Since

our attendance tends to fluctuate by about 30 adults, we would probably be hitting highs of 150 when our average attendance was about 135. Given that we still had two probable growth periods ahead of us (our 4th term Commitment Series and the New Year), we estimated that we would probably be averaging about 135 adults by February 2018. If that was the case, then in our high weeks we would probably be at about 80% capacity. Again, this is why we felt like February 2018 was a wise time to start the second service.

Why two morning services?

This one was a bit of a doozy, particularly since the double morning probably wasn't the obvious or expected option for most of us. After a lot of discussion, we narrowed it down to what we felt were two good (though imperfect) options. Although both had pros and cons, we felt like both could *probably* work. However we also felt that the double morning probably had the most manageable weaknesses and under God would likely give us the best long term consequences. As you can see, there's a fair bit of '*probably*' in there. At the end of the day, we can't know the future, but we thought, talked and prayed about it *a lot*, and the double morning was where we landed.

In what follows, I'm going to give you the thinking behind the decision to have two morning services. As you read it, remember that in the end we've actually decided to defer things until October 2018 (for reasons I'll explain in **Stage 3**). That being said, my hope is that by seeing some of the pressure points of both options, you might get an insight into (1) the pros and cons of each scenario and (2) why we've ultimately decided that it's worth waiting until October 2018.

The two options I want to discuss in this document are:

Option 1: 10am & 4pm

OR

Option 2: 9am & 11am

While framing the options like this is technically correct in the short term, it unhelpfully masks some of the longer term challenges of option 1, and likewise probably magnifies some of the short term challenges of option 2. It is therefore important to consider the pros and cons of each option in light of our medium term plan.

So what's the medium term plan?

Remember the vision; thousands of disciples throughout Sydney and beyond. We want to reach the lost and grow them into deep disciples! Therefore, the medium

term goal is not just to transition to be a church with *two* gatherings, but eventually, to leverage our auditorium until we have as many gatherings as we have time slots available. After all, that's what we need to do to reach more people!

Most likely, that will look like a church with *four* gatherings at 9am, 11am, 4pm, and 7pm (or something like that). Therefore, the question we have to consider is not *whether* to start an evening service or a second morning service; under God we expect both of those things to happen eventually! Rather, the question we have to wrestle through is in *what order* we should do them.

For this reason, we felt the more helpful way to view the options were:

- **Option 1:** Start a new 4pm service with a kids program first, and then transition our 10 service into two 9am & 11am services in a few years time.
- **Option 2:** Transition our 10am service into a 9am & 11am service now, and then start a new 7pm service without a kids program in a few years time.

Or for the sake of simplicity:

Option 1: 4pm, followed by 9am & 11am

OR

Option 2: 9am & 11am, followed by 7pm

We felt it was absolutely critical that we kept this 'two step' process in mind when weighing the pros and cons of each option. Unless we raise the money to renovate and move into a bigger building asap, at *some* point in the next few years we're going to need to run 2 services in the morning. After all, we want to keep reaching people and so we expect our morning gathering will continue to grow! Therefore, the strength of option 1 is *not* that it maintains the 10am service as it is, but that it extends by 2-3 years (max!) the need to change it to 2 services.

With that in mind, let's take a look at what we felt were the potential strengths and weaknesses and the potential ways to manage the risks of each option.

Option 1. 4pm, followed by 9am & 11am

Strengths

- If we can manage to start the 4pm service with a decent sized critical mass, it's probable that we will pick up some quick mission wins with people from the community joining us who we wouldn't otherwise get if we started a second morning service (since they may not be able to make a morning service). This

would help to reinforce the missional nature and priority of our church. It's worth saying, however, that we are probably going to enjoy these quick wins *whenever* we start an evening service. It may be that we think these 'quick wins' are more strategic for us now, but *that* we will get them eventually seems pretty likely.

- An evening service is *probably* going to attract more uni students and young professionals (either single or married without kids) with a little more discretionary time on their hands than a morning service. If this *is* the case, growing an evening congregation first might give us a slightly larger pool of enthusiastic young servants to help us pull off our two morning services when the time comes to make that transition. In this strategy, we would effectively be asking these HCLs (high capacity leaders) to attend their service in the evening, and then help serve in the morning as well.
- A benefit of starting a 4pm congregation first is that we allow our present 10am congregation to continue to experience community time in the cafe area after the service. While we will have to take this away eventually, allowing it to continue for another two years or so could really help the relationships in that community to strengthen to a point where starting two services will be painful, but won't completely dislocate people relationally. Rather, they may be able to minister to others from a position of confidence, knowing that they are secure in their own relationships.
- While we would still be wanting 60 or so people to leave their old gathering and (to some degree) relationships behind to start a new 4pm gathering, those who do this would be 'opting in' to the decision as missionaries rather than feeling like church was forcing it upon them.

Weaknesses

- If we *failed* to get critical mass in the evening, then the burden on our 4pm ministry teams would be much greater and extend for a longer period of time. This would put them at greater risk of burnout and the 4pm service at greater risk of failure, as outlined in the 'critical mass' section above.
- If we *successfully* start 4pm with a critical mass of people, the people who start this service are probably more likely to be our young and energetic crowd (since they are more easily mobile). Most likely, this would also leave many of our parents in the morning service. Given our young parents already find it difficult to serve regularly, we may actually find ourselves unable to continue running 10am as effectively as we'd like, thus threatening our ability to keep reaching people in the morning.

- Similar to the idea above, if 4pm is seen as the ‘new and exciting’ thing that church is doing, it leaves those who remain behind at 10am feeling as if they are old news. This was the experience of another church plant that we are close with, who planted a new 4pm service out of their morning service a few years ago.
- It would significantly limit our musical capabilities at *both* services. In short, we would be splitting an already small band in two, thus disabling their ability to achieve even a reduced version of our present music experience at either. It’s worth saying that our music will take a hit in *both* options, but the hit would be significantly greater in option 1.
- The more comfortable and used to (a) the 10am time slot, (b) the uninterrupted community time after service, and (c) our present ministry systems, that we allow people to become, the more painful it will be when we are forced to take them away in 2-3 years time. By allowing people to enjoy this ‘false promise’ for longer, we may actually be causing them more pain in the long run. In short, while it’s possible that this approach defers the pain (with the hope that people are better equipped to endure it in a few years time), it’s also possible that it will just intensify the pain when we do have to experience it.

How can we minimize the risks?

- We could wait until October 2018 to start 4pm. This will enable us to continue growing such that we can have far more likelihood of getting critical mass at 4pm, whilst continuing to ensure we leave enough people at 10 am to keep it running effectively.
- Carefully hand pick a team of 50-60 people that we want to start 4pm (not just the ‘young ones’, but a broad cross section of our current members), and firmly request that everybody else from our 10am gathering remain behind to keep it running and reaching people.
- Protect the 10am congregation from feeling like the forgotten child by re-visioning them and helping them to get excited about the new opportunity that they will have to step up and lead, serve harder, and build connections with the lost.
- Consider starting a 7pm gathering without kids, rather than a 4pm with kids. This would make it less resource intensive, more likely to pull in HCLs, and pick up the quick mission wins of an entirely different focus more easily. An obvious weakness of this is that it not only has the potential to gut our morning church of young life, but also means our morning kids programs will be in danger of getting too big for the rooms we have available.

Option 2. 9am & 11am followed by 7pm

Strengths

- This is probably the most likely scenario to ensure that we get critical mass at *both* services, given we're only asking people to move an hour either side of 10am. It's also more likely that each gathering would be larger, since we'd be asking for a team of people to consider 'serving one and attending one' or to do 'double-duty' and serve at both (like our bands). While we might get *some* people to do this if we go with the 10am & 4pm option, it's unlikely to be anywhere near as many.
- If we achieve higher average attendance at two morning gatherings (for the reasons outlined above), our overall growth as a church is also likely to be faster if we run two morning gatherings (since critical mass builds momentum, which helps us reach more people). If this *was* the case, then it would actually enable us to ease the increased ministry burden at both services more quickly. Furthermore, such a scenario would probably get us to three services (i.e. 9am, 11am & 7pm) more quickly than if we started 4pm first.
- Because we wouldn't be changing our times dramatically, it's probably also easier in this scenario to keep some of the 'young life' in each gathering, thus protecting one gathering from being gutted of enthusiasm and feeling like the 'boring older brother'.
- This scenario would likely allow us to grow to the point where we have enough people at both morning gatherings to confidently start an evening gathering with critical mass in a few years time. By that stage, it would be easier to ensure that starting an evening gathering wouldn't threaten the health of our morning congregations. For example, if we had two morning congregations of 135, we would only need 35 people from each gathering to start a new evening congregation of 70. This would leave 100 or more people behind at each gathering to ensure that both remain strong.
- By closing our one gathering at 10am, and starting two new gatherings at 9am and 11am, it enables *everyone* to feel like they're a part of something new. The obvious downside of this is that we would be forcing *everyone* to make a change, but at least nobody would feel like they'd been left behind.
- While our music will still take a hit in this approach, it does give us the best shot at maintaining musical excellence across both services. We simply don't have the musicians to maintain our current 2 bands structure and expect them to play across both morning services 50% of the time. That being said, we *could* maintain a reduced version of our current music experience in 2 morning services by shifting to 4 smaller bands, and asking our musicians to play across both services 25% of the time. By having the full spectrum of musicians to choose from, we could actually create 4 smaller bands whose instruments all compliment each other and work together effectively. This

option wouldn't work with two entirely separate 10am and 4pm services. This will also probably help us to keep reaching people. That is, while musical excellence is certainly not the only (or even the main factor) influencing why people decide to join our church, it's definitely a contributing factor.

Weaknesses

- It's possible that the back-to-back services will hinder our ability to do connection and community effectively at our 9am service, thus resulting in new people not joining us and existing members resenting their loss of community time. This is probably the most significant negative possibility with this option. Although it's an issue we will need to solve eventually, it remains a fairly pressing issue if we decide to start with 9am & 11am first.
- Having our two gatherings so close together could result in some people refusing to actually commit to either. If we can't get people to pick one service and commit to it at least 95% of the time, we could end up with our attendance at each gathering fluctuating massively from week to week. This has been a significant challenge faced by some other church plants when they've made this move.
- Doing two morning services is hardest on our Magnification and Kids teams (though note... we will need to cross this bridge eventually). Unless we manage this risk well, we run the risk of burning out members of both teams.
 - Our bands would need to turn up at 7:30 (rather than 8:00), and have to serve at both services (though note... we expect this will only be for 25% of the time, as opposed to the present 50% of the time).
 - We will also be asking our kids leaders to consider serving at one service, and attending church at the other. This will probably mean that they are pretty tired by the time they get to attend their own service.
- Even if we decided that 9am and 11am was the most 'strategic' option in the long run (which I think it probably is), it's major weakness is that it probably won't *feel* like the right decision for many people at church. This makes the whole 9am and 11am scenario a difficult sell, since we would effectively be appealing to people's heads and telling them to ignore their hearts (which isn't easy).
 - In short, despite that fact that it will probably result in *less pain* for a *shorter* period of time, the pains of 9am and 11am are more obvious! After all, our service time will change and 9am could lose their community time!
 - On the other hand, even though I think the potential pain points of starting a 4pm service first are probably *greater* and *longer lasting*, they are far less obvious.
- 10am is probably the most convenient time of the morning for a church service. It's late enough that you can sleep in, and it's early enough that you can still enjoy the rest of your day. By stopping our 10am gathering and

starting a 9am and 11am service in it's place, we run the risk of losing people who are unwilling to make the change to one of these less convenient times. Although I would be surprised if there were many people (if any) in this situation, it's an issue we're going to face at some point, and must be acknowledged as a potential weakness.

How can we minimize the risks?

- If we hire the Freedom Hub (an option they are very supportive of), we could significantly reduce the negative impact on the 9am gathering's community time. For those not familiar with it, the Freedom Hub is a large cafe immediately adjacent to our church auditorium, which we can enter through the back laneway. Now, rather than feeling like they are being shooed out of the building to make space for 11am, our 9am gathering would have a dedicated space that they could go to hang out together after the service. This also has the added benefit of clearing out our cafe space fairly quickly so that we avoid over-crowding it between services.
- If we can manage to convince people of the value of joining and sticking at one service, we shouldn't have too much difficulty with attendance fluctuating from one service to the other.

As you can see, both options would probably work, but neither is without its challenges. On balance, however, we felt like option 2 (9am and 11am followed by 7pm) would probably be the better of the two options in the long run, as long as we worked carefully to manage some of the risks.

Stage 3- September 2017

Even though we felt pretty confident that we *could* start two new morning services in February 2018, by September 2017 we were also becoming increasingly aware of a nervousness among our members around what this might mean from a ministry perspective. This was expressed through some very loving emails as well as personal conversations and focus groups. It was pretty awesome. In short, we were forced to reconsider the question, 'Do we *actually* have enough people to pull this off without burning people out?' Even though I think the answer was *probably* 'yes', it's a foolish pastor who ignores the voice of God's people! In the end, I think it also led to a much better solution, because we reconsidered the issue of the 80% rule and whether or not waiting until October 2018 might be a better option.

In case you've forgotten, the '80% rule' means that we need to start a second gathering around the time that our building reaches 80% capacity so that it doesn't hinder our ability to keep reaching people. Here's what we started thinking in September 2017:

- **A relatively small auditorium-** We can really only fit about 175 seats in our auditorium comfortably. This is quite small. If we play with the arrangement and pack in the chairs the we can *technically* fit about 200 in, but it's pretty tight! If we take 80% of each of those figures we're looking at a 'comfortable 140' or a 'tight 160' respectively before we really need to be starting something new to make some more room.
- **Adult attendance fluctuations-** on any given week, our present Sunday attendance can fluctuate by at least 30 adults. For example, in term 3 our average adult attendance was 116, but we had a low of 100 and a high of 135. This means that even though our average was only 116 adults, we were already nudging the 'comfortable 140' (which is 80% capacity of our comfortable seating layout). As a side note, the larger a church gets, the greater their attendance fluctuations will become over the course of the year.
- **Church growth calendar-** I've already touched on this above, but it's worth explaining again. The two best times of the year to start something new in a church are October and February. This is because (1) they tend to give you the longest growth periods before the next predictable attendance slump (i.e. January and Winter) and (2) starting something new in a growth period gives the new thing the best opportunity to succeed.

So here's the challenge we started to realise in September 2017. If February 2018 is too soon to start a 2nd gathering, October 2018 could also be too late:

- By mid February 2018 we expect to be averaging at least 130 adults. It could well be more than this, but this is a conservative estimate. This would mean that our highs would be about 145 people (past the 'comfortable 80%', while our lows would be at 115). Creating two equally attended gatherings out of this one gathering (no guarantee) would result in two gatherings that averaged about 65 people. This is about as low as we'd want to go for the critical mass reasons outlined above.
- If we wait until October 2018, our average attendance will probably be up at around 150 adults or more. In this case, our highs would be closer to 175 (well beyond even the 'tight 160'), and our lows closer to 125. Not only would this be uncomfortably tight, but the more significant danger is that it could prevent us reaching people, since our auditorium would be so full.

One solution is obviously that we just decide to start our new service in Term 2, by which time we might have about 140 adults in average attendance. That being said, as long as we felt confident enough that it wouldn't prevent us from reaching more people, waiting until October 2018 does have some significant benefits:

- The need to start a new morning service would be palpable by this stage. This addresses the potential weakness of doing it in February, which is that it may not feel just as necessary at that stage.
- We would get to enjoy the atmosphere and encouragement of having a packed auditorium for another 6 months of next year.
- By allowing our one service to grow for a bit longer, we would then have far more people in each gathering when we do finally make the transition into two. This would be helpful for *both* ministry resourcing (i.e. not burning people out) and ensuring critical mass at each.
- This might also allow our current 10am gathering to solidify some of their relationships, so that they feel more relationally secure when we eventually ask people to transition into 2 new gatherings.
- It would also allow us to keep growing our kids ministry, which would help us to (a) test the limits of our building capacity and (b) delay managing the complexity of 2 programs until we can more effectively resource it.

In the end, we feel pretty strongly that waiting until October 2018 not only sets us up for the best chance of having two really strong morning gatherings, but also protects our members from burnout! The obvious downside is that we (and primarily me as the lead pastor) feel like we have strung out this whole process for much longer than it needed to be and run the risk of frustrating our members.

If that is the case, I really do apologise! My hope and prayer is that you're able to forgive the nuisance and put it down to a combination of a big heart to reach people and a bit of youthful inexperience! Thanks for bearing with me in love!

As a closing thought, let me address one logistical question you may have.

Who will be the pastors of each gathering?

The short answer is that both gatherings will be led by the same team of pastors that our single gathering presently is. For a long time, many traditional and mainline churches have operated with a congregational pastor model, in which a church may have two or three congregations (e.g. 8:30am, 10am and 6pm), and each congregation would have a separate congregational pastor. Typically, each congregational pastor would do the bulk of the sermons, pastoral care, follow up, and evangelism for that particular congregation. In other words, all three pastors would be generalists, each doing the same work, but for different congregations within the same church.

It's important to say that while this model is *not* inherently wrong, it does have several weaknesses. First, it can often lead to an expectation that one pastor will do

all the 'ministry', rather than seeing him as an equipper whose job it is to 'equip the saints for the work of ministry' (Eph 4:11). Second, this model can also burn out its pastors, because it expects far more from them than they are physically able to accomplish. Third, it is almost impossible to grow a congregation over about 150-200 with this approach, since this is about the upper limit of any one person's ability to provide 'pastoral oversight'. Fourth, this model tends to ignore a theology of gifting and often unrealistically expect its pastors to be good at everything.

From the very beginning at Grace City, we have taken a 'team pastoring' approach to church leadership. That is, while Tim Clemens is the lead pastor, he has a team of both men and women who not only support him in leadership, but also help him in caring for and ministering to our church. As we say at ONBOARD, Grace City is not just led by one pastor, but by a team of pastors. Our M structures are quite helpful in this regard, because it means that we always have someone responsible for championing the work of 'delighting in God' (mag), 'building a sticky and caring community' (mem), 'deepening in the Word' (mat), 'serving joyfully and sacrificially' (min) and 'sharing our faith with others' (mis). This way, our church gets to benefit from being led by a team of people with a breadth of different gifts and experiences, rather than expecting one person to do it all.

Practically, what this means is that when we transition to a church with two gatherings (or 3 and 4 gatherings later on), we won't suddenly have two congregational pastors. Tim will continue to do the bulk of the preaching at our services (at least for now), and will continue to lead a godly and gifted team of men and women in the work of equipping the people of Grace City to care for and minister to one another. In time, we will probably appoint 'focus leaders' whose job it will be to try and keep a finger on the pulse of a particular congregation/s at church, but it will not be their job to do everything a traditional 'congregational pastor' might do. There is a fair bit more that could be said about the team pastoring approach to ministry and what it looks like at a church with multiple gatherings, but this should suffice for now.

If you managed to read this far, congratulations! I hope and pray that you think it was worth your while.

Yours in Christ,

Tim Clemens
28.09.2017