

# LEADERSHIP TOOL

## CHURCH CULTURE INSTRUMENT

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One of the features of Baptist church ecclesiology is the concept of “the autonomy of the local church.” This does not mean Baptist churches should be independent. Baptist churches have generally chosen to associate and collaborate for mutual benefit. But it does mean that each local church has the right, indeed the duty, to operate under the direct Lordship of Christ. This means that each local church has the right to operate in its own, hopefully contextually relevant, way. This distinctive means that local Baptist churches demonstrate a beautiful diversity while still falling under the banner of being a “Baptist” church.

Although this “beautiful diversity” gives Baptist churches the flexibility to minister effectively in a wide range of contexts, it does present, at least, one challenge. When churches are looking to call pastors from outside their own membership, they are faced with the difficult challenge of seeking to identify “church-pastor fit.” Because Baptist Church diversity is so multi-faceted sometimes we do not realise that there is a philosophical difference between our church and an incoming pastor until it is too late. Usually, both the church and the pastor will affirm that there is no “right” or “wrong” position on any issue of Baptist ecclesial diversity, but the difference can sometimes produce uncomfortable outcomes and hinder the effectiveness of the pastor in a given church.

This “Church Culture Instrument” is aimed at helping avoid these awkward situations. A range of Baptists from across Australia have together worked out a range of “dimensions” of Baptist Church cultures in Australia. These “dimensions” are an attempt to quantify the diversity that exists in Baptist churches and amongst Baptist pastors. It helps churches to identify “where they stand” on a range of matters and to check the compatibility of their stance with that of a potential pastor.

The leadership team and the prospective pastor will be given the same list of dimensions and make the same choices. The responses can be compared and used as one tool for identifying whether a potential pastor will be a good fit for a particular congregation or just be a way to open up conversations and develop awareness of different perspectives and ministry philosophies.

It should be noted that there will always be some variation in perspectives (even within an established leadership team) and this is not always a bad thing. Sometimes differing perspectives can enrich and provide a broader understanding of things. Sometimes differing perspectives can correct unhealthy imbalances. Sometimes differing perspectives need to be held in an irreconcilable tension because both are important and to be valued and acted upon. Different responses do not necessarily mean that church should rule out a potential pastor or that the potential pastor is not God’s choice for the role. They may simply provide an opportunity for greater understanding and appreciation.

This tool is helpful during the pastoral search process. It can also be used as an evaluation tool within existing teams to identify their strengths and their potential blind spots. Alternatively, it can be used during a pastoral review for an existing pastor to help identify the current culture of the ministry context and whether any changes in culture are desired or required.

Our hope is that you find this instrument a helpful tool as you seek God’s will for you and your church.

Our thanks go to Rev Dr Ian Hussey for his research that has contributed to developing this instrument.