

ARTICLE

Regenerative Development as a Pathway for Church Renewal

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Abstract

This article details and discusses Regenerative Development, a concept developed by the Regenes Group, as a means for enabling church health and renewal. Across 2020–23 Cityside Baptist in Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand, worked with Regenerative Development Practitioners through three phases of application. The process and what emerged challenges usual perspectives on church growth and revitalization priorities around vision, outcomes and the community and context in view.

Keywords: Regenerative Development, Renewal, Cityside

In 2019 the leadership of Cityside Baptist Church in Auckland, New Zealand, found themselves wrestling with the question, “Why Cityside, here?” We had decisions to make that would impact our life together in the present and the future. Amongst our members were four people passionate about Regenerative Development and, seeing resonant potential with the nature of our community, the decision was made in 2020 to accept their recommendation to apply this methodology to address our question. What emerged challenges usual perspectives on church growth and revitalization priorities around vision, outcomes, and the community and context that is in view. This article begins by backgrounding our story leading up to this work, introduces Regenerative Development and details the process as applied to Cityside and emerging discoveries, before discussing the implications for understandings of church health and renewal.

1 The Cityside backstory

In 2019 the Council of Cityside Baptist found ourselves wondering what we were being called to be for another generation of our life together. This iteration of faith community at 8 Mount Eden Road in Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand, had been

alive and active since 1993 and formally instituted as a church of the Baptist Union in October 1995. It had emerged out of a period of social justice ministry on the site (the Auckland Baptist City Mission) in recognition that such ministry “needed to be based in a worshipping congregation” (Cityside Baptist, n.d.). Essentially at the time a fresh expression of church community in the inner city made up of young to middle-aged adults, Cityside, initially led by Mark Pierson, became known for being a safe space for those struggling with traditional theological assumptions and performance-based paradigms of church, and for its innovation in artistic expression and participatory “ancient-future worship” (Pierson, n.d.). Study of the community’s approach was published in the mid-2000s (Taylor 2004; Guest and Taylor 2006). By 2019, with the worshipping community having outlasted the work of the City Mission on the site, we were feeling the need to revitalize our sense of identity for discerning our future as a church and ongoing missional purpose. A group of members had undertaken research into the future potential of our buildings and offered design possibilities, and we were wondering how best to approach not only our children and youth spaces but a range of needs in our diverse community.

One of the wider local contextual realities for us was that construction was beginning on both a redesigned public transport hub and high-density housing planned to accommodate 20,000 inhabitants, promising to significantly alter the physical and socio-cultural landscape (Auckland City Council, n.d.). Closer to home, due to an initiative called 8Space, our building during the week is a vibrant hub hosting artists, musicians, poets and community events across twenty art studios and rehearsal and meeting spaces. Their evolution and aspirations need to be taken into account. Meanwhile there has been a growing commitment amongst Citysiders, inspired by Māori brothers and sisters, to try to truly live the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the founding document of our nation. This is a long but important journey of decolonizing our thinking, relationships and living in this land.¹ Key challenges for us in the face of these contextual realities are that: few of our members live locally; there is not often cross over between Sunday and weekday inhabitants; and Te Tiriti requires paradigm shifts in language and power. As we look to the future, what is God’s invitation to us? Who are we to be?

It was important to employ a process that would resonate with us. The innovator of 8Space, Damaris Kingdon, and two others of our congregation, Roxanne Haines and Justine Skilling, are Regenerative Development Practitioners; a fourth, Joy

1 A roopu (group) of the Minister, three Māori members and the Chair of Council was established during 2020.

Davidson, was deeply interested in this methodology. They felt regenerative principles of wholistic, participatory, nested-systems, essence-of-place regenerative development aligned with our community and so early in 2020 they approached Council. After some months of discussion and planning, the Council agreed to begin this process in November 2020. Mark Haines, a Council member and from August 2021 its co-Chair, volunteered to coordinate the logistics and gave many hours to this work. Coming strongly recommended, Rhyll Stafford, a member of the 8Space community and experienced Regenerative Development Practitioner, was employed as an invested outsider to facilitate the identified phases. The process itself, planned to be substantively progressed in 2021, was slowed by the COVID pandemic. The phases were completed at the beginning of 2023.

2 Regenerative Development

Regenerative Development first emerged as a concept in North America in 1995, coined by the Regenes Group. It describes a means of enabling living beings to co-evolve a whole-of-systems approach to harnessing potential so that a project might contribute to the regeneration of the unique place in which it is located. As a methodology, Regenerative Development seeks the stories of that place as contained in environmental, historical and community records and data (quantitative and qualitative) to uncover recurring patterns shaping geology, biology and culture over time. By doing so, the essence of that place is revealed and thereby core guiding principles for future initiatives can be discerned. In taking such a place-sourced approach what becomes possible is not a short-term strategy, but a fifty- or even five-hundred-year trajectory for development.

Typically, development and renewal projects are the work of a (siloed) few, seeking to address problems that have arisen, with an eye on the immediate issues, working to time and money constraints, and rarely taking into account wider considerations and interdependencies, let alone listening to the unique stories of place. A city, for example, may be facing urban growth that puts pressure on essential services and housing requiring the reconfiguration of neighbourhoods and risking social and ecological disruption. Locally, a community suffering from the consequences of disaffected youth might look to further means for curtailing their behaviour, missing opportunities to harness their energy, while (church) leaders may decide to establish as a missional initiative a community garden to address rising costs of living but find themselves quickly facing issues of sustainability.

Regenerative Development does not focus on a problem in an attempt to fix, contain or manage it, but proactively engages in deep listening and “imaging” to identify

purposeful potential – the inherent, long-term directional possibilities emerging from context. “Imaging is different from imagination. It is a focused effort to see something accurately and from the inside, as it really is” (Regenesis Institute 2023a: 3). In order to do this, the whole story of a setting needs to be taken into account in order to discover its inherent potential sourced in its essence. Then it is a process of “seeing how that essence can be uniquely value-adding within its con-text” (Mang and Haggard 2016: 123). For Regenerative Development, this requires the collaborative involvement not only of would-be decision-makers, but all those who will be affected from the past, present and future. The Law of Three facilitates what could present as a complexity of disparate ideas. It understands that truly creative thinking is enabled by activating forces inspiring new ideas, restraining forces that identify those things that could constrain and thus need integrated consideration (often articulated by the receiver), and reconciling forces that bring the first two together and enable “a shift in level or insight” (Regenesis Institute 2023b: 2). In such a process place and its unique qualities is crucial, for Regenerative Development believes we must allow nature and indigeneity to shape us if we are to thrive as nested eco-systems. A given project may be place-based – an imposition of an idea on a living community; the aim is to be place-sourced – inspired by what we encounter. Deep listening is therefore a matter of paying attention not only to current need but, in the case of a community’s development, the interweaving of realities sourced in historical human knowledges of and behaviour in that place, ecological and, deeper still, geological truth.

The focus on place recognizes that eco-systems are unique expressions of interdependent communities – animated in ways particular to each location, “touchstones for shared meaning and caring” (Mang and Haggard 2023: xxxii). Who and what we are and can become is inevitably shaped by place. As Rebecca Solnit has observed, “Places matter. Their rules, their scale, their design include or exclude civil society, pedestrianism, equality, diversity...They map our lives” (Solnit 2007: 9). In a real way vocation emerges from this mapping, essentially of soul. For a true thriving there will be congruence of the past, present and future, across land, water, rocks, vegetation, human and other life forms. Indigenous peoples have been profoundly aware of this for millennia: those of us who have inherited Western enlightenment thinking need to recover this understanding.

Such thinking recognizes the complex reality that we exist within interrelated (or nested) systems that not only have an impact upon us, but which we also impact. Regenerative Development is built upon systems thinking, including the work of John Bennett in the 1960s (Bennett 1992). In his work, four sources underpin activity toward realizing potential: the ground and the goal (motivations revealing the why,

that take into account need and aspiration); and the directive force and instruments (means of engaging). In Regenerative Development they become:

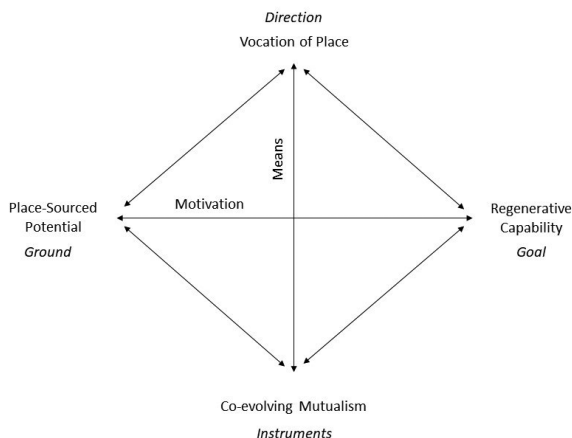


Figure 1 Regenerative Tetrad with Bennett’s terms added (Regenesis Institute 2023b: 6)

The starting point for seeking motivation is the question ‘What is the unique and inherent potential of this place?’ for that will help in identifying the regenerative capability of the work. Discernment of the vocation of that place (its essence that will inspire guiding principles for long-term decision-making), deployed in an approach committed to co-evolving mutualism of all natural and human parts, constitute the means. This is not a process therefore of the visioning so popular with many leaders with its sense of casting an idea forward, but of identifying purpose – a profoundly grounded exercise exemplifying the Māori proverb, “Ka mua, ka muri,” we walk into the future facing the past.

Two other approaches to change are also woven into Regenerative Development. Permaculture, “originated by Bill Mollison and David Holmgren in the 1970s ... discerns patterns in natural and human systems in order to weave them together as dynamic wholes” and Developmental Change Processes commit communities to working together to co-evolve “the potential of place, rather than struggling over the limits presented by existing conditions” (Mang and Haggard 2016: xv). The overall result is that design (and planning) is linked to process rather than end product and is held with an open hand while being grounded.

It is important to note that whenever and wherever this work is done, systems thinking requires of us an awareness that whatever our “whole” might be – the geographical or conceptual project we are focused on – it is nested within, and offers nesting to,

other wholes. The concept is of interdependent holarchies as opposed to discrete hierarchies – nested and interweaving ecosystems. A building project, or a project centred on a building, for example, should not consider the building individually but be mindful of its role as both a host of wholes and belonging to larger wholes, or systems. Truly regenerative work, embarked upon in a way that gathers the voices, understandings and creativity of all invested parties, human and of nature, should thus enable thriving beyond the immediate sphere. In the thinking of organizational architects James Clark and Charles Krone, writing in the 1970s, humans have the potential to awaken “the capability embodied in all living systems for creating increasing levels of vitality, viability, and the capacity to evolve” if we would only think in these new (yet, for indigenous peoples, old) ways (Plaut and Amedée 2018: 5). As noted earlier, deep listening is required to discern what is essential and wherein lies potential; self-awareness to set aside ego in order to align and image with others the possibilities of the nested whole is a continuing (regenerative) necessity. Spirit in and through all is key; deep calling to deep.

3 The process and our discoveries

Most commonly Regenerative Development has been applied to urban design and development projects, as well as community development. We agreed to apply it to our life as a gathered and dispersed community of faith (gathering on Sundays to worship at 8 Mt Eden Road but living and working during the week across the city of Auckland) to address two fundamental questions: What is the Spirit saying to Cityside at this time?; and Who/What is Cityside being called to be in this place?

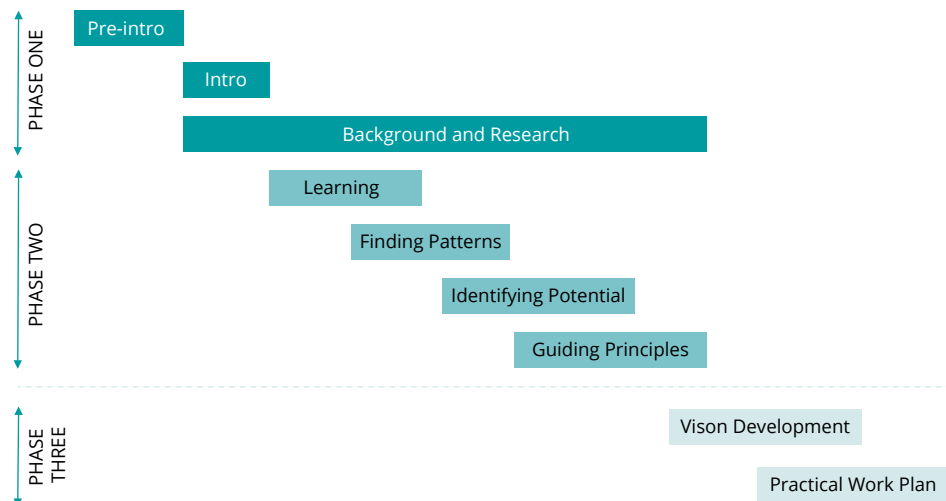


Figure 2 Three Phases (Haines 2020: Slide 2)

Three phases were shaped up to enable us to discern the essence of Cityside and this place, what we could look like, feel and do in a regenerative state, and what our guiding principles and commitments might be. Together they help us discover and enable in this iteration three of the four elements of the Regenerative tetrad noted earlier: place-sourced potential, co-evolving mutualism and vocation of place. The fourth – regenerative capability – being the goal.

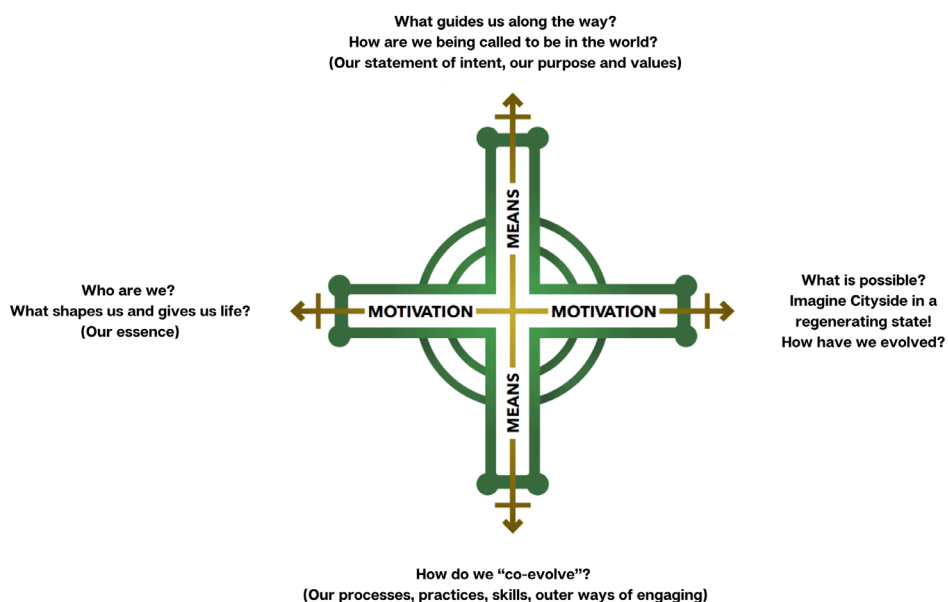


Figure 3 Cityside's Tetrad (Haines 2022)

Several months were devoted to the first phase and particularly to researching our "Stories of Place". Five storylines were explored by Cityside members: tangata whenua (indigenous) stories; geological, ecological and water stories; neighbourhood stories; church history; and Cityside stories.

3.1 Phase One: Stories of Place

3.1.1 Tangata whenua

Cityside is located under the shadow of Maungawhau, "The Mountain of the Whau tree" (also known as Mt Eden), a volcano of some significance for local iwi (Māori tribes) in Tāmaki Makaurau, or the Auckland region (Geonet, n.d.). An elder, Matua Paora Puru of Waiohua, a confederation of tribes, took members of Cityside up the mountain on a hikoi named Te Aro Oho – A Journey of Awakening. As part of that journey, we learned that until about ad 1700 thousands of Māori had lived there

in an enormous pā, a terraced citadel. You can still see the evidence of this carved into the maunga, along with indentations of house sites and food storage pits. The crater itself is known as “Te Kapua kai a Mataaho – ‘the food bowl of Mataaho’, the deity responsible for volcanic activity” (Tūpuna Maunga Authority, n.d.). The whau, after which the maunga is named, is a native tree with large leaves whose wood is half again lighter than cork. The wood was used for rafts and outriggers on small waka (canoes) and as floats on fishing nets, the leaves as paper, and the sap and jelly beneath the bark for medicinal purposes (Te Mara Reo, n.d.). Meanwhile, in the valley between Maungawhau and the ridge on which Cityside is located is a puna or spring named Te Ipu Pakore, which was the main water source of the pā. The maunga for Māori therefore, we discovered, had been a home to many, a key source of shelter and sustenance, hospitality and healing, a refuge and place to both venture out from and return to. Interestingly today it also hosts a series of large rocks sourced from another key local volcano, Te Tātua a Riukiuta, the only surviving scoria cone of three in the wake of quarrying. This is to maintain the memory and the mana (spiritual power and authority) of these lost ancestors.

3.1.2 Geology, hydrology, ecology

Investigation into our geological history reveals that while we are located on tuff – rock made of volcanic ash ejected during an eruption – it does not come from Maungawhau, our closest mountain, but from Pukekawa, the volcano now at the heart of Auckland’s central business district. The lava of Maungawhau meets the tuff of Pukekawa at the ridge on which Cityside sits. Hydrologically “the porous volcanic soil [across the area] causes rainfall to quickly soak away, and the large fractures and even caverns in the rock allow large amounts of water to be stored and move underground” creating an aquifer below ground – the ongoing source for puna (springs) nearby – and a stream above ground flowing eastward to the sea (Dewerse, Dewerse and Skilling 2022: 2). Alongside this significant water resource, the volcanic soil itself is extremely fertile, rich in magnesium and potassium, creating an abundant ecological oasis. A lush forest grew alongside a wetland, both full of native trees and plants good for food and medicine as well as native birds, lizards, fish and eels. Māori, arriving from Polynesia, added kumera, taro and uwhi (yams), cultivating significant gardens and using warm rocks from Maungawhau to enable these tropical plants to grow. Living with the land they came to see themselves as its descendants and kaitiaki (guardians and caretakers). Europeans and Chinese from the 1840s altered the landscape, building houses and roads along main arterials following ridgelines such as ours, as well as market gardens. “In a short space of time, the fertile soil, the stream, the spring, the forest and wetlands disappeared beneath concrete and asphalt” (Dewerse, Dewerse and Skilling 2022: 3).

3.1.3 *The neighbourhood*

Reflection on the neighbourhood noted our neighbours as not only being the volcanoes, our abundant water sources and fertile soils, but also the thirteen iwi (Māori tribes) who have lived, moved through and interacted in this area over time. There is an invitation and challenge to deep relationship in the mihi, or salutation, given to Cityside by Matua Paora Puru, our guide on Maungawhau: “Ka pa he taura waka e motu, he hono tangata e kore e motu.” Unlike a canoe rope, a human bond and connection can never be severed. (Kingdon, 2022: 6). Today, as in pre-European times, we are located on the edge of a tuff that is both a point of convergence and a thoroughfare “on the way to elsewhere” (Kingdon 2022: 7). Down the road is a train station that has been key to the Auckland rail network since the 1880s. Not far away is the Mt Eden Corrections Facility, a fortress-like prison built in 1882, today a reception centre for male remand prisoners in the Auckland region. While the area overall has gone from housing to industrialization and back, postcodes for our neighbourhood have been changing in recent times as apartments have been appearing and the population has been densifying. If you examine our neighbourhood over time it evidences cycling patterns of showing promise or lapsing into dubiousness, of housing people or becoming industrial, of land being fertile and abundant or contaminated, of being vibrant and artsy or soullessly functional. Today it has been dubbed “Uptown”. Maungawhau has been redesignated sacred and is a place for walkers to pause and remember. A new housing development is under way with accommodation for business and light industry. Not-for-profit organisation For the Love of Bees has established an exemplary no-till regenerative organic market garden in what was an empty contaminated lot and 8Space gathers together a vibrant arts community. There is renewed intent and possibility.

3.1.4 *Church history*

The land our church building sits upon was part of the Waitemata block “gifted” by a local Māori chief to the British around 1840.² Baptist activity first began in a house a few streets away with the founding of a Sunday School in 1864 by Theophilus B. Heath to give children local to Mt Eden something divinely-shaped to do on their weekends (Kingdon 2022: 6). Rapidly-growing, a dedicated building catering for up to 200 children was erected in 1865 at the junction of three main arterials. Then in 1885, Heath’s home church planted Mt Eden Baptist further down the main road on the

2 “Gifted” is enclosed in speech marks because while the British understood it therefore as ownership, and able to be bought and sold for Māori “tuku whenua” is land gifted for a purpose to be used responsibly and without alienation of the land, in the context of ongoing mutual relationship. In the perspective of Māori, this gifting has been abused (Healy 2009: 111–34).

current site. Adult membership multiplied ten-fold within two years, partly because of political commitment to the temperance movement. Over time, from being a church plant the community at Mt Eden became church planters. Twelve other Auckland Baptist churches existing today had Mt Eden Baptist members involved in their founding, a fact which meant our church waxed and waned in number as people engaged beyond. From such significant evolutions, by the 1950s industrialization was overtaking housing in the area, reducing attendance. In 1960 the congregation decided to close and offer the building for the use of the Baptist City Mission. It became a key centre of resourcing and refuge, particularly for those who were homeless. An article in the *Central Leader* newspaper in 1971 called it “an oasis of relief in Auckland’s concrete jungle” (Prince 1971: 5). Thirty-five years later, in the wake of one hundred years of very Christological cycles of dying and rising, a new ministry emerged with the constitution of the faith community of Cityside in 1995.

3.1.5 Cityside

This storyline, being the most recent, coalesced through conversation and contribution. It was actually the first piece of research undertaken and included interviews with our two previous pastors, two former children’s programme leaders, and five long-standing members; five reflective Zoom sessions open to all current attendees which more than thirty-five people attended; and the opportunity for the community to construct an online Map of Time and Heart exploring when Citysiders first came to the community and why, and why they have stayed. The data from more than fifty people on the Map pretty much sums up the original intent and realised potential to date. The majority came because they no longer felt at home in Church, wanted a faith community in which they could be fully themselves, and/or because of relational connections. They stay because honest wondering is truly welcome as per our tagline “Thinking aloud allowed,” for the authenticity and challenge to the status quo, the emphasis on participation, silence and creativity, the inclusivity and aliveness of spirit, the commitment in our lives and work to the good of our wider world, and the deep friendships that have been forged. For many, Cityside is an edgy oasis to come to and go out from.

3.2 Phase Two: Discerning deeper

We spent time learning and presenting the storylines to our community because it was important for us all to hear, understand and process these if together we were to uncover the essence of place so important for discerning our unique vocation, and thus responding to “Why Cityside, here?” Our children too engaged in experiential reflection by walking in our neighbourhood and the Maungawhau rock forest and exploring the nooks and crannies of our building. As the storylines were celebrated – woven into our worship services – key observations were noted on tall

three-dimensional blackboards standing as pillars amongst us. We colour-coded and drew connecting lines as we formally and informally reflected together on what was emerging. We asked five questions: What is unique to this place?; What has influenced and is influencing Cityside's role?; What resonates for us personally?; What do we hear amongst us as we share responses?; and What does this mean for Cityside's role and potential? Children and adults alike journalled and conversed. The "Regen Boards" we populated together provided the data against which all subsequent parts of our Regenerative Process were cross-referenced by our facilitator Rhyll and a small team of key Cityside Regenerative Practitioners and leaders supporting her.

In the wake of the storyline sessions one of that team, Karen Haines, wrote the following responsive prayer. It usefully summarised our storylines, expressed our desire, and began the distillation process.

*Cityside is built on ancient tuff
at a meeting of the ways, travelled by pathfinders.*
We seek wisdom in our journeying.

*Cityside is near a spring,
nourishing life, an oasis to splash in.*
We seek wisdom as we, too, thirst.

*Cityside wants to honour Tiriti partnership
making space to listen, to understand, to kōrero together.*
We seek wisdom in our learning.

*Cityside has met the needs of community:
children learning, church planting, provision for lost adults, space for meeting.*
We seek wisdom to be good neighbours.

*Cityside has nurtured imagination,
drawn in artists, musicians, way-finders, free-thinkers.*
We seek wisdom as we create and recreate.

*Cityside is on a hill, visible from a distance
edgy, being out front.*
We seek wisdom as we influence others.

The next step saw us, across three workshops with small groups of people, focused on defining, refining and finalizing an articulation of Cityside's essence of place arising from the data gathered. As Rhyll noted in her report:

Much like our personal essence that endures and transforms through our lifespan, the essence of place is also unique and enduring. Collective action can be empowered when the unique essence of a communities[sic] place is uncovered and expressed. Asking if we are being true to essence, keeps our collective direction alive and free of personal agendas. Providing much more than plans or activities that tell or ask people what they think, we have instead an invitation to learn and respond collectively to what is emerging. We can move forward with essence as both a reflection and a guide. (Stafford 2023: 17)

*Cityside's Essence:
A nourishing wellspring
where journeys converge,
a waypoint at the edge,
providing sanctuary
as we creatively explore and question,
respond to and engage in our world. (Stafford 2023: 16)*

Once confirmed, past and present Cityside council members sought to distil core principles. We drew not only on our Regenerative work to date, but also a set of Community Priorities and a Statement of Intent drawn up by then leaders in 2014 that proved encouragingly, consistently resonant.

*We seek to be a transforming community following in the Way of Jesus the Christ, through practices of prayer, hospitality and engagement in our world – local and global.
We hope to nurture depth, beauty and vitality in ourselves and in the world around us.
We aim to sustain and resource Christian practice, and work towards the restoration of all life. (Stafford 2023: 32)*

Our principles we consequently named as: Relational, Restorative, Creative. The expectation is that into the future all decisions in any part of our community life be cast and reviewed through their lens to ensure we honour our discerned essence.

3.3 Phase Three: Ka mua, ka muri

In Regenerative Development, as noted earlier, awareness of nested systems and interdependency is important because “in a truly healthy state, each system adds

value to the other” (Stafford 2023: 19). The activity in our building across every day of the week reminds us that Cityside is only one whole within *its* whole as other groups also find home here. Not only that, Jesus’ command to love our neighbours (Mk 12.31), cast through the Regenerative frame, requires that we consider our human and natural neighbours beyond our building, local and global. While we know this, the Regenerative process nonetheless invites us in our next season to intentional accountability that is true to our essence conducted in ways that are always relational, restorative and creative. Having said this, it is important to note that for our indigenous members such reminders are unnecessary. Early in the Regenerative process they noted that its commitments and insights are intrinsic to their world-view. This makes it even more urgent that we honour the call to deep relationship woven into Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

What therefore could Cityside look like in a regenerating state? Further workshops sought to respond to this question, imagining practically what this might mean. We identified three ways we would recognize we are regenerating, set the following goals for the next three years within those, and identified an accountability structure including timeframes and people responsible to see them carried out.

Cityside as a Church [will be] sustaining an authentic and responsive Christian centre – reading the ‘signs of our time’ as a dispersed community.

1. *Weaving Cityside spiritual practices, encouraging those on the margins and multiple voices.*
2. *Understanding and developing co-governance. Equipping Pākehā.³*
3. *Creating a cultural shift: Relational spirituality/Being intergenerational.*

Cityside ... [will be] providing a meaningful contribution to our neighbourhoods: local, theological and ideological.

1. *Developing Cityside as a community hub...(establishing a ‘Community Weaver’ role).*
2. *Initiatives in the Building (including Social Enterprises).*

Cityside building and surrounds [will be] creating a place of solace and restoration, in connection with our local environment, providing contemplation for Citysiders and others.

1. *Building renovation. [Note: during the Regenerative Process the City Council hired our hall and kitchen to provide people in the area with “quiet space” when the rede-*

3 Pākehā initially referred to those of British descent. It can also refer to all non-indigenous New Zealanders.

velopment of the local train station got too much for them, affirming our essence as sanctuary.]

2. Residential Intergenerational Community – An offsite option.

One Sunday, when practical ideas to realize the goals were presented, there was significant energy generated with a surprising number of people offering their creativity, skills and time. This was a first affirmation for us that when development is sourced in the essence of place, imagination can be sparked and vitality enabled. As Rhyll noted, however, moving into a regenerating state is a commitment taking years, not months. “Building the required capacity and capability for a regenerative direction can be a creative challenge, needing action as well as plenty of room to experiment, reflect, adapt and learn” (Stafford 2023: 31). This is the space Cityside now find ourselves in.

4 What can Regenerative Development offer to church renewal?

There may in fact be much in our story and this approach to renewal that seems unsurprising. Missional church leaders know the importance of surveying one’s neighbourhood to ensure initiatives undertaken are congruent with need. History is something congregations often like to recall and assess the present in the light of. But in our context, where the possibility of numerical growth by which health is so often judged is becoming elusive for many church congregations, Regenerative Development offers a wider perspective and frame.

The concept of renewal has been significantly influenced since 1961 by the work of Donald McGavran, who inspired the Church Growth Movement (CGM) (McGavran and Wagner 1990). McGavran promoted evangelism conducted via a genuine understanding of local culture though in the hands of others CGM developed into a focus on quantitative measurement and over-simplified formulas for church growth (Stetzer 2012). In the 1990s one such formula given significant profile was Rick Warren’s *Purpose Driven Church* offering five strategies. This focused on “purpose” via internal people-building to create health bringing growth (Warren 1995). More recently the concern has been to understand church life cycles because “Learning life cycle status often provides a sense of urgency for church leaders as they plan for new cycles of growth and development to avoid the life cycle of decline” (General Baptist Ministries 2016, n.p.). The key perceived problem, to be avoided if at all possible, is decline and death. “Redemptive potential” is the antidote – a quantitative analysis of income, membership and activities to realise a comfort zone that enables transition into a larger church size (General Baptist Ministries, n.p.) Embedded in all of this is

the assumption that the responsibility for renewal lies on the shoulders of “church leaders”, or the church leader, who must cast a vision for others to follow.

Related to these approaches but deviating a little, other initiatives have pressed again into sociological understanding for empowering renewal. “Place” is acknowledged as important and “ecology” is even spoken of, but typically these terms refer to the church building as per the model for growth for leaders profiled in *Holy Places: Matching Sacred Space with Mission and Message*, or to human community evidenced in local demographics of changing cultural and socio-economic reality (DeMott, Shapiro and Bill 2007). Alice Mann in her chapter entitled “Place-Based Narratives” took a step further and investigated the historical story to reveal the “soul of place,” but stopped there (Mann 2010: 63). Bids for renewal, even when sourced in attempts at appreciative enquiry, fundamentally remain problem-centred and anthropocentric.

Regenerative Development affirms uniqueness of place and, rather than being focused on the problem, seeks to discern vocation arising from place-sourced potential through wide collaboration. Regenerative Development recognises that an organizational entity is not an entity unto itself operating independently and on its own terms in the world around it. Beginning with the boundary of the greater whole, which could be, say, the city limits, we look at the systems nested within that boundary. We explore how ecology, geology as well as sociology and anthropology affect a place historically to the present and then, based on this information, into the future. The outcome of this is that the entity doesn’t “do to” the world around it, but “works with”. At first this sounds like classic missional thinking, but the major difference is that it is not anthropocentric in the first instance. After deep listening to the nested systems it finds itself in, the church discovers its vocation, which determines shape and service. We should not underestimate the seismic shift in thinking here. Rather than “mission to” the emphasis is on “participating in”. A church then is integrated already, particularly if it has a building.

In this frame, evangelism and church “growth” is dramatically expanded from a fundamentally quantitative exercise into a qualitative journey, and into a service model rather than a saving model. It is no longer an “us and them” but simply an “us”. We become participants in the systems we are nested within rather than set up against them. Furthermore, the attitude the church has towards itself is more humble and accepting of ebbs and flows in the church life. For example, the children’s ministry that once thrived is allowed not to now. It is not a crisis if an ebb takes place. Trying to avoid decline and death at all costs is arguably not consistent with the acknowledgement at the heart of the gospel and affirmed by Paul in the

Epistle to the Romans, that it is dying that makes rising possible. Part of the crisis in Western churches, we would suggest, is that we see existence needing to be a continual progression in growth. Worldviews that are cyclical in orientation accept waxing and waning as a part of life; “unforming” is as vital as forming and re-forming in the process of renewal (Lee 2022: 7). From another angle, as Steve Taylor noted, we need to be very cautious about assigning value to permanency (Taylor 2019). Cityside’s own Stories of Place affirm the beauty of reimagination and rebirth, as well as our need for repentance. As in permaculture, instead of growth being territorial and imposing, health incorporates death and decay to give way to more life.

If the focus on place that Regenerative Development requires seems to fly in the face of the old adage that a “church is not the building but the people”, the wisdom of indigenous peoples reminds us that landscapes are living beings and we are integrally connected to them. As David Titterington has noted, landscapes are “actors ... ‘agentic’ ... shape[ing] our beliefs, our bodies, and our minds” (Titterington 2017: n.p). Reminiscent of the Law of Three, “they also enable, inspire, and constrain much of our activities ... Societies and stories *take place*” (Titterington 2017: n.p). The biblical record itself evidences the importance of place for shaping identity and grounding potential. “The place where we live tells us who we are – how we relate to other people, to the larger world around us, even to God” (Lane 2007: 22). For Cityside, a dispersed community where the majority of members do not live in the suburb of Mount Eden during the week, a lingering question was how can a process focused on the place of our building be relevant to our everyday lives? The understanding of nested and interdependent holarchies affirms, however, the resonance of discerned patterns in one place (for us restoring, relating and creating) for influencing life in others. In Spirit the essence of place goes with us.

5 Conclusion

When it comes to how we might effect church renewal, a warning from the leaders of Regenesi Institute is useful: “On the face of it, the promulgation of good ideas around the world seems sensible. Yet it has the insidious effect of transforming living communities into commodities. It flattens reality, ironing out the differentiation and diversity that makes all the places of the world rich, resilient, and interesting” (Regenesi Institute 2023c: 13). At Cityside, as a result of the Regenerative process we have undertaken to date, we have caught a glimpse of how hopeful and vital our life can be, within a transformed understanding of viability.

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