



Providence

MIDLAND

What is Midland like and where does Providence Midland fit?

Midland

Although the town hall of Midland is a mere 16km from Perth city, culturally the distance is more extensive. It has roots in working-class stock, and it boomed in the early years after the war. The Midland workshops are where many a diesel mechanic learned their trade. However, the whole area is now being gentrified to contain a hospital, flats and houses and the start of a new university campus. Midland looks to the past, which it is proud of but has been carving out a post-industrial future for itself.

As one of the older towns in WA, Midland has one foot in suburbia looking towards the city, and one foot in the semi-rural hills, with at least one toe stretching out the start of the Wheatbelt. It is the first major centre on the way in from the eastern farmlands, and it's the last stop on the train-line out of the CBD. Midland is surrounded by major arterial highways, and replete with heavy and light industry, whether that is for farms or mining. It is busy, full of shops and businesses, with the highest percentage of tradies per capita in WA, and the least percentage of those with a university degree.

Its shire, the City of Swan, has the second-biggest indigenous population in WA outside of the North West. Roads around Midland start off as housing before morphing into warehouses and light industrial as they approach those major roads. It's possible to drive through Midland and think it's primarily shopping, lifestyle and light industry. It's only as you turn down the side streets you realise that people live in and around the town.

Like any town on the outskirts, it has its share of social problems, but the reputation is worse than the reality. And with easy access to Midland from expensive hills suburbs, along with leafy Federation suburbs along the river just around the town centre, there is an eclectic mix about Midland that is more akin to Fremantle than to the suburbs closer to the Perth CBD. In reality, no more than 4000 people live in Midland itself, with many others living in the rings of suburbs around it, while still others make the trip on the train or by car to work in the businesses and industries there.

Midland and Church

Midland contains what all of the older Australian towns contain, a plethora of established churches from the mainline denominations, including Roman Catholic, Anglican and Uniting Church. There are a few other smaller churches that have struggled on in the town's immediate surrounds over the years, including independents and Pentecostals. But Midland has had a reputation for being something of a church planting graveyard. There's no big church in the town itself, and certainly, no Bible focussed, Jesus centred church like Providence, of any size. It's only as you move outside the bounds of the town that these larger warehouse churches appear.



So the Swan Valley, to the east of the town, is home to a few larger churches, mostly Pentecostal and independent, and these tend to draw people from regional areas rather than from Midland itself. The area has a strong post-War European migrant background, many of whom were loyal to the Catholic Church which has had a strong history in the area, but the generation that led that are now old and dying out. With a few start-up church plants in the past few years, there is the feeling that Midland is ripe for some new churches.

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With all of that in mind, it is essential to note that Providence Midland is a church that meets for its main gathering just outside the boundary of Midland, on the edge of the Swan Valley, and has become primarily a church in Midland rather than a church for Midland. That means Providence Midland is also a regional church, which draws people from a radius of, on average, 20 minutes' drive away, with a number coming from further afield, both east and west of the town. We have congregants who live up to 50km from each other. This means that Providence Midland is a "drip-line" church, not a "sprinkler" church. A "sprinkler" church is a church that dispenses its gospel water within a close radius to itself. There are several smaller churches in Midland that seek to reach Midland town specifically and do so through outreach and foodbank services into the town.

Other churches, including Providence because they are regional, seek to be "drip-line" sending the gospel out with our people into their more suburban settings, and the workplaces they attend, including the Perth CBD.

Few of our people actually live in Midland, and even if they do, fewer still work there. Conversely, some live outside the boundaries of Midland and the Shire of Swan, yet travel to Midland to work. We have consciously not pitched ourselves to be Midland-centric, simply because our people's lives are not focused on that area.

We do not want to draw our people away from their mission and ministry in life towards Midland. That would require a level of withdrawal from their own settings that would be hard to maintain, given all their other energy and focus is in suburbs up to half an hour away. In time a dedicated team of people living in Midland who attend Providence, and seek to focus their reach and ministry into the inner streets of the town may spring up, but it is not the primary priority.

Having said that, we do have a focus on some of the social complexities that spring up in Midland. Several of our people volunteer at other inner-town churches to help with food and aid distribution. Others run professional allied health and mental health businesses in Midland. Two families are involved in foster care programs, and take in children from the area, while the church community provides meals and other support to a foster agency that has a robust Midland presence. Although most of the congregation does not live in Midland, the makeup reflects both Midland's past and its future, with a mix of tradies, office workers, semi-skilled professionals, as well as white-collar workers, allied health, and medical workers.

Several families home school, with a significant number of families who send children to Christian schools in the area. We have one congregation, and this has been a fiercely guarded intention of our people, who enjoy the social and demographic eclecticism at Providence Midland.



So, at the moment we live on the edge of the town, as do most of the other larger, evangelical churches. We would at some stage envisage having office space in the central streets of Midland as they are all high traffic areas - both vehicle and foot - and this would give us a presence in the town without having to locate the church in the town. Given what are surprisingly prohibitive rents in the immediate areas around the town, and a lack of any established facilities, such as a warehouse and adequate parking, it would seem that the town outskirts is the most practical and economical setting for us, and does not take away from our mission focus of being a “drip-line” church.

Steve McAlpine
Snr Pastor

