Sustainability in ministry and the prevention of dropout for Australian Baptist Pastors serving in local church-based ministries.

by
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Signed certificate of original authorship

I, Keith Mitchell declare that this thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctorate of Philosophy, in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS) at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS).

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Abstract

The threat to society of having diminished numbers of pastors in church based ministry is too high a cost to ignore in Australia, especially considering the financial and emotional costs experienced by pastors, their families, the churches that they have served in, and the costs incurred by government agencies affected from their dropout. As a result this study has emanated out of a desire to see pastors sustained in pastoral ministry rather than dropout and experience these sorts of costs.

In this scholarship an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) study was undertaken to unearth reasons for sustainability of Baptist pastors in Australia. IPA studies differ to other studies in that they involve a three-fold process in method that engages phenomenology, double hermeneutics, and idiography. As a result IPA studies tend to have small sample sizes due to their idiographic nature.

This was the first study in Australia amongst pastors that had used IPA, was the first to compare pastors who had been sustained in ministry against those that had dropped out, and was inaugural in that it was conducted by a researcher who had served in the field of study. These distinctive factors meant that rich data could be obtained for analysis. The study engaged a cohort of three Baptist pastors in Australia who had served over 10 years in church based ministry, known as Pastors In Ministry (PIMs), and compared to a second cohort of Australian Baptist pastors who had dropped out of pastoral ministry prior to serving 10 years, known as Out of Pastoral Ministry (OPMs). Through a coding process themes in this research emerged showing convergences and divergences of experience between the two cohorts. Analysis of these results found that the main contributing factors to sustainability and preventing dropout was the development of: emotional intelligence (EQ or EI), the type of social support that pastors had around them, the level of spousal support that they experienced, the approach in which personal conflict was processed, and the manner in which spiritual resources were employed. These results are unique to Australian pastors and their sustainability and now contribute to the ongoing research that is being conducted amongst pastors in Australia surrounding sustainability and preventing their dropout.

This research supports previous research that has affirmed the key to sustainability for pastors is high job satisfaction and low emotional exhaustion. It endorses this previous research by indicating that the manner in which these two factors are most likely enabled for pastors is through the contributing factors that were discovered. It draws attention for theological colleges, denominations, and other support services to focus upon EI development in people considering and currently engaged in pastoral ministry.

Glossary

In this dissertation there are various terms utilised that may not be familiar to some readers and so this glossary is included at this point of this dissertation. The following list of defined terms aims to add fluidity to the ongoing reading of this project to those not accustomed to such terms from the field of study:

Baptist Congregational System – a Baptist church is a congregational church using a governance system where 'authority resides primarily in the local church (and is shared by laity and ministers) and ascends (for limited purposes of common action) to regional, national and inter-national institutions – such as a Baptist association (regional), a Baptist union or convention (national) and the Baptist World Alliance: but these entities cannot interfere in the exercise of the autonomy of the local church' (Doe 2015, p. 148).

Baptist Polity – Baptist churches are considered to be 'a community of believers in a particular place where the Word of God is preached and the ordinances of Believers' Baptism and the Lord's Supper are observed' (Doe 2015, p. 150). 'Baptist polity' is the unique manner and way in which worship is conducted and participated in and decisions are made compared to other Denominations.

Call of God – the Call of God is generally accepted as a universal appeal by God to love him (Hillman 2008; Labberton 2014). However, there is also a secondary call that has been recognised relating to a person's sense of identity and contribution to society. This secondary call engages a more specific sense of being directed to enter or partake in a designated role vocationally (Elangovan et al. 2010). It is this secondary understanding of 'calling' that has been utilised in this study, with a religious understanding that it is a divine call from God and is somewhat supernatural (Labberton 2014).

Church Plant – There are considered to be five stages in a church's life cycle: conception, development, birth, growth, and reproduction. A church plant is where conception commences and then aims to continue through these other stages 'with the

ultimate goal of reproducing other churches or church plants' (Malphurs 2011, p. 20). Church plants often have a different polity compared to established churches.

Denomination – This is a sub-group of a cluster of churches within the organised Christian religious movement, identified and set apart from other Denominations through certain characteristics of polity and ecclesiastical aspects. For instance the Baptist denomination is a set *body* or *form* composed of defined boundaries and 'adherents' separate to other Denominations of the Protestant movement (Richey 2013).

Ecclesiastical/ecclesiology – this is a generalised theological term in reference to Denominational church processes and ideologies concerning identifiable and visible expressions of structure, governance and spiritual expression. It is taken from the Greek word '*eklesia'* meaning public assembly of people of faith in Jesus Christ (Mounce 2006).

Hermeneutics – Hermeneutics is the theory of interpretation of a text within its own context and was originally utilised in the exposition of biblical texts (Smith et al. 2009). However, through influences from the likes of Paul Ricouer (1913-2005) the exposition of texts has been expanded to other historical documents and scholarly materials so as to be closely read within their time and context of writing, now known as '(*lecture de texte),* or textual exegesis' (Davidson 2010, p. 1).

Manse – A manse is the term utilised for a church owned home for the pastor and their family to reside in during their tenure as that church's pastoral leader. It is sometimes provided as part of a pastor's financial package of employment in that church (Cross & Livingstone 1997).

Ordination – 'Ordination itself is the process by which the vocation of individuals to serve as ministers is recognised and by which they are 'set apart' for ministry' (Doe 2015, p. 145). Either a Denomination or an individual church, will recognise a person being set apart for ordination based around certain accepted and completed parameters of training, character and spiritual leadership. These processes are unique to each Denomination.

Parachurch – this is a Christian organisation that works as an independent faith-based agency, often emanating from a particular denomination. Generally, parachurch organisations are not directly accountable to any one church congregation or denomination through authority lines. These organisations make their own decisions, and aim to work alongside church-based ministries as a type of adjunct and support structure (Willmer et al. 1998)

Resilience – There is a growing tendency in research towards the examination of resilience in vocational service. Resilience is considered as a person having 'the competence to seek the right connections with those who are most helpful during times of stress' (Worsley 2015, p. Kindle Location 62).

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