

6pm as Baptist and Missional in Identity

Joshua Chubb

Abstract

Identity is the buzzword of the early 21st Century, and often as Christians we have a lack of identity. This lack of identity is most pronounced in our communal coming together, bombarded by Western individualism there is a lack of communal story. For the 6pm congregation of Mosaic Baptist Church this is no different, we lack identity and voice as a community and so lack missional contrast and outlook whereby we can serve the community and bring glory to God. The following is an attempt to enter into dialogue with the 6pm congregation and help them find the voice that they already have, making explicit our assumptions and what draws us together as individuals that we might better take up and engage with the pastoral vision for us. Through engaging with Baptist and Missional voices we will find our missional contrast and identity is thoroughly Baptist, Missional and uniquely 6pm.

Mosaic Baptist Church is a church made up of five congregations across two campuses, this size can both be a boon and unhelpful at times. As a part of Mosaic Baptist Church the 6pm congregation (which meets oddly enough at 6pm at the Page campus) has somewhat of a lack of identity and missional purpose. A problem facing Mosaic as a whole is that of seeing evangelical growth as opposed to transfer or natural growth. For 6pm specifically this lack of an identity residing in tension with the Pastoral vision for the congregation places the congregation in a unique place to find an answer to this problem that Mosaic as a whole is facing. The pastoral vision for the 6pm congregation is formed out of the current missional movement within the Western church, for 6pm and Mosaic this poses a potential problem, how do we as a Baptist congregation and church engage in a Baptist manner with the missional movement. The intention of this paper is to flesh out the identity of the 6pm congregation and to help facilitate part of that conversation with what it means for 6pm to take part in the missional calling and vision for the congregation through engaging with the Baptist and Missional voices of Mike Breen, Graham Hill, and Michael Frost.

The context of 6pm within the church of Mosaic means that we inherit the values and vision from Mosaic as a whole. The vision and values of Mosaic are largely aspirational. The first value that we have is specifically challenging, “We Value Reaching out to those like and unlike us with Grace”¹ if this is to be one of our values, and it is a good one, then we need to transform it from just being aspirational to being who we are. For 6pm the ability to reach out to those like and unlike us suffers from our lack of identity, are we merely those that meet at 6pm within the Page auditorium of Mosaic Baptist church, or do we have a missional contrast and specific missional outlook by which we can engage with the culture around us for the Glory of God?²

The 6pm congregation has historically and continues to have a youth and young adult focus, and has a large majority of its attendees falling within this 14-30ish age bracket.³ Over the past twelve years there have been at least four congregational leaders in a pastoral like role both pastors and lay leaders. At its largest over this time frame this congregation was pushing 120 attendees per week, however at the present time it normally averages about 60-80 attendees, most of them would identify the 6pm congregation as their church home, or family.

One of the tensions currently facing 6pm with regards to finding its identity is how the congregants understand themselves as a group in conversation and contention with the pastoral, or leadership vision for the congregation. This vision is not just in the present but extends forward to try and build the congregation for the next ten or so years. The vision simply put is this, “God is calling us to become a network of families on mission, who *gather* well, *grow* well, and *go* well as we actively seek to make disciples.” In essence transforming the congregation into a conglomeration of missional communities of about 12-30 individuals each, that are then freed up to engage with the wider Page community in ways that empower their members. The idea of this vision is noble, it addresses some of the needs of the target demographics of genuine and intimate community, while also hopefully freeing them up and empowering them for community engagement that will expand the Kingdom and glorify God.⁴

1 "Strategic Objectives and Values." Mosaic Baptist Church. Accessed October 06, 2018. <https://mosaicbaptist.org.au/about-mosaic/strategic-objectives-and-values/>.

2 Hill, Graham. *Salt, Light, and a City: Ecclesiology for the Global Missional Community*. 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017). 188

3 The largest minority group of the congregation is parents of those within that age bracket. See Appendix 1

4 Michael Frost comments on the need for us to as the church meet the growing isolationism of the West, Frost, Michael. *The Road to Missional: Journey to the Center of the Church*. Grand Rapids, (MI: Baker Books, 2011). 106-108

One of the first steps towards implementing this vision so far has been to open up a time of sharing around the question “Where have we seen God moving in our community/life this week?” This question and the resulting discussion and stories has the goal of enculturating an idea of sentness, a cognisant and reflective awareness of how we are as a congregation and as individuals alerting everyone, everywhere to the universal reign of God in Christ through the Cross.⁵ This practice and sharing both our successes and our failures also helps us as a congregation to see those places where God is calling us to participate in this alertness, and respond appropriately in similar situations.⁶

With an understanding of the demographics of the 6pm congregation and an idea of where the leadership wants to take us, let’s now turn to the question of our current scattered identity. As is probably typical of most Baptist congregations these days we have wide variance in our theological and social outlook, this perhaps in other cultural contexts may be more detrimental than beneficial. However within the postmodern and metamodernist outlook through which we as individuals within the congregation engage with the world around us this diversity of thought can and will become a powerful unifying force. Dialogue has long been a staple of both Baptist life and more generally both Christian and Jewish life.⁷ In order to take a snapshot of the identity of the congregation a survey was taken.⁸ The focus of this survey was to attempt to understand the congregation through the eight dichotomies that Bill Leonard articulates in *Baptist Ways, A History*.⁹

These dichotomies are; Authority of Scripture and Liberty of Conscience; The Church: Local Autonomy and Associational Cooperation; The Ministry: Laity and Clergy; Regeneration: Dramatic Event and Sustaining Process; Ordinances: Sacraments and Symbols; Doctrinal Statements: Invariably Confessional, or Selectively Creedal; Religious Liberty and Christian Citizenship; Diversity: Theological and Ecclesial. The survey did not cover all of these dichotomies primarily because this author believes that the context within which the congregation operates answers the question of how the congregation aligns with regards to these tensions, namely those of church structure, ministry, liberty and doctrinal statements.

On church structure, given our place within a multicongregational and multicampus church it is clear that we have a high reliance upon associational cooperation, while still being autonomous and somewhat self-determining, further given this situation and the brevity of Mosaic’s statement of faith it is also clear how we sit on the dichotomy of doctrinal statements. On ministry we have high levels of lay involvement with pastoral oversight, a large number of the Young Adults are engaged in leadership in both the Youth and Young Adults ministries of Mosaic as a whole and participate in the congregation both in service and leadership. On liberty given our place within Australia and its separation of church and state and the millennial and post-millennial reaction against the intertwining of politics and religion often seen in previous generations this coupled with a desire to engage in society in a Christian way is more than self-evident within the congregation.

With some of the questions narrowed down around what we need to understand to progress in terms of a Baptist identity for this congregation the survey seeks to understand how the congregation lies

5 David Bosch, as quoted in Frost, *The Road to Missional*, 24

6 Such a practice is envisioned as a corporate form of the 3DM tool of reflective engagement with the breaking in Kingdom.

Breen, Mike. *Building a Discipling Culture: How to Release a Missional Movement by Discipling People like Jesus Did*. 3rd ed. (Greenville, SC: 3DM Publishing, 2017). 75-88

7 Indeed the both the Talmud and the Church Fathers are good examples of this tradition of dialogue. Perhaps we also need revival of interest in these conversations for the 21st Century church, and perhaps an engagement in the Global conversations with our contemporaries in other contexts that Grahma Hill encourages.

8 The raw data of which is found in Appendix 2, the following sections are an analysis of said data.

9 Leonard, Bill. *Baptist Ways: A History*. (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2003). 6-9

along the dichotomies of Scriptural Authority and Liberty of Conscience, Punctiliar or Continual Regeneration, Ordinances, and Theological Diversity. Along with these the question of self-identification is a helpful topic to look at.

Baptist Identity¹⁰

About two-thirds of the congregation do not identify as Baptists. The comments upon identity as a Baptist show an affinity with Baptist theology and identity, it is therefore best to understand this as a largely catholic trend within the congregation to first and foremost identify as a Christian, which is understandable given the propensity for some more vocal adherents to denominationalism in the past to debate the validity of other denominations. This coupled with the stance on theological diversity gives us good standing on the catholic ideal and seeing our participation in denominationalism as a conversation rather than as making one or another group invalid.

6pm Identity¹¹

The understanding of 6pm as a unique congregation ranges from merely being “the congregation that meets at 6pm on a Sunday night at Page” to this particular answer that is more holistic in its understanding of identity, “Openness, connectedness, an emphasis on being a vibrant community that wants to connect with one another rather than just attend church, welcomeness, the ability to be 'playful' in the ways we express faith, the hands on leadership, the willingness to pray, the joyful celebrations together.” This answer and summation encapsulates both the grassroots culture that has grown up among some of the young adults within the congregation, and also the Pastoral vision for the congregation.

Bible Authority and Soul Competency¹²

This congregation tends towards seeing Biblical authority in ones life and the life of the church, there is a far greater acceptance of this, than of the statement on soul competency, perhaps this is from the realisation that many have that conversion happens within the context of community, and is therefore a conversational event, as is the working out of faith, the answers to the question of conversion and theological diversity perhaps also serve to illustrate this.

Sacramentology¹³

On the topic of Communion and Baptism 6pm thoroughly embodies the tension of Baptist life of seeing these rituals in both symbolic and sacramental terms. The sacraments are seen by diverse persons as representing a spiritual reality, or of conferring grace, or as a spiritual reality itself. This diversity in our shared sacramentology is not just representative of our identity in self-identifying as Baptists or not, but also as a marker for our identity as 6pm, in being open and welcoming. This diversity from the acts as symbols to being participation in the grace of God is pleasing to see, there is an awareness of some real presence theologies however there is no espousal thereof.

10 See A2.1-2

11 See A2.3

12 See A2.4-5

13 See A2.6-7

Church Involvement¹⁴

Church involvement is seen as a necessity in the life of this congregation, and this is visible in a lot of our out ministry, where we serve the other congregations of Mosaic. There is a high number of youth and childrens ministry leaders within the congregation, but also a large number take part in the worship ministry of the church. The youth ministries involvement with Soul Survivor highlights the need to be outwardly focused and this has overflowed into 6pm with a number of service projects, both as grassroots movements and as leadership lead outings.

Conversion¹⁵

The predominant view of conversion is seen as a continual process, about 40% opted for both a continual process and punctiliar event, no one chose merely the punctiliar event. As stated above this is quite likely due to the heavy involvement of many in childrens and youth ministry seeing the coming to faith of children and youth over the course of their time in those ministries.

Theological diversity¹⁶

There is a strong desire for theological diversity, the only “disagrees” to the question on theological diversity come from those that do not identify as Baptist, this perhaps is due to the question being worded too broadly. The trend of the survey responses up to this point display a desire for conversation, and not just dogmatism. Suffice to say that the quotation “unity in necessary things; freedom in doubtful things; love in all things” is a virtue that we hold to.

Synthesis and discussion

Having surveyed the current identity of the 6pm Congregation given the tension that is inherent in moving towards a vision a time of dialogue with voices both Baptist and Missional to help the congregation move forward in strengthening our strengths and finding our voice. The pastoral vision comes out of the congregational pastor’s engagement with the 3d Movements (3dm) curriculum and so Mike Breen as the main author and architect of this content will be one of the conversational partners, Michael Frost and Graham Hill as two individuals who are both Baptist and Missional will be our other conversational partners, and continued conversation with the articulated Baptist identity.

Nettles states that the Baptist identity has its goal in becoming more Biblical in practice and in belief.¹⁷ This desire is seen both in those that identified and did not identify as Baptists in the survey. This desire predominantly manifests itself within the culture of 6pm not only in the vocalised preaching of the gospel to the unbeliever but also to pair this proclamation with the tangibility of seeing and feeling the Kingdom reign.¹⁸ Bebbington describes such a position of

14 See A2.8

15 See A2.9

16 See A2.10

17 Tom J. Nettles, *The Baptists: Key People Involved in Forming a Baptist Identity*, vol. 3 (Fearn: Mentor, 2007). 386-389

18 Frost, *The Road to Missional*, 120

joining both the Liberal and Evangelical strands of Baptist tradition.¹⁹ This desire reflects a growing trend and realisation that one-off meetings wherein the gospel is told are not the norm despite what we have been lead to believe and a strong desire for incarnational living in the midst of community to bring about the required and desired change both in the community itself and in the people within the community for the glory of God. Michael Frost talks of this as slow evangelism, and it comes through life-on-life encounters with those who embody the gospel in both word and deed.²⁰ One of the struggles that we will likely continue to face as the 6pm congregation is relearning how to do Mission out amongst the community rather than continuing the tradition that has been handed to us gather everyone in to have the gospel spoken to them. But there is a desire there and so the goal in the pastoral vision should be one of equipping and informing to be able to take up this desire. Indeed as the implementation of this vision finds its root in this discipleship and missional revival this could very well be the way to equip us as a whole community to be able to face up to this challenge of living in the way of Jesus. This desire and this equipping must be formulated within the life-on-life vibrancy of incarnational mission and christian life, not just from the pulpit. Such point out all three of our commentators and is realised within the congregation.²¹

This shift in focus should come out of and be informed by a new reunderstanding of what the gospel is and what it means to be participating in God's mission, or in God's kingdom. Traditionally the gospel has been understood as God rescuing sinners from their brokenness, however recent reevaluation has called this into question and such reevaluation is being taught within Mosaic as a whole and is enshrined within the values that we hold. The reevaluation of the gospel is that it is the good news that God in Christ is making all things new through the church.²² This makes the gospel more than simply a form of eschatological fire insurance and makes the church and her role within creation to be an eschatological foretaste of the wholeness and shalom of God. This change in understanding of the gospel has serious implications for the way we conduct ourselves as church. In the sermon where the pastor laid out his vision for 6pm he pointed this out, in the sermon "We can't go to church anymore" and subsequent sermons on the topic of interacting with the community,²³ the need for community engagement out within the community rather than within the church building. Interestingly parts of this new vision are more reflective of the historic roots of Mosaic as a church and the original vision in being a collection of home churches.²⁴

The strong desire within the congregation to identify as Christian first and Baptist second, or even never, expresses the strong tendency of "Evangelical" Baptists to be somewhat catholic in their outlook.²⁵ It also comes up in Hill's discussion of the marks of missionality.²⁶ This catholicity can

19 David Bebbington, *Baptists through the Centuries: A History of a Global People* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018). 239-240

20 Frost, *The Road to Missional*, 57

21 Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 54
Frost, *The Road to Missional*, 94
Hill, *Salt, Light, and a City*, 197-198, 227

22 Frost, *The Road to Missional*, 47
Hill, *Salt, Light, and a City*, 228

23 "We can't go to church anymore" was the sermon in which Andrew first enunciated the vision, this has been subsequently fleshed out most recently in the "MORE" series

24 "Mosaic's History" Mosaic Baptist Church. Accessed October 06, 2018. <https://mosaicbaptist.org.au/about-mosaic/mosaics-history/>

25 Bebbington, *Baptists through the Centuries*, 240

26 Hill, *Salt, Light, and a City*, 186

and should help us to mark ourselves out as a culture of contrast.²⁷ Society, especially that in our context is isolating through the modern ideals and values that have been created, however the welcoming and catholic natures that are prevalent within our community as a whole can serve to set us apart.²⁸ This strength of welcoming catholicity, however, is not seen as well in the large public space that is seen on Sunday nights, and our small groups are too small or not focused primarily on that welcoming engagement with non-church community to be able to offer what is needed. In his sermon “What MORE is in store for you?” Andrew Robb argues for a middle sized community that as Mike Breen would put it is “small enough to care, large enough to dare.”²⁹ this mid-sized group gives both a measure of mobility and anonymity on the small end of things and the manpower and multiplicity that are required to make a sizeable impact.³⁰ Of the three “small” groups that this author is aware of that are connected to the 6pm congregation, one is actually of this size. The challenge we face is that this culture of doing is still foreign to us, and it is difficult to move into that space when we do not know how to navigate.

As a congregation that takes part in the Baptist tensions and theological conversations if we are to be a Baptist and Missional congregation as is envisioned by Andrew then we need to look at our relation to what Graham Hill calls the five missional marks of the church. They are, missional foundations, missional ecclesiology, missional contrast, missional outlook, and missional practices.³¹ This paper has served to attempt to formulate how 6pm has missional contrast, how it is distinct from the community around it to best serve that community through the proclamation of the Kingdom. Our Baptist identity serves to shape and inform our missional foundation, (That is commitment to the gospel, and to scripture) and missional ecclesiology, what is left for us to look out and see that the fields are white for harvest, and learn how we may participate in God’s mission.

27 Ibid. 186-189

28 Frost, *The Road to Missional*, 134-135

29 Breen, Mike. *Leading Missional Communities: Rediscovering the Power of Living on Mission Together*. Pawleys Island, SC: 3 Dimension Ministries, 2013. 26

30 Ibid.

31 Hill, *Salt, Light, and a City*, 186-189

Bibliography

David Bebbington, *Baptists through the Centuries: A History of a Global People* Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018.

Breen, Mike. *Building a Discipling Culture: How to Release a Missional Movement by Discipling People like Jesus Did*. 3rd ed. Greenville, SC: 3DM Publishing, 2017.

Breen, Mike. *Leading Missional Communities: Rediscovering the Power of Living on Mission Together*. Pawleys Island, SC: 3 Dimension Ministries, 2013.

Frost, Michael. *The Road to Missional: Journey to the Center of the Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011.

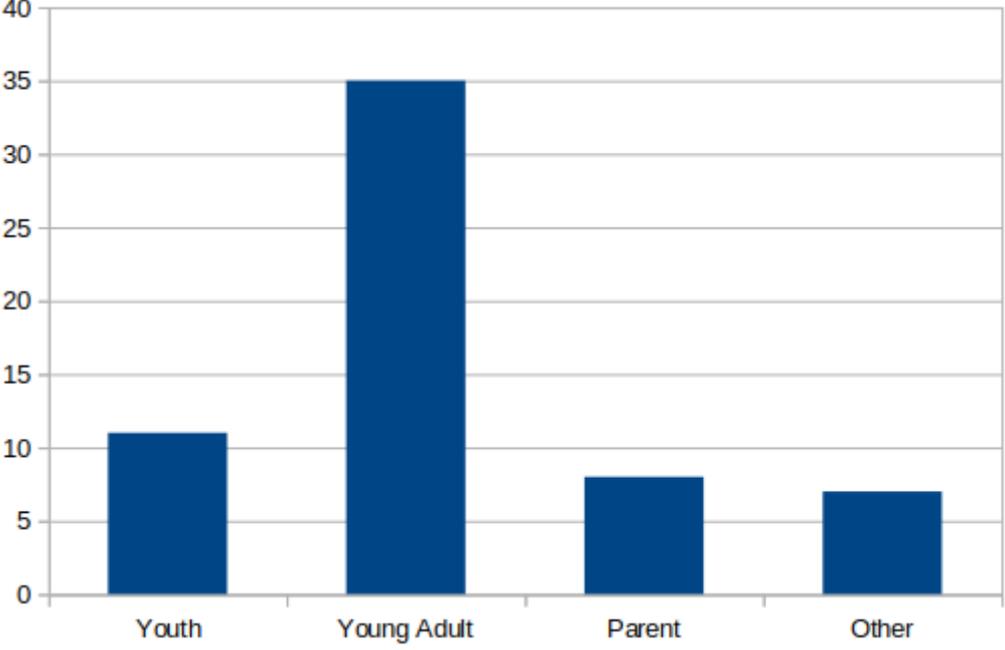
Hill, Graham. *Salt, Light, and a City: Ecclesiology for the Global Missional Community*. 2nd ed. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017.

Leonard, Bill. *Baptist Ways: A History*. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2003.

Nettles, Tom J. *The Baptists: Key People Involved in Forming a Baptist Identity*. Vol. 3. Fearn: Mentor, 2007.

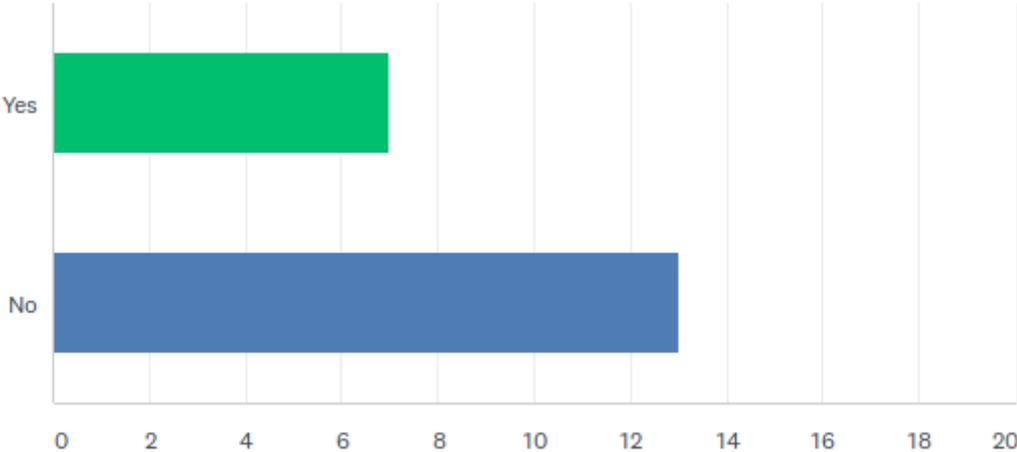
"Strategic Objectives and Values." Mosaic Baptist Church. Accessed October 06, 2018. <https://mosaicbaptist.org.au/about-mosaic/strategic-objectives-and-values/>.

Appendix 1 – Congregational Demographics from the Attendance Roll



Appendix 2 – Survey

A2.1 – Do You Identify as a Baptist?



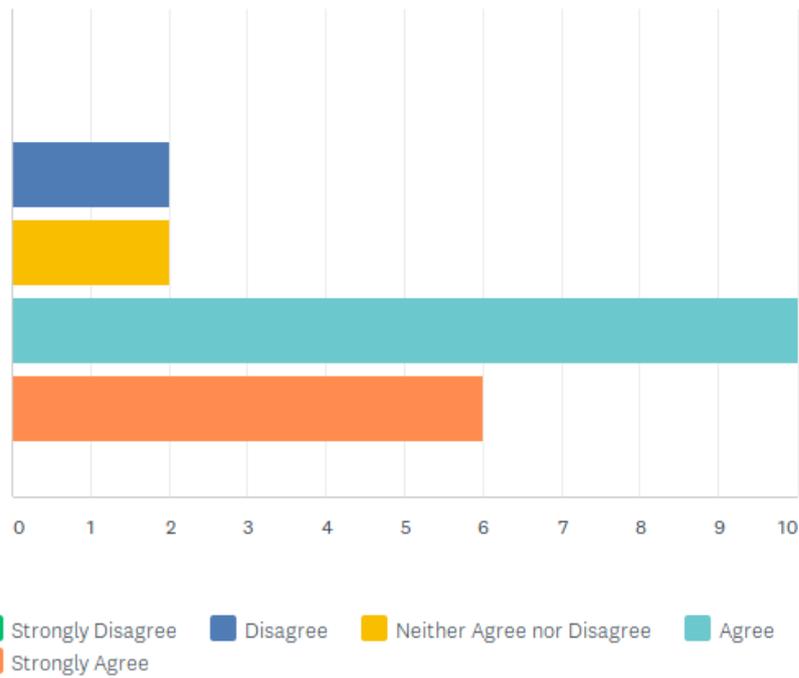
A2.2 – Why do you/don't you identify as a Baptist?

- I go to a Baptist church
- Mmm depends on the situation. I would say "I go to a Baptist church" and there are parts of Baptist theology I really like, but I've never been into identifying with a denomination
- I would prefer to identify myself simply as Christian rather than by a specific denomination.
- Because I want to think for myself yo
- I just identify as a general christian- each section of Christianity has aspects that i dont agree with.
- Don't know what they specifically believe, primarily identify as Christian, then Anglican
- I prefer to just identify as a Christian to keep it simple. Don't know all that much about being specifically Baptist
- Bc its the church i currently attend and I'm happy to have that label and what it represents
- Because I go to a baptist church ?????? Because I agree with believers baptism as opposed to infant baptism Because I believe that god speaks through the community of believers
- I don't believe it is necessary or improves my relationship with Christ to identify as Baptist
- I think following Jesus and living for the kingdom has very little to do with "denomination" but is helpful in finding a community that "suits" your personality, gifts, and faith life.
- I grew up in the Anglican church, so don't specifically identify as a Baptist
- It's all I have known
- Going a baptist church just feels right. Not the name but the doctrine, beliefs and the way people live it out. To me, labels ensure separation, rather we should unite but with room to agree to disagree. If you truly want to identify as a baptist, you should give reasons why others are wrong in every aspect. I don't feel the need to label others as wrong, hence a classify as a believer.
- More from a basis of the culture baptists promotes than actual belief system. The church as a whole is afraid to step out of their comfort zone, allow God to move in our actions, and make changes that could allow God's kingdom to grow if one person might be offended etc. I believe in having faith that God will provide a way if we trust in him.
- I don't think Baptist's know who/what makes them any different to any other denomination anymore
- Because I'm not sure what a Baptist is... the congregation that I'm a part of (6pm) seems to be widely varied in terms of belief.
- Go to a baptist church and generally agree with their teachings and interpretation of the bible
- I dont really know what the difference is. I just identify as a christian?
- I am a part of a Baptist community

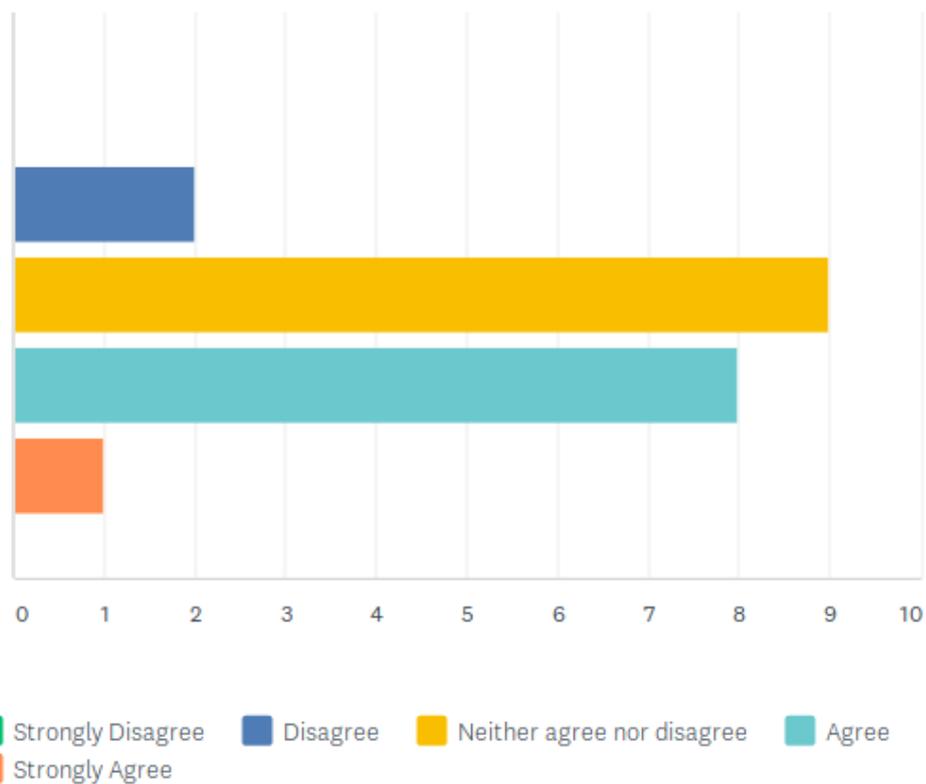
A2.3 – What do you think makes us '6pm'?

- We go to church at 6
- The vibe. Haha the time ;) It's about a more relaxed, youth friendly but everyone super welcome vibe, the community makes us what we are
- The people and relationships I have in the congregation is what distinguishes '6pm' for me.
- People show up to a service, I don't believe there is a strong identity that we hold
- An amazingly friendly and supportive community :)
- Better music. Great people. Good vibe. Progressive and open views.
- I think we have a less "traditional" view of church? I feel like we are a small community/family. Good discussions and relationships make us 6pm :) (not that other congregations don't have that!)
- Young-ish, willing to do things in a new way, explore faith, positive about the future
- Next gen, not the church of our parents. We are less formal and structured We are not afraid to take risks and express ourselves in worship We look for the spirit working amongst us
- The time at which we meet, and a strong desire to sleep in on Sundays.
- Outgoing, youthful-ness, fun.
- The time of the service and the funner more youthful service
- We are like a family
- Openness, connectedness, an emphasis on being a vibrant community that wants to connect with one another rather than just attend church, welcomeness, the ability to be 'playful' in the ways we express faith, the hands on leadership, the willingness to pray, the joyful celebrations together.
- The time of day.
- We dislike the morning... it burns
- Our demographic (primarily young adults)
- The community and knowing most of the people there. Our ways of doing a 'service' - worship, sharing time, prayer, etc.
- We meet at 6pm. We are theoretically able to make choices about what we do distinct from the other congregations. We're mostly young adults
- The time in which we meet and the lifestyle that it generally entails.

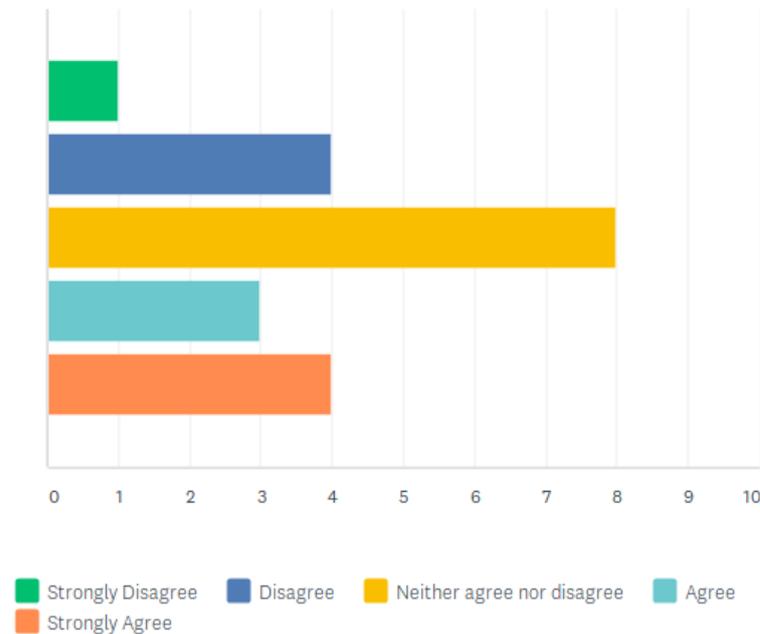
A2.4 – The Bible must be central in the life of the individual and church



A2.5 – Religion is a personal matter between a soul and God



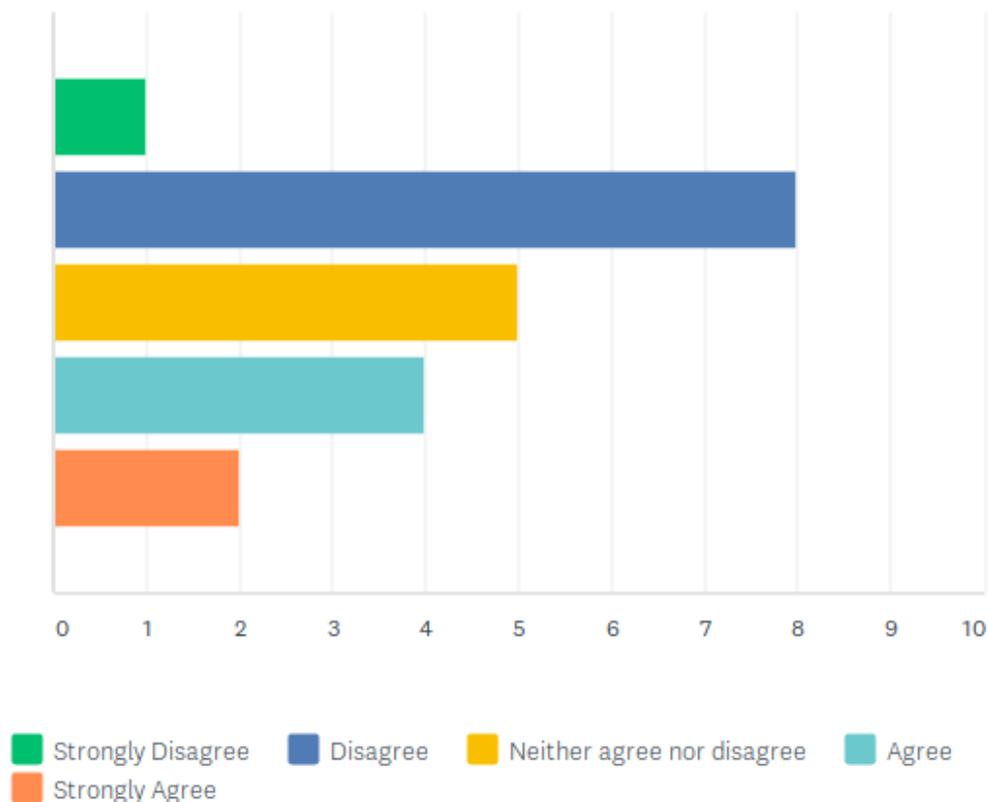
A2.6 – Baptism is merely a sign of our obedience to Christ, or entrance into Christian community.



Comments

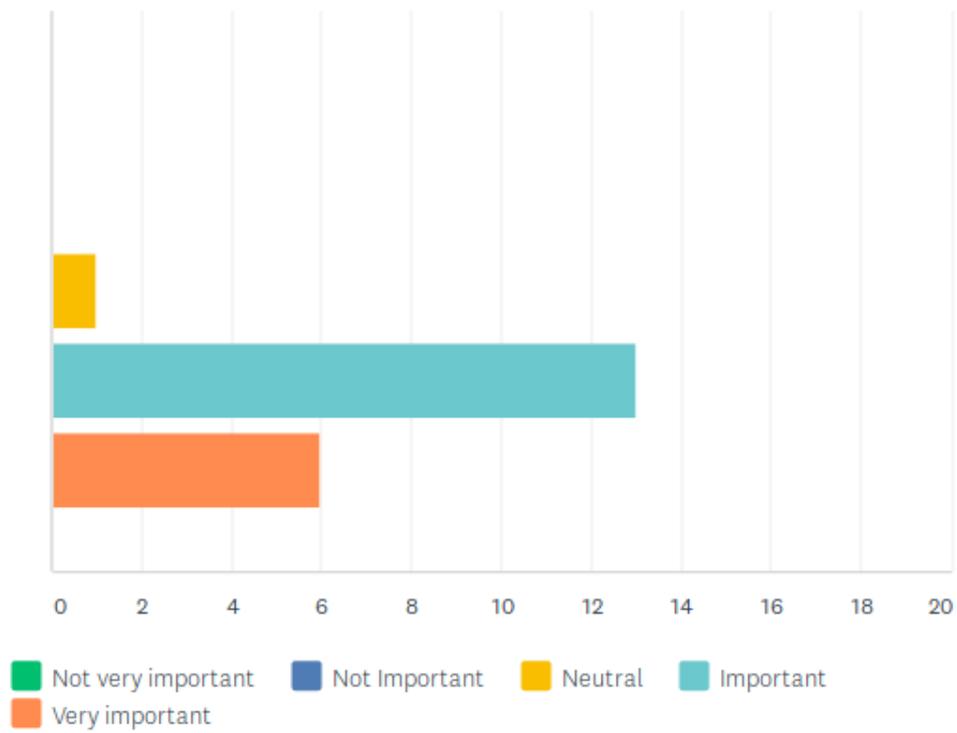
- Mmm baptism means different things to different people, and I think it can be more than obedience, and it's not about entering community, it's about that individuals choice
- In context of our church it is a sign of someone being obedient to God in their own path. This does not add or subtract from their "Christian-ness"
- I think it is a sign of obedience and promising to God to follow him, but I think you can be part of a Christian community and have the same beliefs without being baptised.
- It's a physical sign of a spiritual reality... an outward commitment of an internal decision. I don't think it signifies our entrance into a particular community?
- There is no entrance into Christian community. If you love, follow, fall away, are curious, kind of believe I believe you are welcome in Christian community. Baptism is a response to Christ and a public display of your commitment to him, the kingdom and the community you are a part of.
- Baptism is a outward sign of our commitment to staying true to who we are as a Christian
- A sign of what has happened in your life yes, the result of life that is obedient. Not a requirement, nor the action itself.
- Disagree with it being an entrance into the Christian community as there were many things that came before water baptism as acceptance and belief of Christ. Agree with it being obedience to Christ.
- The physical act of a baptism, that is. I believe baptism of spirit to be distinct from that, and far less common than we've been led to believe.
- People can already be an integrated part of christian community before being baptised
- I think it is these things, but also a very spiritual experience that sets us apart in the spiritual realm

A2.7 – Communion is merely a remembrance of the Cross

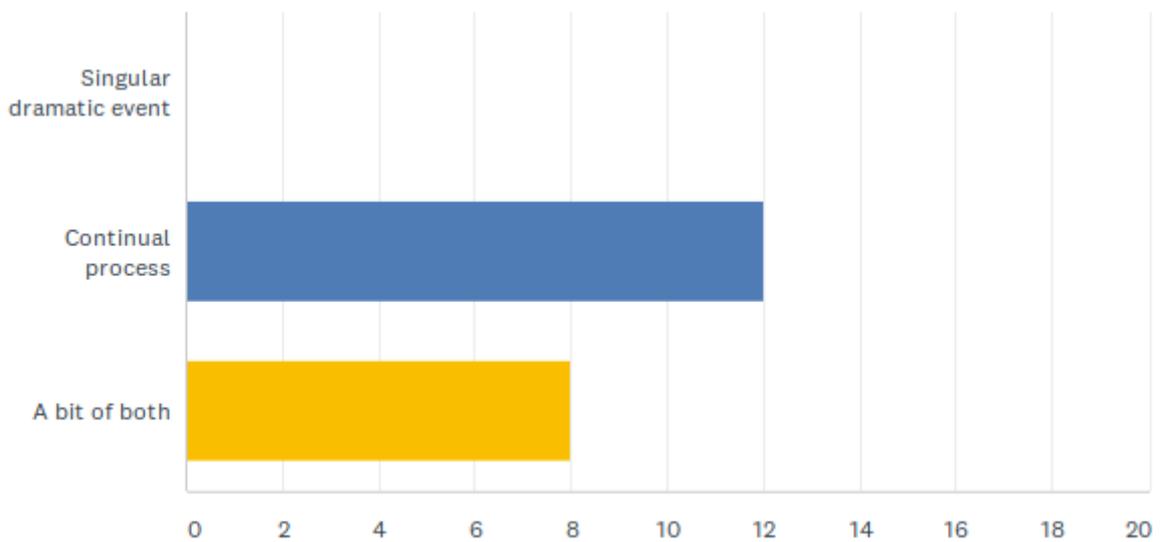


- Communion is not "merely" anything. It is deeply spiritual and deeply normal. I guess I don't believe in transubstantiation, but I do believe in the power of symbolism and remembrance. Haha so maybe it is merely remembrance!
- But what does the cross signify? The communion reminds of the cross which reminds us of the ultimate price paid.
- For me, communion represents Jesus's sacrifice and is a time to thank Him for that and reflect on how I can be responding to that sacrifice.
- Not 'merely'. It is a remembrance of the cross in all its significance! (Don't like the wording of this phrase... I don't think we are literally eating and drinking Jesus flesh and blood, but I would never describe it as 'merely' remembering Jesus death)
- I think it is something that pulls the community of Christ together. It is an act of obedience, and a chance to remember and repent of our sins.
- Uh. No. Too many reasons to type.
- It's also a remembrance of the promise the Lord made to his people
- It is not only so, but a group act. We remember the life and death of Jesus, not just the death. Also a reliving of our faith and why we come here.
- Technically 'The Cross' had not even happened at Passover, even if Jesus knew of it and that was his intention (What is to come etc).
- It is remembrance of the cross - but in a personal way (like what does that mean for me, what do I want to say to Jesus, and how do I want to live because of this)
- I think communion is our chance to remember and also to reconnect with god and reflect on jesus' sacrifice.

A2.8 – How important is involvement in the local church?



A2.9 – How do you understand conversion/regeneration?



A2.10 – Theological diversity is good for the church

