

## Getting the Feedback You Need Trial 2014

### To the pastor

Thank you for taking the time to read this overview of a trial process for obtaining effective feedback for the development of preachers and preaching that will run in early 2014. This trial is a work in progress and this document seeks to provide you with the background information you need to consider whether you might like to participate. The essential information is found on pp. 1-3 while pp. 4-7 contain an information sheet and additional forms.

It is important that you take some time and carefully read this document so that you are clear about the trial and what it is seeking to achieve. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me at [Marc.Rader@gymeabaptist.org.au](mailto:Marc.Rader@gymeabaptist.org.au)

### Introduction

The feedback process that I am trialling is based on my doctoral project completed in 2013 through the Australian College of Theology (you can download a copy of the project on my website: [www.feedbackforpreachers.org](http://www.feedbackforpreachers.org) on the Resources page). In the project I explored the feedback gap that seems to exist for preachers. In other words, while preachers affirm the value of feedback for development, very few actually receive the sort of feedback from their congregations that they need to develop their preaching skills and competencies.

In a series of focus groups with preachers I explored the reasons this gap exists and came to the conclusion that the essential obstacle was a process that would address the many concerns and questions that preachers have about gaining feedback. These issues include personal insecurity, the amount of time required, the identity of raters (those providing feedback), the subjectivity of feedback, the focus on a single sermon, how the feedback is to be presented and by whom.

Parishioners, who I believe are in the best position to provide preachers with feedback, had similar concerns which were explored in separate focus groups. Chief among them were protecting the relationship with their pastors and a lack of technical knowledge about homiletics from which to provide accurate feedback.

To address these concerns I proposed that multi-source feedback (also known as 360 Degree feedback) as used in many business settings could provide a suitable process. Multi-source feedback is essentially a process used to gather feedback from multiple rating sources. Due to its corporate setting a great deal of time, money and research has gone into creating an effective process. The insights from multi-source feedback can, I believe, be adapted to assist preachers to obtain the feedback they need to foster their development.

There are, of course, limitations to any feedback project. The most significant is that it is limited to areas of competencies. This is not to deny the importance of character or calling, nor it is to be seen as overriding the power of the Holy Spirit to bring about spiritual transformation in our congregations. For the purposes of this trial feedback will be sought on a series of competencies that are commonly affirmed and taught in the homiletic literature.

The competencies for this trial are: Introductions, Illustrations, Applications, Delivery, Structure and Exegesis. Each category contains several items. Some of the items are functional (what a category is meant to do) and some of the items are practical (how a category does what it is supposed to do). Feedback on each category will be provided on a series of questions on each item.

For example, under the category of Introductions the preaching texts indicate that there are two functions introduction serve: to raise spiritual interest and to lead into the sermon. There are at least six characteristics of effective introductions (that raise interest and lead into the sermon) do this: brevity, specificity, relevance, variety, preparedness and appropriateness.

A complete list of the categories and the items will be made available in early 2014. This will allow me to make any changes suggested by the first trial and also to complete the category of Exegesis which is new for this trial (this really is a work in progress!).

A second limitation is that gaining feedback alone will not bring about development. Feedback is only part of the development process. It is a critical component of any learning because it provides an accurate assessment of where development is needed. However, once areas for development are identified a learning plan must be created and implemented before feedback is gathered again to assess whether the learning outcomes have been achieved. This trial is designed to provide the starting point. Participants will be encouraged to identify one or two areas for development and to create a learning plan that can be implemented, but this is beyond the scope of the project.

### The Essential Insights from Multi-Source Feedback

There are several critical insights from multi-source feedback that have significant implications for the process that I propose. In this section I will provide an overview of these insights and how they have shaped the trial you are considering participating in.

To begin with, you as the preacher own the feedback data that is collected and you control who sees it and how it is used. This is based on the insight that multi-source feedback is best used for skill development rather than appraisal. The reason is that feedback gathered for appraisal purposes shifts the focus from developing skills to gaining good ratings which is detrimental to development. Research has shown that if the one receiving the feedback does not believe that the feedback is in their best interests they are unlikely to a) seek accurate feedback and; b) will be resistant to accept the feedback results.

On top of this it has been found that people are much more willing to accept feedback from people they have nominated. You will be responsible to nominate potential raters from among your congregation. You may choose to do this in consultation with others but you will have the final say about who is approached to participate.

This is actually critical for your parishioners as well who will be hesitant to provide feedback if they believe that the outcomes will be negative for their pastor. If, however, they know that you have nominated them and that you genuinely desire their feedback in order to develop in your preaching skills they are much more willing to participate.

These things must be clearly communicated to your church leadership and to that end, one of the requirements of participation is a letter that is to be signed by your church secretary affirming that the church leadership understands the purpose of your participation in the trial and the ownership of the feedback.

A second, related, issue is the number of raters. In order to facilitate accurate feedback it is recommended that raters be anonymous and, therefore, at least three raters are required. My recommendation is a minimum of six raters. However, the more raters you are able to recruit the better! In the first trial one pastor had over twenty raters!

If you lead a larger church with several services it is recommended that you focus on a single service and recruit raters who attend that one service. For example, if you have a morning

and evening service recruit six raters from the service you would most like feedback from. Raters will give feedback through Survey Monkey, a web-based survey tool and will be able to withdraw from the process at any time.

The third insight of multi-source feedback, which you have already noticed, is that it gathers feedback from internal sources. There is, of course, great benefit in peer reviews of our preaching or a coaching or mentoring relationship. However, it is our parishioners who hear us preach week in and week out and who are in the best position to provide us feedback.

The problem facing many parishioners, however, is that while they know a good sermon when they hear one they do not necessarily have the technical language or knowledge to put into words what makes it a good sermon. In order to overcome this obstacle raters will be required to participate in rater training prior to the commencement of the trial.

In the first trial this involved a two hour face-to-face training session designed to clarify the categories and items and give raters an idea of what “good” looks like in each. In this trial, the training will be web-based. Raters will be required to watch the training videos on the Feedback For Preachers website before the rating period begins. The total time required shouldn’t be any longer than two hours and participants can watch the videos at their own pace. The videos currently on the website will give you an idea of what the training videos will look like (though there are more to come and some of those on the website will be updated as a result of the first trial).

The fourth insight that has shaped this trial is the longitudinal aspect of multi-source feedback. In other words feedback on particular skills is given over a set rating period. This is one of the biggest “innovations” of this trial. Most preaching feedback forms are focused on one sermon which makes identifying trends and patterns quite difficult. The rating period for the trial will be three months and the minimum number of sermons the raters will be asked to listen to is six. At the conclusion of the rating period raters will be asked to complete an on-line questionnaire. The rating scale will ask for feedback on the frequency of certain skills and competencies. A typical question would look like this:

1. The preacher’s introductions raise my spiritual interest.

Most of the time, Some of the time, Occasionally, Not often enough, Rarely

Raters will also be encouraged to provide additional comments on each feedback item. In order to facilitate this raters will also be encouraged to take notes during the rating period (and there will be training about how to do this). The feedback will be collected only once at the conclusion of the rating period.

The desired outcome is to provide you the preacher with an overview of your preaching rather than a snapshot of one sermon. From this basis you will be able to identify one or two areas to develop.

## Conclusion

I hope that this brief introduction provides you with enough information to consider your involvement. I am very excited about the possibilities that this feedback process holds for preachers and would value the participation of you and your parishioners!

## Getting The Feedback You Need – Information Sheet

Getting The Feedback You Need is a trial of a doctoral project by Rev. Marc Rader. Marc is a part-time faculty (Bible & Preaching) member at Morling College and the Preaching and Teaching pastor at Gymea Baptist Church. The doctoral project proposes a feedback process to assist preachers develop their preaching skills and competencies.

The trial is open to preachers and parishioners who are able to meet the following requirements:

### A. Preacher requirements

1. Preaching in a single congregation/service a minimum of six times during the rating period (April-June 2014).
  - If you preach more frequently, that is great.
  - You may need to provide the dates you are preaching to the raters.
  - If at all possible, try to preach as normally as possible over the rating period.
2. Communicate the intention of the feedback trial to your church leadership and have your church secretary (or other church officer) sign the “Acknowledgement of Purpose” document (attached).
3. Recruitment of at least six raters.
  - There is no limit to the number of raters. The only limitation is that they are able to meet the rater requirements (see below).
  - I have included a letter of invitation that you can use or modify to invite them to participate.
  - The recruitment of raters will need to be completed in early March – with enough time for the raters to complete the on-line training.
  - Send me a list of names and email addresses of those who will be attending the rater training so that I can be in contact with them.
4. Watch the training videos.
  - It will be very helpful for you to watch the training videos so that you know what your parishioners will be looking for in your sermons.
5. Complete a post-trial on-line survey about the feedback process.
6. Self-rate your own preaching skills at the end of the rating period.
  - You will use the same feedback survey that the raters use.

If you are interested in participating please contact me through the website [www.feedbackforpreachers.org](http://www.feedbackforpreachers.org) or by emailing me at [Marc.Rader@gymeabaptist.org.au](mailto:Marc.Rader@gymeabaptist.org.au).

## B. Rater requirements

### 1. Complete the training videos.

- This is critical to the trial and is a non-negotiable requirement.
- The training videos will be completed early in 2014.

### 2. Able to listen to a minimum of six sermons preached by the preacher during the rating period (April-June 2014).

- Your pastor can provide you with a list of dates that he/she is preaching during the rating period.

### 3. Keep a journal of your reflections on the preacher's sermons during the rating period to facilitate the most accurate and clear feedback.

- This will be discussed as part of the training.

### 4. Complete an on-line survey at the conclusion of the rating period that will provide feedback to your pastor.

### 5. Complete a post-trial survey on the feedback process.

### Acknowledgement of Purpose

The following acknowledgement is to be signed by the church secretary or other church officer and submitted prior to the beginning of the feedback trial.

We the leadership of \_\_\_\_\_ church support our pastor's participation in this feedback trial. We understand that the feedback is to be used for his/her development and acknowledge that he/she owns the feedback results.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Please indicate leadership role (e.g., church secretary): \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Letter of Invitation

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I am writing to ask if you would provide me with some feedback on my preaching. I am keen to continue to develop as a preacher and, to that end, am participating in a feedback trial. Please be assured that my participation is entirely voluntary and that the feedback you provide will be very helpful for me.

The trial is being run by Rev. Marc Rader a part-time faculty member at Morling College and the Preaching & Teaching pastor at Gynea Baptist Church in the south of Sydney. The trial is based on his recently completed doctoral project.

As a member of our community of faith here I was hoping that you might be willing to participate with me in this. I have been asked to approach a number of people whose feedback I would like to hear and you are one of them!

The process of gathering feedback in this trial will be a bit different than what you might expect. Essentially, you will be asked to listen to my preaching over a three month period (April-June) rather than a single sermon.

If you are willing to be involved there are a few things you will need to be able to do. First, you will need to watch a series of training videos that will clarify the aspects of my preaching that you will be providing feedback on. These videos will be available on the website [www.feedbackforpreachers.org](http://www.feedbackforpreachers.org).

Second, you will need to listen to a minimum of six of my sermons during the three month rating period. If you know you are going to be away on holidays or for work I can provide you with a list of dates when I will be preaching.

At the conclusion of this rating period you will be required to complete an on-line and anonymous feedback survey on Survey Monkey.

Finally, you will also be asked to complete a second on-line survey about the experience of participating in the trial.

I would really appreciate your involvement in this trial and would value your feedback. However, I fully understand that some people might be uncomfortable about doing so. If you would rather not, do not feel any compulsion to participate.

If you are willing to help please let me know as soon as possible.

Sincerely,