



MISSION: *To know Christ and to make him known.*

VISION: *To see more and more disciples of Jesus shining as lights in the City of Wollongong.*

‘EASY ENGLISH’ CHURCH PLANT

Executive Summary

Aim To commence an “Easy English” church plant.

Where At 11am Sunday mornings on-site at St Michael’s.

When Launch on 30 April

Method Led by Dr Joe Radkovic, 30 Core Team, with extra Launch Attenders

Action Next: final consulting, help existing congregations adjust, training.

God’s Big Picture for the Nations and St Michael’s place in it

Isaiah prophesied that in the day of salvation, people would say:

*“Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; **make known among the nations** what he has done, and proclaim that his name is exalted.” (Isaiah 12:4).*

That day arrived when God’s Son Jesus, having lived the perfect life, then died for our sins on the cross and turned God’s righteous anger away.

After his resurrection, Jesus then commissioned his disciples to go and preach the gospel to make disciples **from all nations** (Matthew 28:18-20). That’s our task today too.

Our own St Michael’s *Vision 2020* document says that “by God’s grace, in the spirit of James 4:15, we want to see 700 disciples of Jesus in our congregations weekly.”

And its values section says one of our core beliefs is in being “Globally-minded Christians, connecting with all classes, ages and cultures.”

Not surprisingly then one of our ministry goal focus areas is to **engage** with the changing face of our society, including the influx of overseas students and migrants.

And a primary goal we have set it to participate in one new church plant from our Mission Area by 2020. Under God, this documents proposes a way to meet these goals.

Background

St Michael's has a great heritage of gospel commitment to the nations. There's been a strong link with CMS, sending missionaries to Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. And there's been a strong local history of ministry across cultures. For example, ministries to Spanish speakers, and Sudanese refugees, as well as support of migrant and refugee services through Anglicare in Wollongong.

Most notably, for many years, our English For Life (ESL) classes have reached hundreds of migrants, refugees, overseas students and international visitors. Many have been blessed – both by increased English skills, and by gaining a greater knowledge of the Christian faith. Some – including from Muslim backgrounds – have become Christians and been baptised.

Our Mini-Mikes playgroup has also been a place where people from different cultures are welcomed. Likewise our new Kids Club has welcomed kids from other nations.

And Wollongong is at the heart of an increasingly multi-cultural population in the Illawarra. And it's genuinely *multi*-cultural, rather than being dominated by just one migrant group. And it's God who has brought this opportunity to our door step...

Our easy-to-find CBD location near public transport means we are ideally placed for accessibility. We have strong links to the University through our own members on campus, and the AFES ministries there. This gives excellent natural connections to international students who arrive here to study. And our Cathedral status means we are also seen as established and safe, rather than fringe or extreme.

And although their ethnic backgrounds might be different, refugees, other migrants and international students are often quite like us. They often prize education, and want the best for their families. They are sometimes readers, often hard workers. That means they will often naturally 'click' with us at St Michael's where many have similar values.

Lastly and perhaps most of all, our current congregations all exhibit relative health and strength, with strong attendances, and many members with strong and varied gifts. This means we have the resources and opportunities to grow.

Indeed, we are squeezed for space at some of our congregations. It's often hard for newcomers to find room. The current average at 10am, for example, is 175! We want all our congregations to grow, and we need more space to make room for this hope.

The strong growth in attendance of those from non-English speaking backgrounds at 10am gives us an opportunity to do it... especially since it's through the ministry of members from similar backgrounds. One Sunday recently I went home actually imagining the day when white faces were no longer in the majority at church!

So God desires for the nations to know of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. And because of our growth and place in this city, church leadership believes planting a new congregation will give more chance to reach all nations, more space to grow, and more room for our current members to serve – both in existing congregations and in the new ministry.

The New Congregation

Discussion of a church plant focussing on internationals goes back prior to the now-closed Cono Church Plant led by Jim Douglass. An international plant was the alternative option given strong consideration as far back as 2011.

More recently, it was raised in the 2016 Senior Minister's AGM report, and firmed up as an option at the staff planning conference back in September. Since then, it's been discussed in ministers letters, in sermons, at Parish Council, at the Ministry Expo and at seminars during the Ministry Boot Camp in 4th term last year, with congregational ministry teams, and in public church meetings.

Dr Joe Radkovic, in his part time role on the church's pastoral staff has been re-focussed on leading this initiative from a more general evangelism brief. He is aided by Rev Jon Baird, our Sunday Assistant, who focuses on international students, and some key lay leaders, including those from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB).

Following much research, feedback and discussion, we have determined that

- The short title for the new church plant is '**Easy English**' **Congregation** (EEC);
- **All congregations** should continue to welcome **people from all nations** and should not automatically direct everyone from a NESB to EEC;
- The **starting date** for EEC will be **Sunday 30th April** – the first Sunday in second term (too many away over Easter and school holidays), giving momentum before we run into winter months of weaker attendance.
- EEC's **start time will be 11am** – mid-late morning is normal to go to church compared to midday; likewise EEC often wishes to follow church with lunch, but a later timeslot would make this too late.
- Therefore, the **10am** congregation will move to a **new start time of 9:30am**;
- **Sermon series** will run *in parallel* with current 8am and 10am congregations as a default, **aiming at 20-22 mins** (as modelled in recent weeks), but sometimes an alternative program, specific to 'easy English' needs, might be followed.
- **Children's ministry** will initially be offered for crèche through to school Year 2.

A core planting group of 30 committed adults has formed, drawing people from several other of our congregations. Plans are well underway for what EEC will look like, including such things as 'easy English' sermons and liturgy, music, kids ministry, and eating together. The core group plan to have about several 'practice runs' (as a closed group) on the Sundays immediately prior to launch perhaps starting at 11:30am.

Obviously the 11am slot has an impact on the other congregations, especially those earlier in the day. This actually helps us all feel involved with the venture, rather than remaining untouched and potentially less engaged. Members across other congregations participate in the planting effort by adjusting to changes that affect them as a way of serving others.

All our existing congregations now have a chance to rethink their own ministry focus points, along with the likelihood of enjoying more space to grow, should the Lord will it.

The 'To Do' List

- **All are invited to pray** for God to give the growth among those who would benefit from an 'Easy English' Bible-teaching gospel ministry, for wisdom, patience, energy, faithfulness and unity across our parish and congregations.
- **Jon and Joe** are liaising with **Andy** about staffing children's work, and with the core team, about practice runs.
- **Reg and Liam** are liaising with their **Congregational Ministry Teams** about changes needed so 8:00am and new 9:30am service times can finish reliably within 65 minutes.
- **Reg** is also hosting a meeting for 8am-ers, so they can discuss how best to understand and support this venture under God.
- **Lauren** is working on a comprehensive plan to communicate new times and the new service. This includes new signs, new brochures and flyers, website update, etc.
- **Sandy** is ensuring liaison occurs between **staff**, and **musicians, AV operators**, and **ushers/welcomers**, in particular, to bed down changes to procedures.

EEC – FAQs

We are grateful for feedback and suggestions, comments and questions received at congregational meetings and personal conversation regarding the proposed Easy English Congregation (EEC). This has helped test the proposal and, humanly speaking, has improved its chances of viability. Here are answers to most of the questions we can recall.

Q: Can you be more precise about the focus of each congregation now?

The 'branding' proposed for our services is as follows:

Congregation	'Shorthand'	Longer description
8:00am	Prayer Book	A prayer book service with hymns, and, generally, the Lord's Supper. Enjoy our delicious raisin toast afterwards!
9:30am	All Ages	For all stages and backgrounds, with crèche and kids program, and a cuppa after.
11:00am	Easy English	Using simpler English to connect with people from many nations and backgrounds; often followed by lunch together.
5:00pm	Families	A relaxed gathering with crèche, kids program, & junior high Bible study; followed by a light meal for kids and refreshments for adults.
7:00pm	Young adults	A modern gathering mainly for young adults at senior high, uni, TAFE or work, followed by refreshments.

Q: Is it viable to have starting times only 90 minutes apart?

A: It will be a challenge. But other churches have done this.

In particular, Reg Piper has reported that 90 minutes between start times is workable from his experience with 3 Sunday morning services in Adelaide.

We will need effective ushering, and to maximize active and efficient use and flow via three exits.

Q: What will the effect on parking be?

A: We believe it will be easier to find a car park prior to 9:30am, than it currently is at 10am, which is when shops open on Sunday and when the Gateway Church starts.

However, we are giving active consideration to rostering and training parking attendants (or possibly even limited valet parking) to maximise assistance in this area between the morning services. This would be a new ministry, which may encourage some members newly to volunteer and use their abilities.

Q: Could more space have been created for growth at 10am by having the kids at their programs from the start?

A: Yes, but on current numbers that only creates an extra 25-30 spaces maximum, so is a short term solution. In addition, parents indicate they highly value having their children in church for part of the services. Biblically, we want to communicate to kids that they have a place in church. However we continue to consider creative options for children's ministry, e.g. starting out and coming in at the end for either 10am or 5pm, to give us more space.

Q: Is the level of understanding really so low among people of NESB?

A: Obviously it varies, but self-reporting, as well as conversations about sermons with international students and migrants, frequently reveals that people of NESB (non-English speaking background) often miss many details and sometimes even the main point of a sermon. People attending both St Michael's and FOCUS (the Fellowship of Overseas Christian University Students) at UOW often report much greater understanding at FOCUS with its targeted efforts to communicate in simple English.

We will encourage other efforts to maximize understanding at all services, including continued provision of full text notes before, or after the service, along with visual aids etc. But the easy English service will give the chance to address this need specifically.

Q: Will attenders from NESB still meet Aussies at the EEC?

A: Please remember that some Aussies themselves come from NESB, and not all Aussies are Anglos either.

However, yes, most of the core planting team of 30+ are Aussies, with the majority having English as a first language. However, all are committed to working well at crossing culture.

Q: How will we manage transitions between services for musicians and the AV operators?

A: Attention and consultation is needed here. The new digital desk gives increased opportunities for pre-set default settings. Rehearsals will likely need to occur at other spaces (and possibly times), with actual set up between services limited more to simply plug ins, sound checks and brief test runs.

Q: Given growing pains of a 5th service, will the maintenance budget increase sufficiently, i.e. 20%?

A: A 5th Sunday service does not automatically mean a 20% increase in wear and tear. And the initial launch is budgeted to be almost revenue neutral.

However, it is right to point out that maintenance needs are often neglected or under-funded in parishes and to ask the Parish Council to ensure proper consideration is given to budgeting for increased wear and tear.

We also note that the extra ministry effort to establish and pastor an additional service implies an equally urgent need for increased funding for pastoral staffing down the track,

How the budget grows in 2018 needs attention to our 'whole parish' Vision 2020 goals.

Q: What lessons can be learned from previous cross-cultural efforts that did not continue such as the San Miguel (Spanish-speaking) and Sudanese (Dinka) services?

A: We welcome further insights and reflections, however we note that both were differently targeted, to first generation migrants in their original languages, without any effective strategies for reaching second generations, and so both had natural end points, when first generation aged or moved away (e.g. for work).

The English language approach casts the net much more broadly. In addition, we understand that neither of these ministries has core groups as large as already recruited for this church plant.

Q: Given the transient nature of many NESB people (e.g. overseas students returning home), what will the impact be on "real community" (one of St Michael's 'values')?

A: We note that we already experience this transience with many English-speaking Australians too, due to uni attendance and changing employment patterns.

Community can form quite rapidly among newcomers, as some of us experience through our English classes. Indeed, a desire to love our neighbours means we ought to be all the more eager to share our church community with those who lack such opportunities.

We think that this question may in fact point to a potential lack of congregational *stability*, given higher turnover, rather than community *per se*. However stability and continuity will be provided by committed locals, and also as some from NESB become locals as they obtain visas and jobs.

Q: What is the effect on existing community, with the greater pressure to rush in and rush out between services that are closer together?

A: Present experience already shows that having the next congregation starting while people from the previous congregation are still on the grounds is workable. It does *not* mean people have to leave straight after that meeting.

It is anticipated that the EEC kids program (crèche and infants only) will initially be in the office foyer, so the hall is still available to those wishing to continue conversations from the prior congregation.

Morning teas can potentially be shared between congregations. But we would need to encourage a culture where people in the courtyard move towards the office side when the bell rings for the next service. Conversations among those from the previous service will need to be muted if near the cathedral windows.

This may require a little extra assistance from and training for ushers/welcomers.

We also remind ourselves of the important point that none of us should rely only on the on-site Sunday time at St Michael's, whether 75 or 120 minutes, as the sole source of community-building. Mid-week connections, via growth groups, 1-1 Bible reading and prayer partnership, mentoring, home and café hospitality, and other informal connecting are crucial for our community-building.

Q: What lessons can be drawn from the Cono church plant that ceased?

A: One significant learning point was the need for a larger core planting team. At Cono, in the end, the core team of adults, was no more than 15 and probably less than a dozen in practice. In addition, the need for some kind of benchmarks is well taken.

Q. So what are the criteria – preferably written – for success, so we can assess whether things are progressing satisfactorily?

Ultimately, the criteria for success is whether people are converted to Christ and whether others are built up in Christ, through a faithful ministry of word and prayer. But even then, only God gives the growth.

However we are suggesting these **draft** benchmarks for assessment:

- A net increase of a minimum of 50 attenders across our congregations by the end of 2018 from average attendance levels as measured at the end of 2016.
- An ability to identify an average of at least 5 internationals sent home converted and/or strengthened in the Lord each year.
- An ability to fund the appointment of an additional full time parish ministry trainee (currently about \$38K p.a. on minimum wages) by the increase in offertories at the end of 2018 compared to the end of 2016.

Failure would be indicated by a net loss of attendance, or a net loss of offertories, across the parish, attributable to this initiative.

An outcome different from that expected, e.g. growth only among one major other language group such as Chinese, would indicate a basis for reassessing the ministry focus.

However, outside of extraordinary circumstances, a minimum commitment to this venture should be no less than 24 months.

Q: Given the Vision 2020 goal of seeing (under God) 700 disciples of Jesus in our congregations weekly, is adding this 5th service really the end point?

A: Absolutely not. We expect the space created by the core group leaving existing congregations will provide new room to grow, new opportunities for existing members to find needs to serve, and new impetus to reimagine and develop how mission might develop at the existing congregations.

We also consider that we could engage or assist in further church planting efforts, whether on or off-site and whether on Sunday or another day of the week (noting for example, Salt Church's Thursday night service).