

## Episode 026

# Interview: The Importance Of Church Culture With Ps. Richard Green

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## Introduction

**Pastor Richard Green, he's the founding and senior pastor of C3 North Ryde. It has really grown to be a large church with multiple branches. And besides that the church has also founded many other churches in different places throughout Australia and even outside in other parts of the world.**

**Could you share with us what are some of the key areas that the church has developed over the several decades?**

We started 23 years ago. My hope was that I might do a reasonable job of pastoring the church of maybe 70 to 100 but it grew. We've always have had a focus on Mission. That's a hard word. A difficult word because it's has a lot of different connotations but largely sharing the gospel in all forms in all places. So we have a big community arm in our own church called Reach Community Initiative which we have chaplains. A grief counselor, a food bank which is used every day. We run a regular monthly Community dinner for people in our region in our area who are really struggling. We probably get about 100 people at that every month.

Then over the years we've been involved in a lot of church planting. Initially we started in Papua New Guinea. Basically, we had a member of our church he and his wife moved to Papua New Guinea. They were dentist and a doctor. They were in a church they invited me there. From there we started our own child sponsorship program which led to a whole lot of different works including supplying fresh water, medical teams and setting up a church planning school. We served another denomination. We sent one of our staff up there to run the church planting school for five years for another denomination. And out of that there's been over 150 churches planted.



Then we also did similar thing when the tsunami went through in 2001. The one that hit Indonesia. We were on the ground in Banda Aceh. The week after the tsunami, right from then we set up nine church planting schools, several orphanages. That led to the planting of about 500 churches for another denomination.

Then we shifted gears probably 10 years ago. Because I realized after a number of years, we'd done a lot of work. But once we trained and released and sent these churches out and they were going. Not because of any bad motive or anything, but I think the denominations that we served took control and we were sort of isolated from remaining connected to those people.

Having reviewed that years later, many of them have not grown. So we've now decided to only plant the churches for our movement. So since then, we've now planted it's about 107 churches that are purely really directly connected with us because for me it's not about money although it takes a lot of money. It's not about training material although it takes a lot of training. It's all about relationships and I don't want to lose that fatherly brotherly connection. We think that's really important. And there's 100 plus which is outside of Australia. There's six in Australia, one in New Zealand. Then they're everywhere from Iraq in Baghdad to Syria to northern Italy, southern Italy right through the Pakistan, Bangladesh right up into the Russian-speaking countries. The former USSR countries including Russian Ukraine. We've got our own little bible college. It's more for our own people and we run an internship program for 23 years.



**One of the things we talked about earlier in the conversation, we were talking about culture and you made a statement "Culture eats Vision any day". Would you elaborate a little bit the power the value of culture?**

I think of it like this. Vision is given to us from God. We don't own the vision. We are servants but God puts a vision in us. In fact, we don't get a vision, but it gets us. In that seed is the power to multiply and all that.

However, the thing we have control of is the environment in which that seed will go in. Like the soil. If you have the wrong soil or the soil's not good. For instance, if you took the best mango seed you could you took it to where we've got a church in Siberia right and try to put it in the soil's rich there but it's the wrong soil. It's not going to grow.

So culture is like soil and if you don't have the right culture, no matter how great that seed is it's going to struggle to flourish. So that's what I mean by culture. The culture is the shared values of that community. It's the sort of values that's lived out. It's not just some theory but very much lived out. It must be lived out and shared so one of the challenges to identify what the real values are within your community, your faith your church. But ensuring that those values are consistent with the values that are in the Gospels. Now some values we have they're sort of neutral. Some values we have are counter to the values of the Gospel. So it's trying to elevate the ones we believe we live which are in the Gospel. And eliminate things that we might espouse to but don't do. Because that's important.



**So as a leader, how can we be intentional in cultivating the right kind of cultures in our group or in our church?**

I think it starts with the leader first. I think the lead senior leader and his wife have to sit and ask the deep questions. What do I really value, really? Now I do an exercise which could be potentially quite negative because if you value something you'll live, eat and breathe and die for it. So I use the opposite. I would start with, "Tell me what you really despise and would not like." Because when you start thinking on that end it evokes emotion. But you don't stop there. I say, "Okay, now that you've identified that, think of the opposite which is the positive." So as an example, in our church one of our values is team. Because I don't like the Lone Ranger, the autonomous superstar. That's just me but it's also my wife. So the opposite to that is team.

So if somebody comes with a really good idea and it could be this great idea and I'm excited. My next thing will be to remain true to that value and I'll say, "Okay that's wonderful. Let's pray about it. Let's seek the Lord and let's wait until others get a similar idea and we've got a team. Once we've got a team [agreement] then we'll do it.

So we've got in ours, we've identified 11 [values] that have started with my wife and I. But then as we've shared them with the core team, the core team said, "Yeah we've got those too." So trying to narrow those lived or those live values are not just Kathy and I. The team have them as well.

**Something that becomes more part of and more natural. So besides that, is there anything else more that you do intentionally? Perhaps amongst the members of the church, how would you intentionally cultivate that amongst them?**

So we start from every person coming to church. As soon as somebody comes to church, we run a thing called Our Church Explained. Not a very funky term. But it's a functional term because we want to explain our church and [in] explaining our church we want to explain our values. So we start there. Then we ask the question in every Ministry area, "How are you living out our values in your kids church programming?"



**Is this something you asked like once a year or just when you feel you need to ask?**

No, it's happening every time the team will meet so when our teams meet, we're always asking the question, "How are we going with our values? How are we working through programs?" So as an example, we have a staff meeting of about 30. Every week we do a session on one of our values. We've got a roster and we leave it to the team and each a member of the team does it. And it may not be teaching necessarily. They could do an exercise. We want it to permeate. They permeate down through everything and then we even use phrases and everything we have is linked to our values. And seeking to dig it deep in into the life of the staff and leaders, and I guess the church too.

**Do you even preach sometimes certain sermon topic series that reinforce those things?**

For the numbers of years, not every year, the last two years have been different. Last three years have been very different right because we've had to adjust to what we've all been through. So we paused but up until then so for 20 years we would plan 12 months in advance.

We'd get one of our values and we'd say which month of the year does that value best fit with and we will plan all of our preaching around the values. So every year. Now we don't go, "We're doing value number one". Well, that would be too boring. So we would say, "What's our number one value?" Our number one value is word and spirit. So we'd say if that's so important to us, "What month of the year do we have the majority of the people and they're energized." Then we're going to do a whole four weeks on that one value. But we would not call it word and spirit. We might call it...let's say the "I Am" statements of John. Because John's gospel expresses transcendence and imminence. I am the bread of life. He's present and He does a miracle. So we're subtle but intentional. So yes, every year's planned.



**That's really excellent. It's really interesting something for me go back and think about as well. What would you say to a leader who's not the senior lead not the top leader. Maybe it's a leader of a small group or responsible for a ministry. What would you say should be their role as part of cultivating those cultures?**

I think the small groups are the most important. They're the engine room of the church. Firstly, we would try to get them to see, not what is not happening, but what is happening. So we want their eyes to be looking for what God is doing. We would encourage them to be looking for what God is doing and how that lines up with one of the values. And to try to structure and elevate the momentum that's coming out of that one value. For example, we've got 57 different ethnicities in our church. So obviously some cultures are more given to eating and food and they are very good at Team. So in that context we'd say to that that group gear everything to elevating what you do really, really well. And we're going to celebrate that and promote that and applaud that on a Sunday. So they become the symbol of that value.

One of our other values is a culture of evangelism. So you might have another group that's particularly good. So we've got a group I can think of that do that really well. Because God's doing that. So we elevate that and get them to celebrate that and promote that. So the group leader is working with what is working. Not trying to manufacture something. And then we would try to resource around that.



**That's a very interesting strategy I think that's powerful. Now another different sort of question. Sometimes as a senior leader you come into a church context where you had to take over a church setting or even a group leader you're taking over a group. And often there's an existing culture which you're thinking, "Okay, but I want to shift the culture. I want to adjust the culture." What would be some key tips to do that?**

Firstly, I would say that we have to acknowledge that culture. As I said culture eats vision. So I can't just plough into a small group take it over and say, "Here's my vision and expect everyone to change." I will be disappointed. People will be disappointed. So I must acknowledge that culture exists. Step one. Step two, I have to find a bridge between existing culture and a positive culture that I might have. So rather than kicking against the culture, try to transform it and link it to the Gospel. I'll give you an example. In Australia probably you could say that perhaps Anzac Day, it has become quite a strong cultural statement in Australia. And the reason being is it celebrates, although it celebrates a loss which is strange, what it does celebrate is mateship.

Now Australia's very egalitarian so sometimes that's hard to lead. Because everybody's opinions are same. I've thought about that. So what we've decided to do is to acknowledge what is the cultural value being expressed in that and let's redeem it. So we believe that's about team. So we elevate Anzac day and we preach our value of Team rather than fighting against a culture, work with it. Then once you get a win, then you can establish a new culture.

So there's the honeymoon theory and then there's the different theories about how you do change. I think you've got to be careful not to go in and try to smash everything but equally you have to be very intentional about how you're going to move a culture.





Really intentional. And I particularly think of some pastors, who have to take over churches that have been existing, to just assume that you can go in with a vision. You have to try to understand what is the shared value here. Now, I don't think we need to be counter cultural. I think we need to be transformative of culture because Jesus said, "Don't be in the world but not of the world." He didn't say react. So I think we've got to try to identify what are the shared values. Which ones can be celebrated that are of the Gospel.

So in a sense, whatever you applaud you're going to get more of. So look for what you can applaud and applaud a lot. And that which we think it's not a good culture don't give it any focus. Positively or negatively.

**Thank you so much Richard, this has been so insightful I'm going to go back and ponder what some of those aspects myself. And try to see what we can do with culture. Thank you so much Richard and I I'm so blessed by many exciting things that your church is doing it's wonderful to have a friend like you.**



## Discussion Questions

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These questions could be done personally or as part of a group discussion.

1. What stood out about Ps. Richard Green's observation about the importance of culture over vision Why?
2. What are some key lessons that you have learnt from Ps. Richard's sharing about implementing culture in the church. Why were these important to you?
3. If you had to take over a group or church, what would be some steps you would take to transform the culture? Explain why.

## Actionable Steps

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Following questions are to prompt us on suitable actions. Importantly, come up with steps you will take to make progress. Give them datelines and priority.

1. Can you identify what some key cultures would be important to you? Why?
2. What are some key steps you can take to cultivate the desired culture values in your group or church? Work out a plan to implement it.



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