

ENHANCING CHURCH GROWTH USING DESIGN THINKING: A PROPOSAL FOR MOUNTAINSIDE LUTHERAN CHURCH

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ABSTRACT

Mountainside Lutheran Church is one of twelve Lutheran Churches in Auckland under the Lutheran Church of Australia and New Zealand. Between 2017 and 2021, most Lutheran congregations encountered a decrease in regular worshippers. There is an urgent need to develop practical tactics to attract new members while keeping present members and their families within the church. Aho (2021) suggested that Christian Churches embrace Design Thinking as a framework to address problems and stagnation. Design Thinking can help promote a creative atmosphere inside the church and enable members to find new possibilities among themselves. This exploratory study uses the Design Thinking framework and starts by mapping elements related to church growth from different works of literature and local successful churches' experiences. Using this list of elements, a survey was designed to provide an overview of the existing internal resources (including the availability of time, talents, etc.) and willingness for change within Mountainside Lutheran Church. Using this mapping, a list of projects was then proposed to enable Mountainside Lutheran Church to implement with the aim of producing future growth. These findings were also presented to the Parish Council, and Elders group using the Design Thinking framework. Several ministry focus areas were found including:

1. The youth group ministry as the focus to change the church's worship experience.
2. The need to reactivate cell groups and welcoming team to enhance support to families, couples and newcomers.
3. A focus on online ministry to strengthen spiritual support to members and outreach to new generations and different ethnic groups.
4. The development of new creative community services, including childcare and other language classes.
5. The organisation of more fellowship events for friendship among new immigrants.

From here it is suggested that actions should be formulated with the help of the Congregation Life Committee of the church. With the implementation of Design Thinking and the development of continual Design Thinking skills within the church, it is expected that reviews and improvement will help these projects.

INTRODUCTION

Churchgoers are declining despite population growth in wealthy countries (Inglehart, 2021). In New Zealand, traditional church attendance decreased from 43% in 2013 to 37% in 2018 (Figure.nz, 2018; Jones, 2020; McCrindle Research, 2018). The Lutheran Church has only 0.07% of the population as members in New Zealand (Figure.nz, 2018; Lutheran World Federation, 2021). However, according to the Lutheran Church of New Zealand's (2021) 41st Convention Report, the number of Lutherans actively engaging in regular services is significantly lower than the statistic found in the census (Lutheran Church of New Zealand, 2021). The Mountainside Lutheran Church (MSLC) is one of only 12 Lutheran congregations in New Zealand, which combined have 3585 congregation members.

Mountainside Lutheran Church in Auckland serves a diverse congregation, conducting weekly services, baptisms, and Bible study groups (Mountainside Lutheran Church, 2021). Mountainside Lutheran Church has implemented Saturday Bilingual Chinese services for Chinese members, focusing on attracting new attendees while retaining existing ones (Mountainside Lutheran Church, 2021).

As stated in the Book of Reports (Lutheran Church of New Zealand, 2021), almost all Lutheran congregations encountered a decrease in regular worshipers from 2017 to 2021, and only two Parishes among the 12 have more than 100 active members (Lutheran Church of New Zealand, 2021.), MSLC being one of these two parishes. This leads to the research aim, of how to attract new members while keeping present members. The expectation is that this research will assist leaders of MSLC in better understanding the areas that the church should focus on to increase church attendance and where the existing congregation is willing to serve towards this goal through a focus on practical, relevant, and appropriate strategies for the future.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The aim was to attract new members to the church utilising the skills and abilities of existing church members and to provide the leaders with practical, relevant, and appropriate strategies for future development.

Therefore, the following research questions were proposed based on the needs of MSLC:

1. What activities and elements are relevant to MSLC to enhance church growth?
2. How can the Design Thinking process be used to plan and develop effective programmes for the church?
3. What are the most effective programmes that can be utilised through the existing resources and talents at MSLC?

LITERATURE REVIEW

A congregation with less than 30% middle-aged adults (over 50 years old) is more likely to grow compared to one with more than 50% (Hadaway, 2011). The number of members between the ages of 18 and 35 also impacts the church's growth, stagnation, or decline (Voas & Watt, 2014). In order to attract young people, the church needs to look at their values, these include credibility, truth, experience, connections, and feelings of necessity in church (Breedt & Niemandt, 2013; Puffer, 2018;). Worship experiences also play a crucial role in attracting and engaging young people (Frisbie, 2016; Poole, 2020).

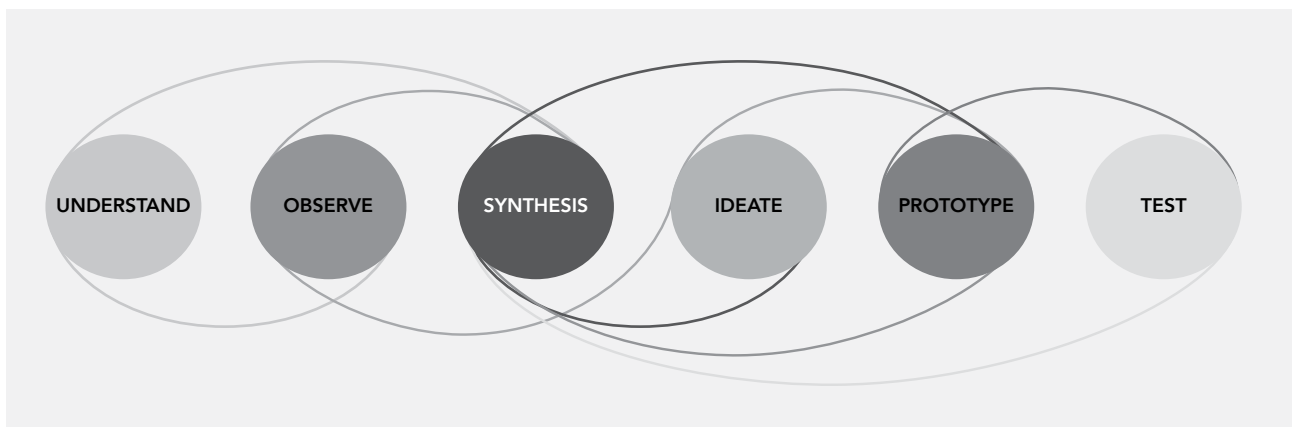
Applying marketing concepts and utilising the Internet can help churches meet the needs of their target market and reach a broader audience (Appah & George, 2017; Ding, 2019; Herring, 2021; Hutchings, 2017; Mork, 2016; Russell, 2016; Smith, 2016). Making a positive first impression on newcomers and implementing systematic admission processes can also contribute to church growth (Frisbie, 2016; McIntosh & Arn, 2013). Enthusiastic and involved church members, along with effective volunteer communication with visitors, are also essential (Ding, 2019; Jackson, 2013).

Members expect support, stability, self-expression, and importance from the church, including care during challenging times (Ding, 2019; Hauerwas, 2019; Warren, 2016). Welcoming attitudes and well-equipped facilities attract newcomers (Ding, 2019; Rainer, 2020; Teasdale & Trefz, 2016), and effective church management and leadership are crucial for ministry effectiveness and growth (Chatira & Mwenje, 2018; Keita, 2019; Puls et al., 2014).

Design Thinking as a Tool to Enhance Church Growth

Design Thinking (DT) was first mentioned by Herbert A. Simon in his book in 1969, and contributed many ideas in the 1970s that are now considered principles of DT (Simon, 1969). It is an agile, non-linear, iterative process used by teams to understand users, challenge assumptions, redefine problems, and create innovative solutions. The process involves five phases: Empathise, Define, Ideate, Prototype, and Test (Leonard, 2021). Design Thinking is particularly effective for addressing ill-defined or unknown problems (Figure 1).

Figure 1: The Design Thinking Process steps by the Hasso-Plattner Institute of Design



Note: From HPI Academy, by Hasso-Plattner Institute, 2018, HPI Academy. Copyright 2018 by HPI Academy.

Jones (2016) echoed Leonard (2021) that traditional churches suffer from the disability of innovation when the world outside the church is rapidly changing. It is therefore helpful for the church to adapt from a human-centred approach to creative problem-solving (Leonard, 2021).

Pearce et al. (2010) found that churches with a high Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO) perform better than their counterparts in attracting and retaining church members. Entrepreneurial Orientation is crucial when management wants to address new opportunities in the market and it refers to the attitudes and behaviours of an organisation, including autonomy, competitive aggressiveness, innovative capacity, proactivity, and willingness to take risks (Sok et al., 2017). According to Lockwood (2010), DT is an approach to problem-solving that puts the focus on the individual and emphasizes observation, teamwork, quick learning, the visualization of ideas, rapid concept prototyping, and concurrent business analysis. Hersleth et al. (2018) further found that EO characteristics were all covered by a different process in DT, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Similarities of dimensions of Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO) and Design Thinking (DT)

DIMENSIONS DESCRIBING EO (LUMPKIN AND DESS, 1996)	DIMENSIONS DESCRIBING DT BROWN (2009), CARLGREN ET AL (2016) AND LIEDTKA (2015)
Autonomy	Open minded, user focus, multidisciplinary teams, building confidence in personal creative ability
Innovativeness	Improve innovative performance, creative, design methods
Risk taking	Unknown outcome, experimentation, risk of failure, be optimistic and always believed there is more than one solution
Proactiveness	In-front of, driver for change, act on real customer needs
Competitive Aggressiveness	Go beyond established boundaries, Think outside the box

Note: Reprinted from "Innovation in hard times: Design Thinking for innovating in mature markets," by Hersleth, S. A., Risvik, E., & Gonera, A, 2018, ISPIM Innovation Symposium, p 5. Copyright 2018 by ISPIM.

Aho (2021), therefore, suggested that Christian Churches should embrace DT as the framework to address problems and stagnation. The advantage of DT is that all projects would start with the church members and help promote a creative atmosphere inside the church. As such, DT is uniquely suitable for church innovation development (Aho, 2021), and was used as a foundation for this research.

METHODOLOGY

The research had two stages: a literature review to identify essential elements for church growth and semi-structured interviews with leaders of three growing churches in Auckland. The three churches were chosen as those with increased attendance in the past three years, and interviews were conducted with each church's leaders. Thematic analysis was performed, comparing the findings with the literature review (Maguire et al., 2017). The second stage involved evaluating MSLC resources and members' willingness to commit time to growth activities through a questionnaire provided to 120 active church members.

To understand the church's needs, thoughts, emotions, and motivations, interviews were conducted with pastors and leaders from various committees in MSLC. Review meetings were held with leaders' groups, following which the DT model facilitated iterative loops for evaluation and improvement, resulting in the final proposal presented to the church.

All participants were informed that involvement was voluntary and confidential. Rights were clearly explained in consent forms before the questionnaire or the interviews were completed. Interviews took place in churches, public spaces or online as requested by participants. Participant names are not used, and all leaders' and members' responses were made anonymous.

Approval for the research was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of Otago Polytechnic Auckland International Campus, ethics number AIC93.

FINDINGS

Interviews with nine external leaders, including pastors, co-workers, and lay leaders from three growing churches in Auckland participated. The responses of nine church leaders from MSLC, including members of the MSLC Parish Council, Elders Group, and Congregation Life Committee were also collected. Their responses were compared with the external church leaders' responses.

Church #1: A New Zealand Church Experience

Church #1 has circa 350 active church members, with around 30% being children. The church has had a steady increase in attendance of 5% per year for the past four years with most growth from the young family demographic.

The church leaders of Church #1 stated that they do not focus much on marketing strategies but rather rely on existing relationships and word-of-mouth to promote events and invite new members. Support for young families, couples, and young adults is a priority, with a large Sunday School programme and youth pastor. Small groups organised by location meet weekly for fellowship, especially targeting recent immigrants. New visitors are personally welcomed and systematically integrated into the church community. Leaders strive to balance strong biblical teaching with reasonable expectations of members. Various services and outreach programmes are offered to establish community connections, including financial courses, life skills, music, dance, and school support. With many ministries, volunteers are crucial. The church has international members from places like the United Kingdom and South Africa and hosts inclusive social events to support them.

Table 2 summarises the interviews themes that help the church to grow in the Auckland setting.

Table 2: Interview Themes for Church #1

THEMES RELATED TO CHURCH GROWTH	
Marketing Strategies, Social Media and other Technological Usage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Not much focus on marketing strategies. – Use Social Media (e.g., Facebook group). – Invite neighbours and family members to join church events.
Support for Young Families, Couples and Young Adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Focus on family and children ministry. – Strong Childrens' Sunday School. – The teenage group led by a youth pastor. – Small-group ministry.
Personal Greetings and Systematic Admission of Visitors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Systematic welcoming to new visitors.
Church Facilities and Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Various courses for different communities.
Management and Leadership of Church Leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Depends on volunteers.
New Migrant Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Focus on migrants from the United Kingdom, South Africa, etc.
Strong Biblical Teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Emphasis on encouraging members to understand the Bible.

Church #2: An Indian Church Experience

Church #2 has circa 300 active church members, with 90% coming from India. There were also members from Malaysia, Fiji, Africa, and Colombia. The church experienced an increase of 66% in attendance in the past three years.

Leaders stated that less than 30% of the church members are over 50 years old. The pastor of the church also knows everyone's name, listens to ideas, speaks multiple languages, and is a conference speaker. Worship services utilise translators and a skilled worship team. The church has international connections and leverages the pastor's online presence and Social Media to attract newcomers. Many members have information technology (IT) expertise and promote the church online. There is a robust Sunday School and activities for children and youth. Small groups organised by region meet for Bible study and prayer. Newcomers receive personal follow-up and feel welcomed like family. Bible study, prayer meetings, fasting, and study plans encourage biblical engagement. Social events like fishing, barbecues, and regional celebrations build connections. Leaders are identified, trained, and mentored. Most members are migrants, and the church helps to meet practical needs by connecting those with shared languages and providing community.

Table 3 summarises the interview themes that help the church to grow in an Auckland setting.

Table 3: Interview Themes for Church #2

THEMES RELATED TO CHURCH GROWTH	
Church Growth Targeting Young Adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Most of the members are under 50 years old. - Good worship team. - Good attributes of Church Leaders <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Willing to listen to members. - Good communication skills.
Marketing Strategies, Social Media and other Technological Usage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Online presence in various Social Media. - Strong IT team.
Support for Young Family, Couples and Young Adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strong children and youth ministry. - Various cell groups, prayer groups, and ethnic groups.
Personal Greetings and Systematic Admission of Visitors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Welcoming attitudes to newcomers. - Follow-up team to engage new friends.
Church Facilities and Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Numerous activities for members to join.
Management and Leadership of Church Leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A clear strategy for church growth.
New Migrant Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Focus on migrants from India, Sri Lanka, Colombia, Africa, and Malaysia.

Church #3: A Chinese Church Experience

Church #3 is a church with a Hong Kong people’s background. The church is divided into Cantonese and English sections. The Cantonese section consists of circa 125 church members, mainly first-generation immigrants from Hong Kong while the Cantonese section has had an increase of ten members per year for the last three years. The English section started five years ago, and it has circa 80 church members, 20 of whom are children.

The English congregation consists mainly of young adults under the age of 30 years old, youth, and younger children. Leaders are caring towards members and non-members. Marketing is limited to a basic website and closed Facebook page, while WhatsApp enables connections and event promotion. A part-time youth worker cares for the youth group. Some leaders pursue further education to better support parents. Cell groups provide care and support, supplemented by informal home gatherings and trips. A welcoming team of friendly, caring members helps new immigrants with practical needs. Sermons focus on the challenges of Christian faith, with the sharing of testimonies. Accountability groups facilitate in-depth sharing. Seminars on topics like finances and parenting support newcomers, along with a partnership with a budgeting organisation. Social events in homes expand the young adults’ network. Leaders are sensitive and willing to take risks. With Hong Kong immigration rising, seminars and festivals attract and connect newcomers while groups provide tangible help.

Table 4 summarises the interview themes that help the church to grow in an Auckland setting.

Table 4: Interview Themes from Church #3

THEMES RELATED TO CHURCH GROWTH	
Church Growth Targeting Young Adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All of the members in the English section are aged under 50 years old. - Good attributes of Church Leaders - Church leaders care caring about the needs of members/non-members.
Marketing Strategies, Social Media and other Technological Usage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use Social Media (mainly WhatsApp) to maintain connection with participants. - Not focused on professional marketing.
Support for Young Family, Couples and Young Adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Half-time youth worker employed for youth group ministry. - Family ministry is also a focus of the church. - Small-group ministry (cell groups).
Personal Greetings and Systematic Admission of Visitors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Welcoming team and following up with newcomers.

THEMES RELATED TO CHURCH GROWTH

Church Facilities and Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Special seminars are provided for the community. – Create small group events at members' home.
Management and Leadership of Church Leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Evangelistic training for leaders.
New Migrant Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Focus on immigrants from Hong Kong and China.
Strong Bible Teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Emphasis on teaching high requirements of the Bible.

Findings from Leaders of Mountainside Lutheran Church

The MSLC is one of the only two Lutheran congregations in New Zealand, with more than 100 active members. Nine of the church leaders were willing to participate in the interviews. Their opinions and expectations were collected and analysed by using thematic analysis.

Table 5: Themes from Interviews with Mountainside Lutheran Church Leadership

Existing problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Concerned regarding the ageing population of the church. – Second-generation teenagers were not attending. – More church members over 50 years of age with few young adults and young families attending. – Lack of interactions and fellowship activities among members. – Not enough people to take up leading roles and responsibilities within the congregation.
Leadership suggested improvements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Good attributes of Church Leaders open to the ideas of newly joined young church members. – Regular pastoral and elders' visits to help church members who need prayer support when facing difficulties. – Worship experience <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Traditional liturgy could be simplified to attract the younger generation, with more modern songs introduced. – Marketing Strategies, Social Media, and Other Technological Usage <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Online ministry is considered an essential direction. – Teaching scripture and related material should be produced online for church members to use in their small groups. – The church experience should be enhanced by providing more exciting events and building relationships with church members. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Support for young families and adults – Small-group ministry <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – It is crucial to restart the small group ministry according to its geographical location to enhance fellowship and interaction between church members. – Prayer Support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The church should encourage church members to pray for each other by allowing people to express their needs. – Fellowship Activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Seven leaders suggested that more fellowship activities that include all church members should be arranged. It is vital to make sure that church members of all age groups can find friends (new and old) to interact within the church community. – Youth Ministry <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – One member mentioned that a youth pastor is needed to help restart the youth group in the church. – Personal Greetings and Systematic Admission of Visitors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Elders of MSLC should be responsible for welcoming people and connecting with newcomers. – Church members with caring characters should also be assigned to the welcoming team to make newcomers feel the church cares for them. – Church Facilities and Services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Two members agreed that the church should focus on the local community. – It was also suggested that MSLC partner with other organisations with common goals to serve the local community. – Management and Leadership of Church Leaders <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Two leaders suggested that MSLC should equip more church members to use their gifts and talents to serve in the local community. The management should approach church members to find out which leaders are willing to help.

The findings from the first stage of the research were correlated to the MSLC church leaders' opinions to see where differences were found. The summary and comparison are shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Summary and Comparison Between Churches

ELEMENTS AND THEMES RELATED TO CHURCH GROWTH	CHURCH#1	CHURCH#2	CHURCH#3	MSLC
Church Growth Targeting Young Adults:				
– Less than 30% of middle-aged adults (50+)		– Most of the members are under 50 year old.	– The whole English section is young adults.	
– Good attributes of Church Leaders		– Yes	– Yes	Agreed
– Worship Experience		– Yes	– Not mentioned	Agreed
Marketing Strategies, Social Media and other Technological Usage	– Not much focus	– Yes	– Not much focus	Agreed
	– Use of social media	– Yes	– Use of social media (mainly WhatsApp).	– Online ministry: invest in high-quality equipment to enhance the church's online presence.
	– Word of mouth	– Yes		– The website of MSLC should be revised.
				Marketing can help to let other people know about MSLC.
				Disagreed
				– The church should first improve our church experience.
Personal Greetings and Systematic Admission of Visitors	– Systematic system.	– Follow-up team.	– Selected welcome team members.	Agreed
	– Follow-up chat.	– Cell group leaders.	– Focus on newcomers' first and second visits.	
	– Small group invitation.		– Cell group invitation.	
Support for Young Family, Couples and Young Adults		– Children and Teenagers Ministry.	– Youth Group Ministry.	Agreed
		– Cell Group, Prayer Group, Ethnic Group Ministry.	– Family Ministry Small-group Ministry.	– Restart small group ministry.
				– Enhance fellowship and interaction.
				– Prayer support
				– Youth ministry mentioned.
Church Facilities and Services	– Alpha evangelism course.	– Two significant regional celebrations.	– Special seminars and talks.	Agreed
	– CAP course.	– Training camps, fishing trips, baby showers, barbecues, etc.	– Partnered with CAP.	– Focus on the local community.
	– Basic life skill programme.		– Creative small social events.	– Partner with other organisations with common goals.
	– Music and dance outreach programme.			

ELEMENTS AND THEMES RELATED TO CHURCH GROWTH	CHURCH#1	CHURCH#2	CHURCH#3	MSLC
Management and Leadership of Church Leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Ministries heavily rely upon volunteers. – Offer training programmes. – Discipleship training. – Bible studies for leaders. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Multiplication is the philosophy used for church growth. – Cell group leaders will also meet up biweekly. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Encouraged relational evangelism. – Training course for the leaders. – Willing to try out new things. 	Agreed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Equip more members to use their gifts and talents. – Approach members to find leaders who are willing to help. – Arrange more interaction between the two sections.
New Immigrant Support	United Kingdom and South Africa.	India, Sri Lanka, Colombia, Africa, and Malaysia. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 95% of the members are immigrants. 	Hong Kong, China.	Agreed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The Chinese section is now targeting Hong Kong people who speak Cantonese.
Strong Biblical Teaching	Emphasis on encouraging members to understand the Bible.	Not mentioned	Emphasis on teaching high requirements of the Bible.	Not mentioned

Quantitative Questionnaire findings.

Following the mapping of factors for growth the research sought to assess MSLC capabilities using a quantitative questionnaire to look at where these may be used in future church development.

There were 114 emails and personal invitations were sent out, and 31 questionnaires were collected in the English and Chinese sections of the church. Of the 31 questionnaires, 23 were from English-speaking members and eight from Chinese-speaking members.

Of the participants, 64% agreed that the church should engage in more evangelistic efforts to engage new people to attend church. Only 40% of the participants agreed that the church has undertaken sufficient practical community activities to spark growth in the neighbouring community.

On the other hand, 80% of the participants agreed that the church should offer more outreach programmes to the neighbouring community and they were also motivated to participate in growth opportunities when completing a growth project that coincides with their natural interests. Furthermore, 73% of the participants were motivated to participate in outreach activities if the project fits their schedule.

Figure 2: Congregations Areas of Interest to Serve in the Church.

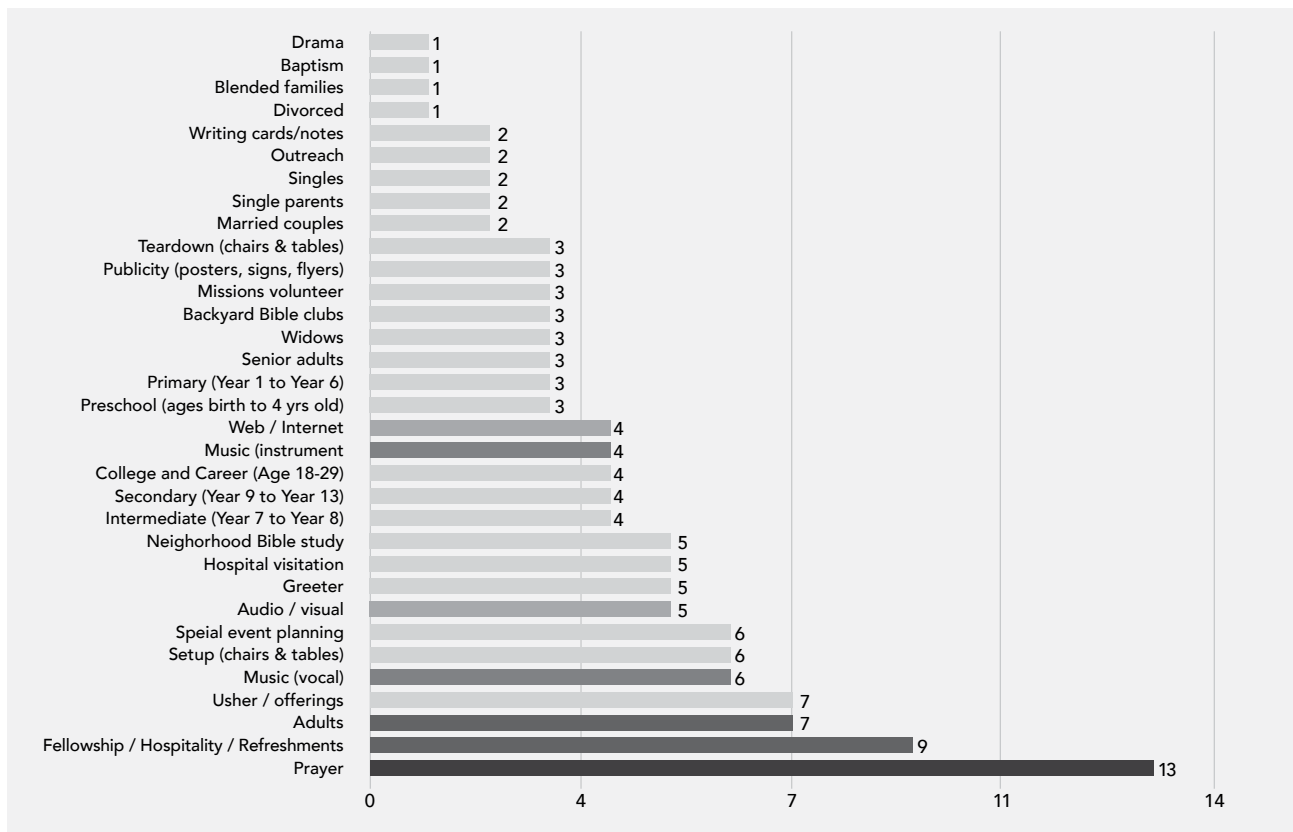
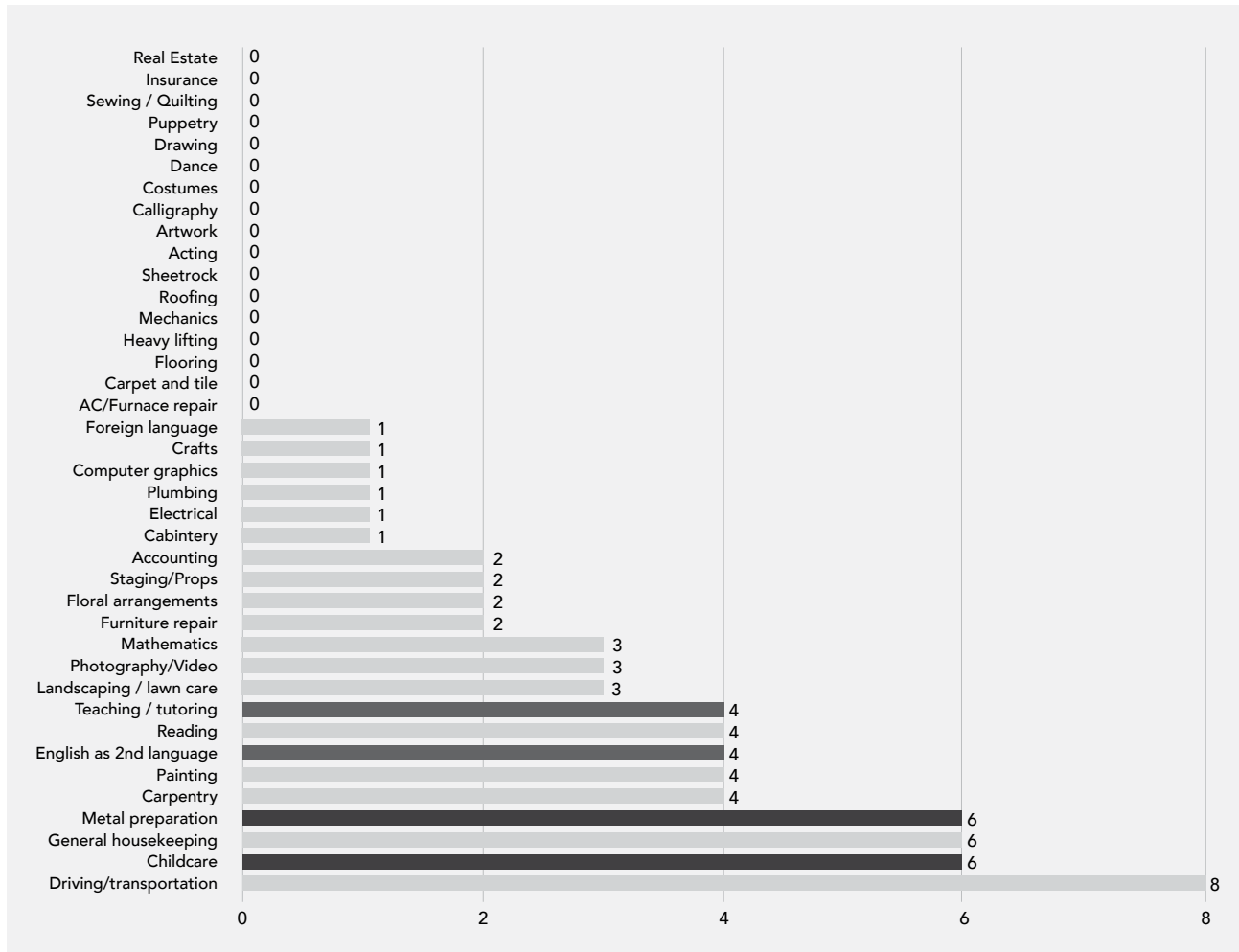


Figure 2 shows the congregation participants' interest in serving in the church in specific areas. Of the participants, 13 showed their interest in being involved in prayers, while nine were interested in fellowship and hospitality-related activities.

Figure 3 shows the congregation participants' skills and talents that could be used in church activities. The responses show that eight participants are willing to offer help in transportation and 12 are interested in childcare and food preparation. Teaching and language were a strength of this group of people with a total of eight participants showing interest. This will help the church match members with related experience to help.

Of the participants, 74% shared that they were willing to partner with the church vision to encourage others to help in activities that can help the church's growth, suggesting that some church members were willing to volunteer in the church community.

Figure 3: Congregation Skills and Talents that can be Used for Church Activities



DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The analysis of the data collected garnered insights regarding the common elements that help church growth in three growing churches in Auckland, that could inform new ministry initiatives for MSLC. In collaborative discussions with church leaders of MSLC, careful consideration was given to the optimal alignment of potential projects with the available human resources, prevalent themes from the literature, and perspectives shared in the leadership interviews. Out of this process, five initial projects emerged:

1. The establishment of youth groups and a worship band.
2. The enhancement of online ministries.
3. Strengthening of small groups and the welcoming team.
4. Offering community classes in English and Cantonese.
5. Childcare and the organisation of fellowship events like baking, hiking, and fishing.

Table 7 lists the suggested projects against the potential congregation numbers and how these items relate to the church growth elements discovered in the literature review and from the church interviews.

Table 7: Suggested Projects for Consideration by the Mountainside Lutheran Church

SUGGESTED PROJECT(S)	SUBJECTS WITH POTENTIAL MANPOWER (NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS COMPLETING THE QUESTIONNAIRE)	RELATED ELEMENTS AND THEMES TO CHURCH GROWTH
Youth Groups – Worship Band	Music Vocal (6)	1. Less than 30% of adults over 50 years old. 3. Worship experience.
Online Ministry – Marketing, Webpage, Spiritual Resources, YouTube, Facebook.	Web/Internet (4) Audio/Visual (5) PC (5)	4. Marketing strategies, Social Media and other technological usage.
Small Groups Ministry and Welcoming Team.	Listening (14) Encourage (10) Welcome (12) Meal for Sick Members (4)	5. Support to young families, couples, and young adults.
Community Services – English Class, – Cantonese Class for Children, – Childcare Class,	English as 2nd Language + Teaching (8) Childcare + Teaching (10) Childcare + Meal preparation (12)	7. Church facilities and services, 9. New immigrant support,
Fellowship Events – Baking – Hiking – Fishing	Fellowship + Adults (16) Baking (7) Hiking (7) Fishing (4)	5. Support for young families, couples, and young adults. 7. Church facilities and services. 9. New immigrant support.

Continued engagement in ongoing and open conversations regarding these proposals with the wider MSLC congregation will continue with the DT philosophy. The Annual General Meeting will provide an optimal opportunity for additional input and feedback to be solicited from members regarding the extent to which these projects resonate with their aspirations for the church's development. As attempts are made to establish alignment between the data collected and the perspectives held by congregational leaders and members, the congregation life committee of MSLC continue to facilitate discussion among the church. More so than the communication of outcomes, the objective will be to catalyse constructive dialogue that allows all stakeholders to voice their outlook and collectively shape future plans.

Ongoing Projects Using Design Thinking

During the implementation of the suggested projects, it will be important to review the early stages of the DT cycle to understand participants' needs and redefine the project details with MSLC groups and committees (Uebernickel et al., 2020).

In order to develop the five proposed projects, small church teams would be formed, and basic training provided for project leaders to explore the needs of the project users, following the DT model process (Buhl et al, 2019). Aho (2021) emphasised the effectiveness of small teams in implementing DT within a congregation. For example, the youth group leaders can reassess the interests of teenagers and explore ways to involve them in Sunday services. By understanding their needs, the youth group can brainstorm and implement solutions, seeking feedback from the teenagers and iterating as needed (Uebernickel et al., 2020).

Regular testing and feedback loops are crucial for each proposed project church team, allowing them to evaluate effectiveness and discover potential solutions (Dam & Siang, 2021). Incorporating a feedback system from users is essential for evaluating pilot projects (Linton & Klinton, 2019).

The testing stage of the DT model helps to identify and address user problems (Dell'Era, 2020). Church project team leaders should maintain open communication with church members and users to ensure project sustainability (Fewings & Henjewe, 2019). By finding motivated members to lead small church team projects and collaborate with like-minded individuals, the church can initiate activities that contribute to its growth.

CONCLUSION

This research identified key elements for church growth through an extensive literature review questionnaires and interviews with three growing churches in Auckland. The findings provided a framework that could be applied by scholars studying church growth in other contexts beyond the MSLC. By gathering perspectives from the leaders of the three churches exhibiting growth in Auckland, common themes emerged that may be relevant to various denominations and geographic settings. The application of the DT model also demonstrates a process that enables creativity, stakeholder engagement, and human-centred solutions that could benefit other religious organisations seeking revitalisation (Aho, 2021). While the projects suggested were tailored to MSLC's context, the methodology and insights on vital areas like online ministry, community outreach, leadership development, and leveraging members' talents could inform studies by other scholars aiming to understand the factors driving church participation. This research aimed to not only catalyse growth for one congregation but also further scholarly knowledge on principles and approaches for spiritual community vitality that could be adapted by religious leaders and researchers globally.

LIMITATIONS

The participants in MSLC were not as responsive as expected due to church members' difficulties and issues during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the results could be used to help understand participants' expectations and limitations before any project starts.

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