Towards Church Planting & Renewal

A Discussion Paper for the Synod of Queensland

Mission Accompanying Team
October 2024

The Uniting Church in Australia
QUEENSLAND SYNOD

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0: Executive Summary

This discussion paper is intended to prompt reflection and gather feedback on the future directions of church planting and revitalisation within the Uniting Church in Queensland. It outlines questions and issues to be considered in drafting a church planting and revitalisation framework for consideration at the 38th Synod in May 2025. The goal of this paper is to seek feedback to help shape a shared vision for such a framework.

Background

The focus on church planting and revitalisation has been prominent for over a decade, including in congregation and Presbytery activities, together with Synod consultations such as Plenty. Various communities of faith have engaged in planting new congregations, while others have undergone significant revitalisation.

Key Issues Explored

1. Scope and Focus of Strategy
   - Should the Synod's framework address both church planting and revitalisation, or focus on one?

2. Diverse Models for Church Planting
   - Outline a range of approaches to church planting and revitalisation.

3. Defining the Synod's Role
   - Consider potential roles for Synod in encouraging church planting and revitalisation.

4. Inter-Conciliar Responsibilities
   - How can different councils of the church collaborate effectively in these initiatives?
   - What do the regulations outline in terms of conciliar responsibilities?

5. Key Drivers for Church Planting & Revitalisation, including:
   - Prayer: Identified as essential to fostering renewal across the Synod.
   - Effective Discipleship Culture: Nurturing followers of Christ who are equipped to disciple others.
   - Evangelism: Integrating the call to evangelism in church planting and revitalisation.
   - Leadership: identification, training, formation and support of church planters and renewal leads

6. Training & Leadership
   - The importance of training church planters and renewal agents
   - Potential approaches both internally and in collaboration with other training institutions.

7. Setting Goals & Targets
   - Consideration of setting both statewide and Presbytery-level targets for church planting.

Opportunities for Feedback

- Presbytery meetings in November 2024.
- Survey link surveymonkey.com/r/8F6YD9S for individual responses (closes December 13, 2024).
- Email feedback via the Mission Accompanying Team at mission@ucaqld.com.au

This discussion paper invites thoughtful engagement and hopes to foster a shared commitment to church planting and revitalisation, aligning efforts across the Synod to respond to God's call for renewal.

1: Introduction

Church planting and revitalisation are topics that have emerged time and again for the Uniting Church in Queensland over the past decade and more – for congregations, for Presbyteries and for the Synod itself. With a focus on renewal at the heart of the 37th Synod meeting, and the ongoing work of the Synod office, this emphasis is once again front and centre for consideration.

This document is a discussion paper, exploring the topics of church planting and revitalisation in the context of the Uniting Church within Queensland. It is offered to encourage reflection and feedback ahead of further consideration and conversation at the 38th Synod in May 2025. The intent here to is explore how the Synod can most effectively contribute to a renewal movement in ways that complement, encourage, equip, and enable the work of Presbyteries and communities of faith.

As such, this document outlines key issues that might be considered in any future Synod strategy or framework. It attempts to outline a range of issues, in places offering options to consider and questions for reflection and feedback.

This is not a proposal or a draft strategy. It is, as the name suggests, a discussion paper. Our prayer is that this paper may lead toward a deeper commitment to church planting and revitalisation across the Synod.

For that reason, your feedback on the topic of church planting and revitalisation, and the issues and questions explored in this document is invited, welcomed, and encouraged. In the first instance, feedback will be sought at Presbytery meetings throughout Queensland during November 2024. Additionally, individual feedback in response to the questions raised in the document can be submitted via surveymonkey.com/r/8F6YD9S. Feedback will be accepted until December 13th.

You are also welcome to send feedback directly through the Synod's Mission Accompanying Team at mission@ucaqld.com.au, or to contact the team to arrange a phone, on-line or in person conversation.

Once gathered, feedback will be analysed to assist in the development of a draft document for consideration at the 38th Synod in May 2025. The draft will be available to Synod members ahead of the meeting. Timelines for this process are:

- Nov — Consultation at Presbytery meetings
- Nov/mid-Dec — Individual feedback open via surveymonkey.com/r/8F6YD9S or to mission@ucaqld.com.au
- Jan/Feb 2025 — Strategy/framework to be drafted for 38th Synod
- Late Feb — Draft available for brief period of feedback
- March — Draft sent to SSC
- April — Draft sent to members of 38th Synod
- 16-19 May — Consideration at 38th Synod
- June onwards — Implementation/further work pending Synod feedback and decisions

1a: Terms Used in this Document

Throughout this document we have opted to use the broadest meaning of several terms. For clarity and convenience, the terms and the meaning ascribed to them within this document are:

- **Church planting:** A term used broadly to mean the process of beginning new communities of faith within the context of the Uniting Church. Such communities may take many different forms and shapes but aim to bear the marks of the Church as worship, witness and service as expressed in the Basis of Union. The process of 'planting' itself may take many different forms and shapes.
- **Revitalisation:** A term used broadly to mean the process of helping an existing community of faith find new life and energy in its worship, witness, and service. This may encompass new generations, new cultures, new commitment to faith sharing, new approaches to worship, new missional endeavours. There is a focus on forming and growing disciples, particularly people who do not currently belong to any community of faith.
- **Community of faith:** An inclusive term used broadly to understand both congregations and faith communities within the Uniting Church, taking a wide range of sizes, shapes and forms of governance and leadership.
- **Congregation:** A community of faith able to meet all the requirements of a congregation as articulated in the Uniting Church's Basis of Union, Constitution, Regulations and Bylaws. Where the team congregation is used in this paper, it is used with this specific definition in mind.
- **Church planters:** An inclusive term used broadly to describe individual leaders and teams of leaders involved in preparing and leading the establishment of new communities of faith. Such people may be lay or ordained, paid, or unpaid as appointed by the relevant body.
- **Renewal agents:** An inclusive term used broadly to describe individual leaders and teams of leaders involved in leading a community of faith through a revitalisation journey. Such people may be lay or ordained as appointed by the relevant body.
- **Leaders:** An inclusive term used broadly to describe both people, both lay and ordained, paid, and unpaid, Church council and ministry team, who offer significant leadership within the life of the Uniting Church.
- **Discipleship:** the lifelong journey of learning, knowing, and living Jesus' way in community for the restoration of all things.

2: Background

Over the last decade and more, the topic of church planting and revitalisation has been repeatedly raised in various conversations throughout the Synod of Queensland.

In 2014, at the 31st Synod, the Moderator convened an open space gathering centred on the question "If the church is on life support, what's our call now?" After two days of meetings and conversations, Church Planting was named as one priority response. A self-organised network formed after the Synod meeting, sharing ideas and insights in the year or two following. With limited structural or organisational support, the network ceased operating by 2016.

In 2017 at the 33rd Synod, a series of future directions were agreed for the church in Queensland. One tasked the Synod with ensuring the development of resources to assist Presbyteries to identify strategic locations for ongoing and future development and resourcing. This work supported Presbyteries in identifying locations within their bounds in which a thriving, healthy church is vital for future generations. It included consideration of both revitalising existing and planting new communities of faith. The language and ideas developed during this period have continued to be useful in some Presbyteries.

In 2018 the Synod office undertook extensive consultation across the church under the banner of Plenty. In a process that led to the adoption of the Plenty priorities, a core focus was identified as discipleship. This call was interpreted as refocusing on the challenge of becoming a disciple-making church. The Synod committed to pursuing innovation in church and mission models to suit a constantly changing world, and refreshing discipleship culture across the life of the church.

At the same time, communities of faith and Presbyteries across the State have also identified and acted upon a sense of call to church planting based on a commitment to discipleship. Newlife, for example, in partnership with South Moreton and Moreton Rivers Presbyteries have completed five church plants over the last 10 years (Pacific Pines, Burleigh, Brisbane, Coolangatta, Moreton). This experience has led to the maturing approaches within Newlife to training, preparation, and planting. New communities of faith have begun in Toowoomba (Highfields Community Church), Caloundra (BELLS), Bargara (Surf Church) and Mareeba among other locations.

New CALD faith communities have sprung up across the state too – a Fijian community in Biloela for example. New church plant projects are underway in new growth areas such as Ripley and Flagstone, and in urban and suburban areas undergoing cultural shift and infill development (Clayfield, for example). Other communities of faith have undergone significant revitalisation and renewal (Toowong, St Lucia, Nerang, Townsville Central to name a few). New missional activities within existing communities of faith (such as Messy Church at Caloundra UC) provide other avenues to revitalisation or planting new communities of faith. There remain important opportunities to consider the lessons learned and knowledge gained through many of these experiences.

Presbyteries and communities of faith have incorporated church planting and revitalisation into their own planning and activities, recognising that God is calling the Uniting Church within Queensland to a new sense of movement. Training offered in the past by Presbyteries or communities of faith (at times in partnership with the Synod office) in areas such as pioneering and fresh expressions, has in recent times been joined by training and formation for church planters in the broader sense.

Other examples of Uniting Church activity in Church planting and revitalisation exist too. Other Synods, particularly South Australia and NSW/ACT have committed to the intentional development of leaders for church planting and revitalisation and are implementing planting and revitalisation plans. The national Propel network, a collective of evangelical Uniting Church congregations and leaders is encouraging and training communities of faith and church planters for church planting and revitalisation.

In early 2024, the Synod office reviewed and renewed its own planning in light of this activity across the church, and the 37th Synod's focus on renewal. Its new 2025—2027 strategic plan, Our Foundations for Renewal and Growth, includes the following Strategic Actions for the Synod office to complete:

- 1.2.1: Co-create Presbytery-specific approaches to support congregational revitalisation
- 1.2.4: Develop a draft church planting strategy, including statewide targets, for the Queensland Synod to be presented to the 38th Synod in May 2025
- 5.2.1: Establish a church renewal specified fund
- 5.2.2: Development of a funding strategy for a mission/church renewal fund

Subsequently, the Synod office has been reorganised to support its delivery of this new strategy. A new Mission Accompanying Team has been established, for example, with the task of supporting leaders, communities of faith and Presbyteries in a range of areas – including church planting and revitalisation.

The Synod office understands that it has not initiated and is not proposing or leading a new church planting movement. Rather, it is responding to and supporting a growing sense of calling that has been steadily emerging across the Synod for over a decade. The Synod and Synod office through a focus on renewal is committed to supporting and strengthening Presbyteries and communities of faith that carry their own sense of call and commitment to a renewed discipleship culture, including as expressed through church planting and revitalisation.

This document is a precursor to the development of a strategy or framework identified in Strategic Action 1.2.4 above, a logical next step building on the history already outlined. This discussion paper is designed to gather views and feedback from across the church about what elements will be most important if the 38th Synod is to consider a whole-of-church or whole-of-system commitment to supporting church planting.

FOR REFLECTION:

What other activities and experiences within the Uniting Church in Queensland have led to this emphasis on church planting and revitalisation?

3: Why Church Planting & Revitalisation for the Uniting Church?

The Uniting Church exists thanks to the missional endeavours of our forebears following the spirit of God to imagine and plant new communities of faith throughout Australia. It is a missional impulse, a call to faith and to being disciples that lies at the heart of our Church and each one of our existing communities of faith. The church exists because people have found good news and responded to Jesus' instruction in Matt 28: "Go into all the world and make disciples". That call still stands for the Church today.

In the Basis of Union, we recognise that Christ is constantly at work, drawing people to faith, leading the Church, and continually reshaping it:

"Through human witness in word and action, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ reaches out to command people's attention and awaken faith; he calls people into the fellowship of his sufferings, to be the disciples of a crucified Lord; in his own strange way Christ constitutes, rules and renews them as his Church." (Basis of Union, Paragraph 4)

The Queensland context is one in which there is significant growth and change in communities, both demographically and geographically. To ensure the Church's presence in both rapidly growing urban areas across the state and changing regional and rural locations, a strong, intentional effort to establish new faith communities is essential.

Within existing communities, population groups move and shift – including increased density of population, or new cultural groups. For the Church to be present in such changing context, it can be argued that a concentrated, intentional, effort to establish a diversity of new communities of faith is vital. Alongside this, an intentional revitalisation pathway is required, assisting existing communities of faith to adapt and respond effectively to change within their neighbourhoods or communities. There is ample evidence to suggest we have not effectively made these transitions within many of our communities of faith.

Additionally, we understand that evidence from within Australia and beyond suggests that new communities of faith can be an effective context in bringing people to faith and forming disciples of Jesus . If the Uniting Church in Queensland is to be true to our commitment to prioritising discipleship, as articulated through the Plenty initiative, then a concerted, intentional church planting effort is a critical aspect alongside revitalisation and other discipleship initiatives.

Any church planting or revitalisation effort should take this emphasis on discipleship to heart. Planting churches for the sake of planting churches, or numerical growth in communities of faith for the sake of statistics pales next to the call on our Church to be and to make disciples and to witness to and participate in God's mission. A church planting or revitalisation framework or strategy should be an outcome of a broader discipleship focus.

Should the Uniting Church Plant New Churches?

This is an important question to consider and respond to. Some reasons to respond positively to it include:

- At our best, the Uniting Church offers something significant alongside other Christian churches. Some of our commitments are an important part of the call on the broader Christian community in witnessing to and serving both our wider society and each local community. Examples include:
  - a covenantal relationship with First Nations Peoples,
  - being a multi-cultural church,
  - the full participation of women in leadership,
  - openness to grappling with modern social, scientific, and ethical understandings and values
- We are blessed with extraordinary people, history, relationships, footprint, and connections. We have the capacity, capability, and resources to both plant new churches, and revitalise existing communities of faith, and to unite with others on this task (we may explore ecumenical approaches, for example).
- One of the primary foci of any Christian church is responding to the Great Commission (Matt 28) to make disciples. Planting churches among new groups of people is a natural extension for any church – and the Uniting Church is no different. Jesus' vision was of a church that would plant churches as part of its response to proclaiming the gospel. Historically the Uniting Church has embodied this, and this call simply takes us back to our roots. If we are not a disciple-making (and by extension church planting) church, are we really a church at all?

- To serve the diverse needs of the entire Australian population, we need many more churches that are thoughtfully adapted to the unique contexts of the communities they are planted in.

Through the discernment of our councils and our leadership communities, and as outlined in Section 2 above, our church has repeatedly heard the Spirit calling us to this task of planting and revitalising, expressing it in our vision: "*to be active in every Queensland community, bearers of Christ's offer of life in all its fullness.*" As in the beginning, so we continue to hear the voice of the Spirit to make disciples, and to grow healthy communities of faith.

FOR REFLECTION:

What are the unique charisms of the Uniting Church that make it important for us to continue efforts to plant new churches and revitalise communities of faith?

In which parts of Queensland, geographically or culturally, do you sense the Spirit calling us to consider something new?

4. Scope, Models & Language

Church planting as a general term can be used to denote a wide range of models; from 'traditional' church plants that involve sending a pastor, a core group and a seed-funding budget, through to small missional communities or fresh expressions, starting a new campus from an existing congregation, launching a house-church and so on. Though our collective recent experiences have been mainly in major population centres, Church planting is a topic for us to consider throughout the whole state – from metro to regional, from rural to remote communities. Models and contexts may differ, the imperative does not.

Revitalisation too, takes on a broad range of contexts and understandings, ranging from injecting new leadership or approaches into an existing community of faith, to merging with another community of faith or a close/relaunch process. Inherent in the process is a focus on forming and making disciples both of those already in the community of faith and among people who do not currently belong to any community of faith. It is, once again, a task for the full extent of our church – and vital in rural and regional communities where withdrawal of services is a lived reality.

A critical question, both for this document and any subsequent framework or strategy, is whether we should consider and plan in the proposed framework for only church planting, or church planting and the revitalisation of existing communities of faith. Though related, the tasks of planting and revitalisation are distinct. There are different skills involved for those who lead, and different strategic and resourcing considerations for councils of the church.

FOR REFLECTION:

Is a congregation always the end goal of church planting or revitalisation? Why/why not?

Should any framework or strategy developed by the Synod consider only church planting, or church planting and revitalisation? Why/why not?

4a: Church Planting and Revitalisation Models

There are a wide range of approaches to church planting and revitalisation active within Australia and beyond. Common to each ought to be a clear commitment to a healthy discipleship culture. Communities of faith, whether new or existing, will not flourish without this emphasis. The following list of approaches to church planting and revitalisation is not exhaustive or definitive, and offered only to illustrate the range of approaches that could be considered useful within the Queensland context.

- Fresh expressions/missional communities
- Sending a larger group to seed a new community of faith
- Intentional planting of a congregation from a discipleship-oriented small group
- Organically growing a congregation from a small group
- Campus or multi-site plant from existing community of faith
- Close and rebirth of existing community of faith
- Revitalisation of existing community of faith with injection of new leadership and approach
- Adding a new service within an existing community of faith – at a different time, in a fresh style, with a different (new) group of people
- Adding a new faith community within existing community of faith. This may take the form of a culturally and linguistically diverse community (CALD), or a missional initiative such as Messy Church
- Establishing a new faith community in partnership with other UCA activity (e.g. school, agency, residential
- college, Uniting Early Learning)
- Community service or centre as lead-in to church plant
- New CALD community/congregation in response to immigration
- Ecumenical church planting or revitalisation – particularly in regional communities
- "Adopting" other communities of faith from outside the Uniting Church (e.g. house church, small missional community, independent churches). Could a "reception of faith communities" process analogous to the Reception of Ministers process be envisaged?
- Independent Church Planters bringing their group/plant to a supportive network/community. Could a process be imagined facilitating this?
- Mergers or relocation can be undertaken to foster revitalisation or renewed mission engagement.

FOR REFLECTION:

What other approaches to church planting or revitalisation can you articulate?

4b: The Value of Shared Language

For as many different denominations or movements as engage in church planting and revitalisation, there appear to be distinct sets of definitions and language in use. Even within our Synod, different Presbyteries and congregations have already begun using language and labels to describe their work. The Synod could, by discussion, agree to adopt a set of terms and language to be used in any strategy or framework – with the intent of ensuring consistency and commonality of language. This would serve to offer a language of church planting and revitalisation to the entire state, helping align our understanding and energy toward the same ends.

FOR REFLECTION:

How could a set of agreed terms and definitions assist us in internal communication, planning, and funding?

5: Strategy or Framework in an Inter-Conciliar Context

"The Uniting Church is governed by a series of inter-related councils, each of which has its tasks and responsibilities in relation both the Church and to the world… It is the task of every council to wait upon God's Word, and to obey God's will in the matters allocated to its oversight. Each council will recognise the limits of its own authority and give heed to other councils of the Church, so that the whole body of believers may be united by mutual submission in the service of the Gospel." (Basis of Union, Paragraph 15).

Each council of the Uniting Church holds distinct but overlapping responsibilities. With respect to beginning new communities of faith, or training and equipping leaders for involvement in new or renewing communities of faith, regulated responsibilities for each council include (not exhaustive):

Congregation and Church Council Responsibilities:

- Reg 3.1.1a includes embodiment of church in one place for worship, witness, service
- Reg 3.1.2a includes leading congregation to fuller participation Christ's mission in the world

Presbytery Responsibilities:

- Reg 3.1.3a includes pastoral and administrative oversight of ministers
- Reg 3.1.3d (1) includes formation of congregations and other pastoral charges within the bounds
- Reg 3.1.3l & 3.1.3m includes designation and placement of lay pastors, youth workers, ministers
- Reg 3.1.3o (i) includes administrative functions related to property
- Reg 3.4.1 includes recognising the establishment of a new congregation
- Reg 3.9.2 includes recognition and support of Faith Communities as an alternative local church structure
- Reg 3.9.3 includes recognition and support of Small Congregations as an alternative local church structure

Synod Responsibilities:

- Reg 3.1.5 (a) includes assisting Congregations and Presbyteries in their missionary responsibilities
- Reg 3.1.5 (i) includes providing for effective supervision of theological and ministerial education
- Reg 3.1.5 (k) includes providing for effective supervision of property matters
- Reg 3.1.5 (vi) includes undertaking such other things as, in the opinion of the Synod, will promote and encourage the mission of the Church
- Reg 4.2.1 includes providing for effective oversight of property matters

Congregation, Church Council, Presbytery and Synod each share responsibility in enacting some aspects of regulations that may relate to forming new or revitalised communities of faith. Examples (again, not exhaustive) include:

- Regulation 4.8.1 includes consideration regarding proceeds of sale of property
- Regulation 4.11.10 includes designated property as available for alternative missional use

Considering these shared and inter-related responsibilities, developing, and enacting an effective framework or strategy for encouraging church planting and revitalisation across the whole Synod necessarily involves a consideration of the individual and shared responsibilities of the various councils, and the means by which effective and genuine collaboration can be supported. To be more specific, any consideration of the Synod should therefore give heed to the responsibilities and actions of the other councils of the Church. The call of the Basis of Union to recognise limits, heed the other, and unite in mutual submission may be vital here.

Here we may naturally consider the relationship and collaboration between congregation and Presbytery, Presbytery and Synod, or congregation and Synod – but also the ways in which multiple congregations can cooperate in church planting or revitalisation.

The NSW/ACT Synod paper Towards a Blended Ecology - A Framework for Missional Innovation and Church Planting observes that "it is not always clear in our polity which councils can or should take the initiative when it comes to starting new things." The authors go on to conclude that "we do not think there is a single way it should take place, but rather there are many different ways it can and does take place. Some are more organic and others more strategic. We need to maintain an openness to this variety, while also recognising that at times a lack of coordination between the councils of the church can lead to missed opportunities and the underutilisation of resources."

FOR REFLECTION:

How do you understand the different or shared roles of congregation, Presbytery, and synod with respect to church planting or revitalisation?

Is the quote from the paper "Towards a Blended Ecology…" helpful in suggesting there are multiple ways for councils to work together?

Do you agree with NSW/ACT's conclusion concerning councils of the church working together in church planting and revitalisation?

5a: Inter-Conciliar Responsibilities: Options for Consideration

One option which could be considered is to develop a model for the Queensland Synod that outlines specific responsibilities for each council, giving attention to the scope of the framework or strategy as explored earlier. Adopting this approach would include a careful assessment of regulations and bylaws, determining where responsibility lies in each step of a church planting or revitalisation process. This approach would alleviate uncertainty in roles and relationships.

A second option would be to understand the need for a diversity of approaches, including a diversity of responsibilities for councils as may be appropriate in each context or situation. This allows for different capabilities and views within different Presbyteries. This option may necessitate developing Presbytery-specific approaches or understandings to allow for different involvement or responsibility of the Synod in various parts of the state, recognising that each different approach is working toward the same Synod-wide goals.

A third option may be to bring elements of both these approaches, outlining an ideal approach to inter-conciliar responsibilities and relationships for most circumstances, while recognising there will be contexts where a different approach to collaboration and cooperation between councils is required.

FOR REFLECTION:

What are the strengths or weaknesses of the two options outlined above? Do you have a preference between these two options?

What other options to consider with respect to conciliar responsibilities and inter-conciliar relationships regarding church planting and revitalisation can you imagine?

5b: Other Matters

In addition to the regulated responsibilities and relational oversight explored previously, each council of the church operates committees, boards, or teams invested in establishing or revitalising communities of faith.

Presbytery bodies include the Presbytery Standing Committee, Pastoral Relations Committee, and Property Committee. Different Presbyteries within the Synod exercise these regulated bodies in diverse ways. In the Presbytery of Carpentaria, for example, a single Presbytery Leadership Team operates as all three of these regulated bodies. Meanwhile in Moreton Rivers, three separate committees act in these three regulated roles.

Through the appointment and calling of their own ministry teams, presbyteries also provide support to the activities of forming new and revitalised communities of faith. Different Presbyteries have different levels of staffing, and different capabilities in this area. Individual Presbyteries may therefore seek different levels of support or involvement from other councils (including both the Synod, and other Presbyteries) in this work.

Similarly, existing communities of faith exhibit various levels of readiness and intent with respect to supporting church planting and congregational revitalisation. Newlife Church, for example, has already gathered extensive skills and a well-articulated strategy after more than a decade's experience in both planting and revitalisation.

Within the Synod there are regulated and functional bodies that are invested in supporting the new and revitalised communities of faith and those leaders and ministry agents involved. These include the Synod Standing Committee (SSC), Finance, Investment & Property Board (FIP), Board for Christian Formation (BCF), Advisory Committee on Ministerial Placements (Placements), Presbytery/Synod Interface (PSI) and the Mission Consultation & Collaboration Committee (MC3), and the Multi-Cross Cultural Reference Group (MCCRG).

The Synod, through its office, has appointed or called staff or ministry agents to support this work including Trinity College Queensland (TCQ), the Mission Accompanying Team (MAT), the Presbytery Support Unit (PSU) and the Finance, Property and Enterprises Team.

The development and pursuit of a shared Synod-wide framework or strategy will require effective and collaborative work between councils and bodies of the Church. This may test our capacity to continue developing generous, trusting relationships across the Church that contribute to our shared vision in serving the mission of Christ.

6: Roles for the Synod in Church Planting and Revitalisation

Determining the specific roles the Synod and its office can play in supporting a Church Planting and Revitalisation movement is a key task. Potential example roles include:

- **Leadership, support, and coordination:**
  - Calling and encouraging the whole church to prioritise and legitimise church planting and revitalisation, including capturing and sharing good news stories
  - Working with Presbyteries and communities of faith to establish or agree on shared language, definitions, and understandings, including models and approaches
  - Providing for effective communication and support from bodies of the Synod, including FIP, MC3, MCCRG, BCF, Placements, PSI
  - Finding those active in church planting or revitalisation and championing their efforts
  - Coordinating or supporting significant church planting projects where the Presbytery/s involved request more active involvement of the Synod
- **Administration, property, and finance/funding:**
  - Identifying, coordinating, and operating funding strategies consistent with Synod policy
    - NB: A draft Church Renewal Fund strategy will be shared for feedback in November, and brought to 38th Synod for consideration
  - Coordinating and operating property strategies consistent with Synod policy
  - Supporting communities of faith and Presbyteries in understanding and navigating regulatory and administrative pathways, including placements processes, safe ministry, insurance, property, governance, or finance processes (including via the Presbytery Support Unit)
  - Exploring alternate and simplified governance models for communities of faith
- **Support, networking, encouragement:**
  - Effective support and assistance from Synod office groups, including MAT, TCQ, & PSU
  - Hosting communities of practice, linking leaders or communities of faith together for shared learning and support (MAT) across the whole of the Synod
  - Accompanying church planters, renewal leads and leadership teams on the journey
- **Research**
  - Social and demographic research to identify suitable planting/revitalising locations
  - Identifying relevant evidence-based approaches to church planting and revitalisation
  - Best-practice training and support for church planting or renewal agents and teams
- **Training & education:**
  - Through BCF, and in partnership with Presbyteries, providing or coordinating training and/or ongoing support to ministry leaders in church planting or revitalisation, including:
    - Training and formation of ministry agents, church planters and renewal agents (TCQ)
    - Coaching or mentoring of church planters, renewal agents and leadership groups (MAT)
  - Creating/gathering/curating a range of learning content in church planting and revitalisation, and related areas such as discipleship, ministry with younger generations, and multi/cross-cultural ministry (MAT/TCQ)

7: Key Drivers to Energise Church Planting & Revitalisation

Church planting and revitalisation are not only activities but the outcome of developing a focused and intentional culture that promotes growth in discipleship and renewal. Understanding the key drivers to church plant and revitalise communities of faith will help congregations, Presbyteries, and the Synod to align efforts.

Prayer

Commitment to prayer is a vital aspect of living and renewing a discipleship culture. Fostering and encouraging a prayer movement, seeking the Spirit of God as together we seek to know and live Jesus' way in community, plant churches and revitalise communities of faith is arguably a key driver of this movement.

Effective Discipleship Culture Expressed in Church Planting

A strong discipleship culture lies at the heart of church planting or revitalisation. This requires an intentional focus on raising followers of Jesus who are not only growing in their faith but also equipped and encouraged to disciple others, leading to a movement that seeks to multiply itself. Planting healthy churches, and revitalising existing communities of faith should be understood as normal business, not an exceptional strategy.

Commitment to Evangelism

Church planting is born out of a passion for and commitment to evangelism, both through individuals and supported by an organisational approach. This involves encouraging and equipping for sharing the Gospel and creating pathways by which a newcomer can begin to explore the Christian faith.

Generosity & Strategic Resourcing

Generosity is how we understand the grace of God, and therefore how others should experience the church. In all its forms (financial, time, and resources) generosity is a key enabler for church planting and revitalisation. New missional initiatives often require extended support that will test our commitment to generosity.

Leadership Development and Support

Effective church planting and revitalisation are dependent on identifying, developing, and supporting leaders equipped for these tasks, ideally in a communal context (such as communities of practice). Assessment, training, coaching, and ministry supervision are critical elements of leadership development and support.

Permission and Entrepreneurial Spirit

Entrepreneurial or apostolic leadership should be permitted, encouraged, and supported, allowing exploration of new models, sustained through relational accountability, supervision and care, assistance with problem-solving, and protection from unnecessary interference.

Love of People and Local Communities

We are called to a deep love for our neighbours. This love will drive us to share the gospel, care for the sick, befriend the lonely, search for the lost, welcome the last and lift up the least.

Sacrificial Leaders

Churches are planted by leaders willing to sacrifice more than is expected in Australian culture including moving to new locations, leaving sustaining communities, working two jobs, learning new skills (and throwing out learnt ones), and risking reputation, wellbeing, and security to pursue the call of God.

Understanding Shifts in Social Context

In the current context, a time in which there are meta shifts in society with respect to believing, belonging, truth, trust and community, planting and revitalising is arguably more difficult than ever. Learning to read and navigate such cultural shifts and contextualise approaches to church planting and revitalisation are vital.

8: Training & Education for Leaders

It seems obvious to suggest that identifying, training, developing, placing, and supporting both lay and ordained leaders for church planting and revitalisation is a critical component of renewal. Identifying the most effective pathway, however, may not be so straightforward.

The implications for ministry selection, training and formation processes within the Uniting Church are significant. It can be argued that our current approach focuses on developing generalist ministry workers, not necessarily fostering the specialised skills required for church planters, pioneers, or renewal agents. This raises a number of questions for reflection:

- Could we wonder how well our leaders are formed to be disciple-makers?
- Should ministry formation include church planting, revitalisation, pioneering, or disciple-making as either compulsory or optional components?
- Should Continuing Education for Ministry offerings on the topic of revitalisation, innovation and disciple-making be more actively encouraged?
- Should our selection processes in the first instance also look to the assessment of candidate's spiritual gifts and suitability for church planting or revitalisation?
- How could we consider the place of Ministry of Deacon in church planting?
- Should the Uniting Church look at ministry through the apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, teacher framework, ensuring that we are seeking to identify and/or develop leaders gifted in each of these areas?

Further, do we effectively draw on the skills, experiences and calling of those within our midst – practicing our commitment to the ministry of all believers?

Within Queensland, the Synod offers education and training through Trinity College Queensland, under the oversight of the Board for Christian Formation. Moreton Rivers Presbytery offers training through its Centre for Ministry and Leadership. Some congregations, Newlife for example, offer their own internal discipleship, leadership, and church planter training. Would a clear framework of offerings assist leaders to identify the most helpful training pathways, and Presbyteries and congregations to make the most helpful recommendations? Would it be more effective to have a single training school for church planters and renewal agents? How is such training and formation effectively accessed by those not located in south-east Queensland?

There are a wide range of training organisations outside the Queensland Synod with some expertise and experience in the areas of church planting and revitalisation. Perhaps the pursuit of training agreements with external providers, or the development of recognised pathways for those trained outside the Queensland Synod may be helpful. Examples of education and training providers include:

- Other UCA offerings such as Uniting Mission & Education NSW/ACT or the South Australian Synod. Is a partnership with NSW/ACT and SA for training and development pathways for church planting and revitalisation an option to consider?
- Other Australian Colleges such as Malyon College, Alphacrucis, Morling College
- International colleges/training such as St Mellitus, Fresh Expressions UK, Gregory Centre for Church Multiplication
- Specialist Church Planting networks, such as:
  - Exponential Australia (Rev Mike Hands is a Director of Exponential)
  - M4 Australia & ConneXa
  - V3 (US General Assembly / Baptist)

FOR REFLECTION:

What are the most important issues with respect to training and development of church planters and renewal agents?

How can congregations, Presbyteries and Synod most effectively collaborate for training and formation in this field?

9: Goals and Targets

Many church planting and revitalisation strategies around Australia and beyond include goals or targets. A decade ago, the London Anglican Diocese committed to plant one hundred new churches (of many models) by 2020, reaching 87 by the end of its strategy period. It has since re-set its strategy and now aims at four hundred new churches by 2030. The Baptist Union of NSW in its Gen1K initiative set an astonishing goal of becoming a network of 1000 healthy churches by 2050 (a tripling in the number of churches in the network).

Closer to home there are Uniting Church examples too. The South Australia Synod/Presbyteries has a bold goal of planting ten churches and regenerating fifteen congregations over a five-year period. The NSW/ACT Synod has committed to five new church plants as part of a mixed ecology approach. Bremer Brisbane Presbytery has set a goal of three new church plants within 5 years, and Moreton Rivers Presbytery 40 by 2040. Downs Presbytery aims to ensure it supports four healthy "pillar" congregations in the Toowoomba region, to support the wider Presbytery.

These kinds of goals or targets can help motivate an entire system and provide a metric by which to assess progress. They can also provide a long-term target within which shorter-term plans can be implemented. Within its long-term Gen1K strategy for example, the Baptist Union of NSW currently has a three-year plan identifying short-term work contributing to the longer-term goals.

On the other hand, identifying and committing to firm targets such as these can be challenging for an inter-conciliar church like the Uniting Church. Which of our councils can commit to such targets on behalf of others, for example? Can the Synod rightly commit to a certain number of church plants or revitalisations across the whole state, when so much of the activity of church planting and revitalisation lies with communities of faith and Presbyteries? Can we meaningfully agree state-wide targets when Presbyteries are at such distinct stages in their own consideration of church planting and revitalisation? Do we want to delay progress while we consult and negotiate to establish state-wide targets?

Other aspects of goal setting may be considered too. Should we measure effort, or input, rather than outcomes or outputs? Should we understand numerical targets as the purview of Presbyteries, naming other kinds of goals for the Synod? Should, in fact, we be more interested in measuring disciples and discipleship, rather than the number of church plants? If discipleship that multiples is the motor that drives everything (including Church planting and revitalisation), how would we measure that?

Here is a variety of ways we could consider setting goals or targets, each from a distinct perspective:

- **Option 1:** Total number of church plants & revitalisations across Queensland by a target date
  - Started (genuine planning underway)
  - Achieved (some level of measurement required)
  - Characteristics (disciple-making, prayer soaked, for example)
  - A broad ambition as a whole Synod, informed by Presbytery targets/plans
- **Option 2:** Total number of church plants & renewals by region/Presbytery by a target date
  - Started (genuine planning underway)
  - Achieved (some level of measurement required)
  - Characteristics (disciple-making, prayer soaked, for example)
  - Presbyteries set targets, Synod does not
- **Option 3**: Identifying training/development targets for church planters or renewal agents by a target date
  - Total number of church planters or renewal agents being trained
  - Range of church plant or renewal agent courses established, offered regularly and being accessed
- **Option 4:** Existing community of faith involvement in church planting or revitalisation
  - Number of communities of faith actively involved in church planting or revitalisation
  - Prioritising and refocusing on disciple-making
  - Undertaking own church plant or revitalisation
  - Actively providing prayer support
  - Actively providing financial support
  - Actively providing leaders for training/development
  - Making property and other resources available
  - Number of communities of faith committed to prayer support

- **Other Measures:**
  - Membership across the UCA
  - Financial sustainability of communities of faith across the Number of churches implementing a discipleship strategy

It is important as we consider goal setting that we do not let fear determine any reservations about setting goals, nor justifying it by a belief that setting goals is inherently wrong. If we chose not to measure our progress, this decision alone will be detrimental to any progress we may make.

REFLECTION

To what degree is it realistic to set 'whole-of-Synod' targets? If you were to set such a target, what would you measure? Over what period?

Considering the options above, which of these could be helpful targets or approaches to goal setting?

What other options could you conceive?

10: What Could the 38th Synod Consider?

Pending feedback on this discussion paper, the General Secretary will consider bringing a draft church planting and revitalisation framework or strategy to the 38th Synod for consideration and response.

There are several options for such a framework or strategy, each of which should take into consideration the inter-conciliar nature of the Uniting Church, the current state of our activity in this area, best practice in church planting and revitalisation, and the capacity of the Synod as a council to make commitments within its area of responsibility. Such options include:

- **Option 1:** A (draft) traditional 'strategy' document for a whole-of-church approach that outlines vision, goals, and actions for church planting and revitalisation. Such a strategy, if adopted, would then be subject to agreement of other councils of the church. It could form the basis for extended consultation with other councils ahead of the adoption of a finalized strategy by Synod (or Synod Standing Committee). The NSW/ACT Synod has undertaken an approach along these lines, though limited in scope.
- **Option 2:** A (draft) framework within which each part of the church can express its own response to the call to plant churches and revitalise communities of faith. The framework may for the basis of planning and agreement between councils for the support of such initiatives
- **Option 3:** A (draft) strategy addressing only the contribution of the Synod or Synod office to the wider effort of church planting and revitalisation, leaving other councils to undertake their own planning and make their own commitments as they see fit.
- **Option 4**: A hybrid option, incorporating both a (draft) framework within which each part of the church can express its own response to the call to plant and revitalise churches (as in Option 2), and the specifics of the Synod's own contribution (as in Option 3). Such a framework could give expression to the different responsibilities of different councils, and different states of readiness to act, and make clear the Synod's commitment to supporting such work.

REFLECTION

How do you respond to these options? Do you support one or more of them? What changes for your preferred option could be considered?

What alternative option/s can you articulate?

10a: Principles

Leadership Development and Support

As the 38th Synod explores a framework or strategy for church planting and revitalisation, it could be valuable to first outline the core principles that will guide the document. Principles might include:

- A movement that is Spirit-led, constantly practicing discernment, and seeking the leading of the Holy Spirit
- Commitment to church planting and revitalisation as a core value for the UCA Qld
- Develop a strong culture of making and multiplying healthy disciples
- Encourage, resource, and empower a range of spirit-led approaches to church planting and revitalisation
- Recognise a range of contexts in which church planting may take place throughout Queensland
- Use the diverse capabilities and relationships among different communities of faith, Presbyteries, and the Synod in the context of church planting and revitalisation
- Ensure the framework is adaptable and future-proofed, accommodating current contexts and capabilities while remaining open to ongoing review and adjustment for changing circumstances
- Making decisions consistent with the following values:
  - discipleship-oriented
  - transparent
  - fair
  - needs-based
  - evidence-based
  - whole-of-system
  - generous and hospitable

REFLECTION

Are these principles sufficient to support church planting and revitalisation within the Uniting Church in Queensland?

What additional principles can you articulate?

What other values need to inform our approach and principles?

Appendix A: Current Status in QLD

Location	Recent History	Status	Strategy	Training	Future Locations & Other Notes
Newlife	Extensive 5 plants over last decade	• Active • 1 new plant underway (Moreton) • 4 previous (Brisbane, Pacific Pines, Burleigh, Coolangatta)	• Clear • Agreed • Implementing	• Active • Residency • 3 students in place	• Under development • Internal Church Planting Strategy in place guiding future directions
Moreton Rivers Presbytery	Some	• Active • 2 new plants underway (Moreton w/ Newlife, Clayfield) • Clear goals	• Clear • Developing implementation	• Active • Training program on offer through CML	• 2 underway (Clayfield, Moreton) • Other locations under development
Bremer Brisbane Presbytery	Limited	• Active • 1 new plant developing (Ripley) • Previous attempt Ripley	Developing	• No internal training • MRP Partnership	• 1 planned (Ripley) • 2 further intended by end 2026, not yet identified
South Moreton Presbytery	Extensive (with Newlife)	• Active • 1 new plant underway (Flagstone)	Developing	• No internal training • Newlife active	• Flagstone underway • None further identified
Mary Burnett Presbytery	Some	• Active • 1 new plant underway (Uniting Life) • Missional Community (BELLS)	For future consideration	No internal training	None further identified
Central Queensland Presbytery	Limited	• 1 developing (Fijian @ Biloela)	For future consideration	No internal training	None yet identified
Carpentaria Presbytery	Limited	• Not active	For future consideration	No internal training	None yet identified
Downs Presbytery	Limited (Highfields)	• Not active	For future consideration	No internal training	• Potential at Cambooya • None further identified

Appendix B: Example Denominational or Synod Strategies

Uniting Church South Australia: Generate 20:21

- Plant ten churches and regenerate fifteen congregations over a five-year period
- Currently four new church plants and two regenerations in progress
- Information: UCA SA - Generate 2021
- News update incl interview with Church Planting Project Officer
- Three models being prioritised include Campus plant, Start-up model (something completely new) and Replant model (existing congregation asks another to replant in existing building/location)

Uniting Church NSW/ACT: A Blended Ecology Framework

"In 2023, the UCA Synod of NSW and ACT affirmed by consensus the proposal: "Towards a Blended Ecology: A Framework for Missional Innovation and Church Planting." A vital part of this paper was planting five new churches in strategic growth areas across the Synod." Read the Project update here.

Project components and Status:

- Church Planting: **strategic congregation**s in Molonglo Valley, Maitland, Sutherland Shire, North-West Sydney, and South-West Sydney. Currently recruiting for teams, funded through Synod Growth Fund
- Cultivating **faith communities** (fresh expressions, micro-churches, house churches, missional communities, new monastic communities, simple churches)…by investing in lay leadership, developing simple and clear processes, providing practical support that eases the burden of compliance, growing support networks, funding, sharing stories and resources, and encouraging innovation and experimentation in local contexts.
- Encouraging the development of **Parish Missions**
- Mission & Innovation Funding via Synod Growth Fund
  - Missional Grants: $10k as one-off grants for missional activity
  - Innovation Grants: $100k over 2-5 years to explore new ways to do church
  - Strategic Grants: Up to $500k over 5 years for strategic congregations or initiatives
- Supported by Uniting Mission & Education's Mission, Growth, and Innovation Team

Melbourne Anglican Diocese: Church Planting & Revitalisation Strategy

"To catalyse a vibrant church planting and revitalisation network, building on our Anglican heritage and working together to reimagine a collective future, where we resource leaders and churches effectively to reach new generations and geographical areas and renew churches so they can thrive."

The Strategy:

- Plant 30 churches and regenerate 30 congregations by 2030, read the details here
- Reimagine: embracing new ideas, adapting structures, training
- Resource: to support and develop planters and revitalisation efforts
- Reach: new churches in growth corridors, urban areas, CALD communities with diverse models
- Renew: partnering with churches in need of renewal via training, consultancy, coaching
- Funding: $110k per plant for initial salary, training, and development. $75k to be repaid in years 4-7
- Staffing: Canon of Church Planting, Revitalisation Lead, Director of Training & Leadership Development, Admin & Events

Questions or comments?

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The Uniting Church in Australia
QUEENSLAND SYNOD