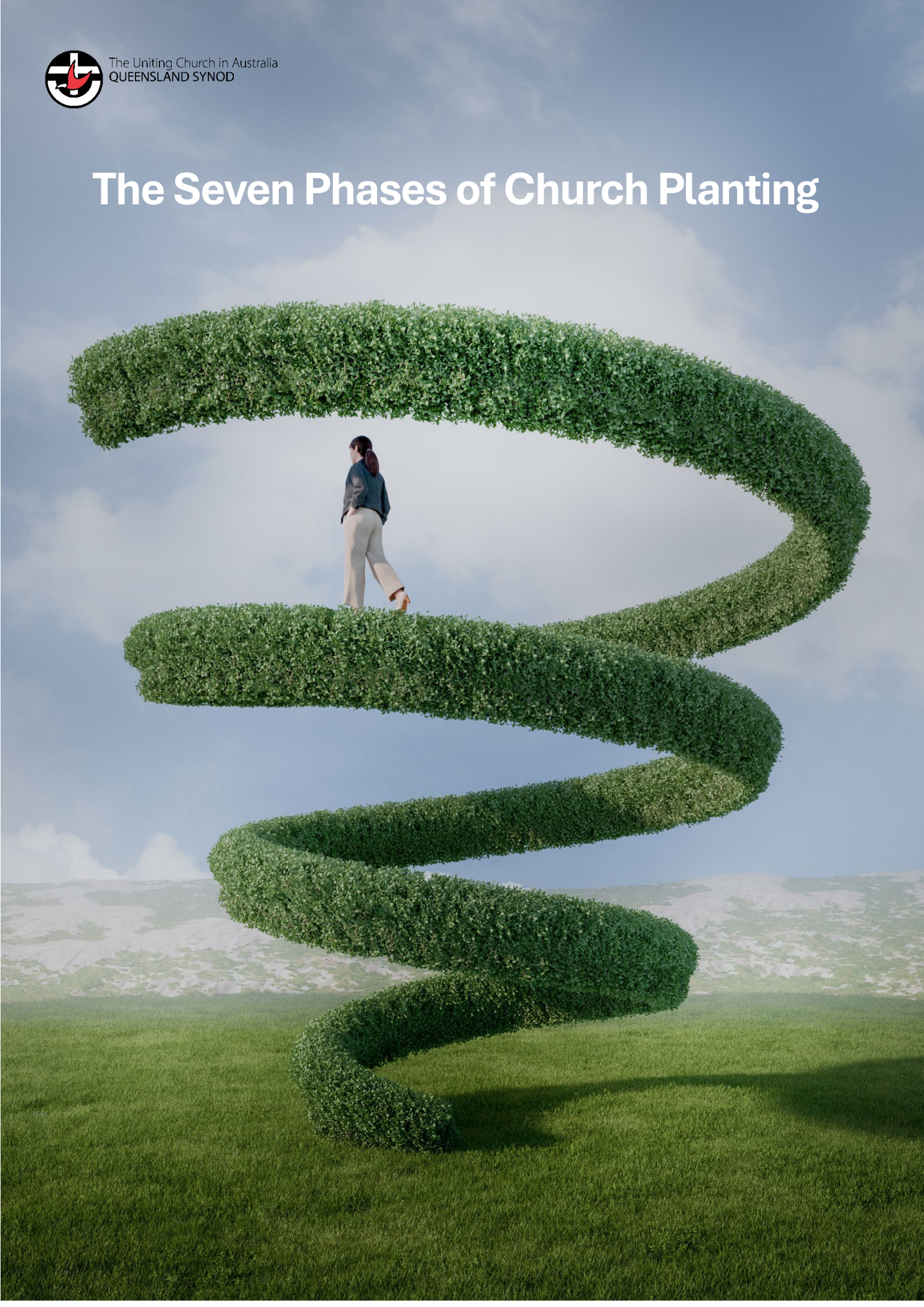
The Uniting Church in Australia
QUEENSLAND SYNOD

The Seven Phases of Church Planting



What if?
God's Church Planting Vision for The Uniting Church in Australia, Queensland Synod

What if, in ten years' time, we could each:

- Look around the state and each know personally one of the 40 church plants we've helped establish and caused to flourish?
- Share how we've prayed, given, loved, supported and cheered on all of those who God has raised up to plant a church?
- Say I saw the work of the Spirit in the life of that person, and thank God I was part of their journey into starting a new church?
- Tell stories of people who were in a spiritual wilderness, but now know the saving grace of Jesus and are following him?
- Rejoice in empty buildings being full again?
- Look on with grateful hearts at the mission, restoration, help and love that has been poured into so many communities?
- Gaze in wonder at what God has done with each of us, his church, the Uniting Church in Australia, to do what we once feared was impossible?

This is the vision God is calling us all toward and to play our part in. It is a vision that far exceeds what we might fathom as possible, but if we come together, invest what God has given each of us, and seek to establish more church plants across our state, we will be gifted this vantage point and more in the decade to come.

This Church Planting Pathway is for everyone in the church. For every Church Council, Elder, Presbytery Agent, Minister, Pastor, lay person, volunteer, even for those currently outside of the church. It is a strategy, which can be tailor-made to any theology, gift mix, local church flavour, number of resources, personality, or calling to plant.

The process (with related questions) presented in this document will surprise you, help you, challenge you, stretch you, encourage you and prepare you for what God wants to do through you. None of us, alone, can see this vision realised. But God is inviting us, every single one of us, into taking the journey to discern what role we each can and must play to see more of God's kingdom come.

A Church Planting Pathway
The Seven Phases of Church Planting

INTRODUCTION

This document has been prepared by The Uniting Church in Australia, Queensland Synod Mission Accompanying Team (MAT) to support, encourage and accompany the planting of more churches in Queensland.

In its Synod Church Planting, Re-Planting and Revitalisation Strategy (2025 – 2035) the Queensland Synod embraced its church planting purpose:

> *In response to the call of the Spirit to our church, the Synod will accompany congregations and presbyteries in seeking and supporting a flourishing church planting, re-planting, and revitalisation culture over a 10-year period from 2025 to 2035. Together we will nurture an eco-system in which the church collectively and locally responds to God's call for renewal by forming new and renewed congregations/faith communities.*
>
> *The associated Goals and targets of this strategy are:*
> *By 2035, the Uniting Church in Queensland will see:*
> *1. A 20% increase in the total number of congregations/faith communities across the state compared to a 2025 baseline, including new congregations/faith communities in a range of cultural, demographic, and geographic contexts.*
> *2. Every community of faith understands and is actively developing a contextual discipleship culture, engaging people in God's work of restoration.*

This resource seeks to assist in making this vision become a reality in the life of our Church.

HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

You may be a (potential or current) church planter, Presbytery agent, Church Council member, interested member of a congregation or someone from outside of the Uniting Church curiously exploring how God wants to use you. This resource will guide you through how to move from where you are, with the theology you hold, toward planting a church. It will not tell you what to do, but it will equip you with vital questions, prompts and resources, to navigate the uncharted territory of church planting, which God is inviting you to travel through.

You may have already moved through several phases of the planting process, so you will need to identify which planting phase you are in, to orientate yourself to what your next steps might be.

The seven sequential phases of church planting we will explore are informed by Paul's words (1 Cor 3:6-7) to the Corinthian church "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow." When Paul was planting churches, he was starting with a seed, the hint of an idea, and the power of a calling, combined to grow into a church.

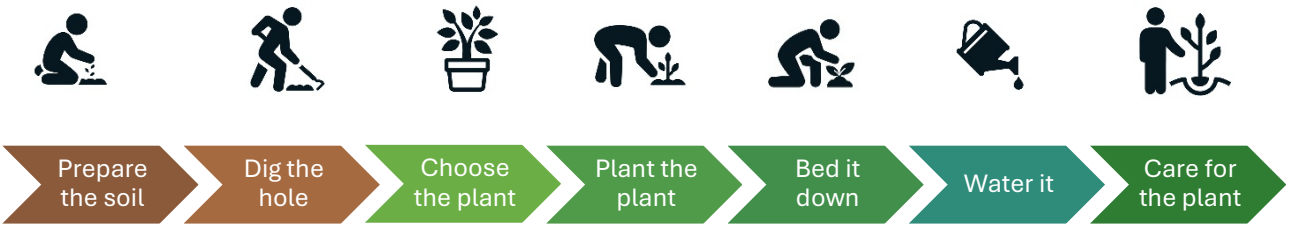
Without question, it is God who makes the church grow. The Church is God's, after all, as Jesus indicates in Matt 16:18 "I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not stand against it."

The following seven phases are sequential, building on each other to prepare you to plant a church. We would encourage you not to skip a phase or see it as less important. There is no set amount of time required on each stage, but we highly recommend doing this work in community, with your team and in partnership with your Presbytery. It is plausible that different phases are led by different leaders, reflecting the importance of a collaborative approach, which is required in planting, for the church to be renewed.

The Synod's Mission Accompanying Team is ready to walk with you and help you navigate these stages of church planting.

ROADMAP (CHURCH PLANTING PATHWAY)

Church planting is just that: planting! There are phases every plant moves through to become established in a garden. Using this metaphor for church planting we can understand seven phases of church planting as follows:



1. Prepare the soil – Identifying and exploring the call of God
2. Dig the hole – Establishing who will go, where and what the vision is
3. Choose the plant – Clarifying local mission shape, culture, strategy and roles
4. Plant the plant – Starting to meet publicly
5. Bed it down – First year, sometimes two
6. Water it – Ongoing support needed
7. Care for the plant – Leading the church toward growth

You may not have begun tending the soil yet, you may have a cutting in your hand to graft or replant, or you may be about to put a growing plant into the ground. Regardless we are ready to accompany you to renewing our world through church planting.

What is a church?

A church is a Christian community that is authorised to be so, and expected to carry the full responsibilities of a church:

- Gathering for worship
- Practicing the sacraments
- Exercise pastoral oversight
- Discerning mission, based on the church's doctrine
- Sending ministries out, rather than only being a mission in itself.

What is a Church plant?

A Church plant is the establishment of a new community of faith, built around Jesus, that is established for a new set of people, not yet being reached, which holds the intention of becoming a self-sustained church.

What it isn't…

- An extra service to accommodate growing numbers
- Restructuring how things are done in a church to be more effective toward renewal
- A rebranding of what was
- A program or ministry
- A Bible study, detached from an established church
- A short-term mission project

Factors determining a church plant in the Uniting Church in Australia:

- It is a new thing
- Intentional formation toward becoming a church
- Clear mission to unchurched people
- A pathway to self-sustainability
- Sits under recognised oversight

This of course keeps in mind what the Basis of Union defines a congregation as and what the Regulations define a Faith Community as:

Basis of Union:

15.a. The Congregation is the embodiment in one place of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, worshipping, witnessing and serving as a fellowship of the Spirit in Christ. Its members meet regularly to hear God's Word, to celebrate the sacraments, to build one another up in love, to share in the wider responsibilities of

the Church, and to serve the world. The congregation will recognise the need for a diversity of agencies for the better ordering of her life in such matters as education, administration and finance.

Regulations:
3.9.2 *(a) A Presbytery may recognise as a Faith Community a grouping of people who;*

(i) are seeking to explore the implications of faith in God, gathering in order to serve the community, and/or nurturing one another in faith; or
(ii) are worshiping together and seeking to relate to the Church for nurture and support, and
(iii) apply to the Presbytery to be recognised as a Faith Community.

THE INHERENT RISK OF THIS GUIDE

Getting our structure right, alone, cannot produce renewal. The misaligned assumption can be that if we tick off all the requirements of church planting, we will see renewal.

The picture of renewal the Scripture gives us comes primarily through repentance, revival, proclamation of the Gospel, commitment to sanctification, and the work of the Holy Spirit. These elements are essential in church planting, but can be forgotten, drifted from or never taken seriously. We cannot make this mistake: faithfulness to Christ must become and remain the emphasis of every church planting endeavour.

YOU ARE NOT IN THIS ALONE

This document has been prepared by the Synod Mission Accompanying Team (MAT), to empower and resource everyone in the church to move toward a vision of church planting. This journey is daunting, challenging and demanding, which is why the MAT are here to walk with you on the journey God has you on.

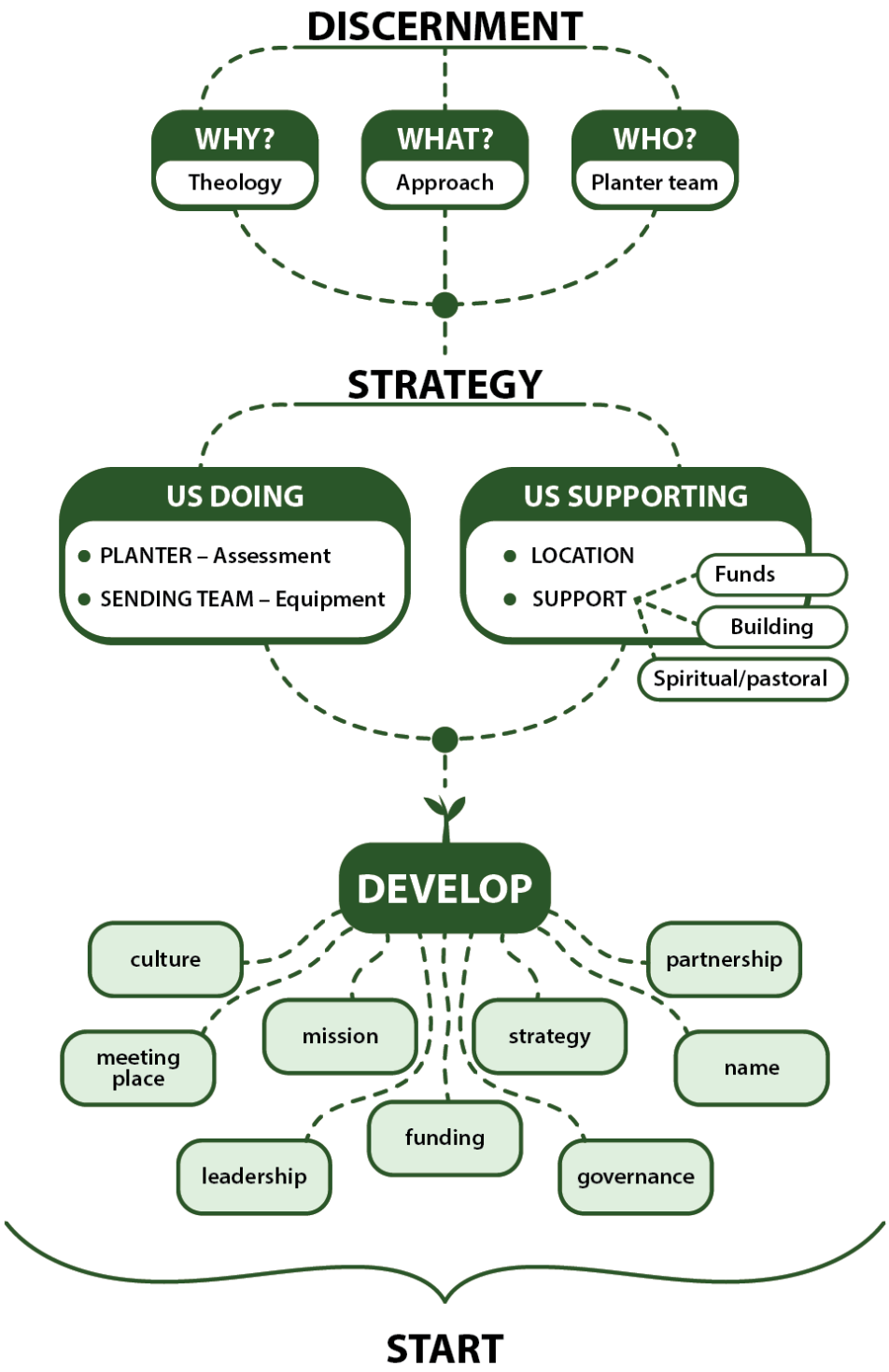
This may be a journey of planting a new church, starting a new service, initiating a missional outreach or exploring what it means to revitalise the life of your local church. Whatever the challenge, of this nature, you are facing, the MAT has been resourced and positioned by the Synod to aid you in moving toward renewal. Please don’t hesitate to reach out, either through your Presbytery Minister or email us: hi.mat@ucaqld.com.au.

CHURCH PLANTING STORIES

We have been cultivating a collection of church planting stories from around Queensland, which will feature throughout this resource. In the appendix you will find an accompanying study guide you and your team may wish to use to explore what church planting and revitalisation might look like for you and your congregation.

CLAY CHURCH: Clay Church was born of the Spirt and planted by Ps. Rose Males in Clayfield, Brisbane. It's been hard, challenging and fruitful in ways Rose never could have imagined. Listen to her story as she reflects a year into the journey. **Watch the video here**

Church Planting Flowchart



PHASE 1: DISCERNMENT

Prepare the soil – Identifying and exploring the call of God

Phase 1 is preparing the ground for the work of planting. It's the first step of the church planting journey; the dream, calling or curiosity where a wild idea begins to become a reality. This phase is defined by prayer. Seeking God on who, what, when and how, in preparation for the detail that is to follow.

> *When planting, the condition of the soil is paramount to the plant's future health, growth and sustainability. It's important to prepare the soil with the plant in mind, knowing what soil components, levels and balances are required before the plant is ever put in the ground.*

The following questions are questions of discernment which every church planter, congregation, council and/or Presbytery need to wrestle with in preparation for a church to be planted.

A. "Come Holy Spirit"

Since its birth the church has sought the leadings of God through an ancient and simple prayer "Come Holy Spirit". This is where church multiplication begins. It is the question that undergirds everything you will encounter through engaging with this resource and must shape every endeavour of church planting you pursue. Church planting is a work of the Spirit and must be done in the power and by the direction of the Holy Spirit. May this prayer shape your reading of what follows, and may you pray this prayer often as you discern God's leading.

B. Why are we doing this? What is the Biblical vision for the church plant?

A Biblical vision is birthed out of prayer and scripture study and is what will hold you to what God has called you to, as your ministry is contradicted and threatened by the power of the culture you are ministering in.

A Biblical vision for a church plant is a Spirit-formed community that proclaims Christ, makes disciples, embodies the kingdom of God, and serves its local context with sacrificial love to see the redemption and reconciliation of all things. We plant because Scripture calls the church to gather under Christ's lordship (Eph 1:22–23), devote itself to teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer (Acts 2:42–47),

make disciples of all nations, baptising them, and teaching them to obey (Matt 28:18–20), and live as a sent people for the sake of the world (John 20:21).

Summarised: A Church plant exists to see people reconciled to God through Christ, formed into mature disciples, and sent into their everyday lives as witnesses to the gospel.

C. What is God calling us to do and to be?

The answer to this question will shape who is intrigued to join you, what you put your energy and resources toward, how you posture the church, how you define the culture experienced by people, and ultimately what the heart is of the church God will grow.

Articulating a response to this question can only come out of corporate and individual prayer, seeking God. It will give you clarity and confidence moving forward. You will likely find that your answer to this matures and develops over time but will not be strayed from.

D. What type of church do we need to plant?

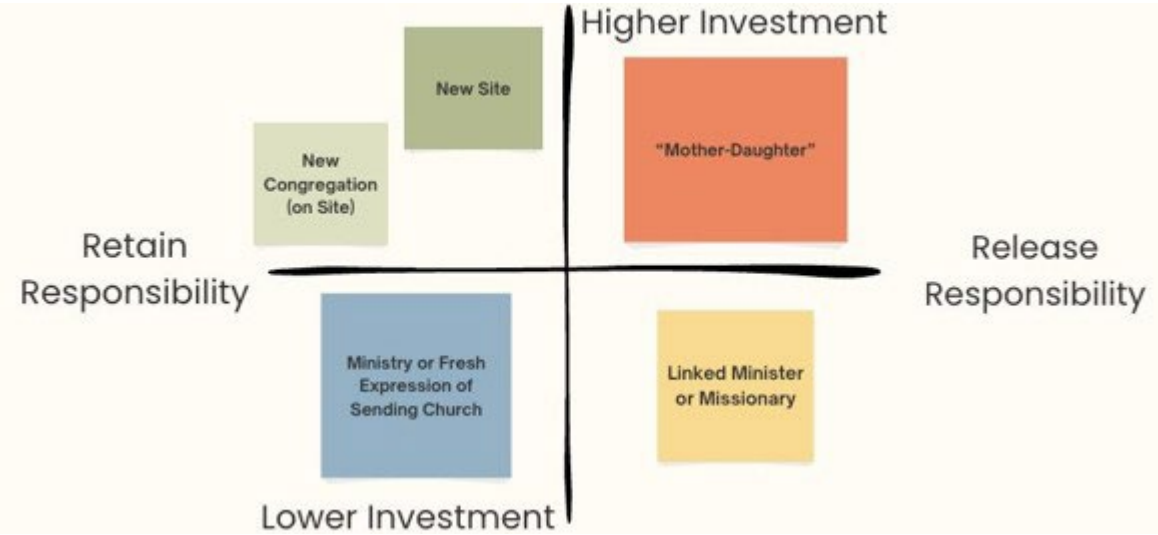
There are many approaches to church planting. Here are a few models to stimulate your prayerful consideration:[1]

- **Campus Multiplication** – A large, healthy church sets up a smaller version of itself.
- **Campus Independent** – A large, healthy church sets up a smaller independent church.
- **Micro** – Always small and missional gatherings, consisting of small groups of people who come together around the Scriptures, but live out a missional heart.
- **Missional Community** – Mission based medium-sized groups, gathered around a particular mission but coming together with other missional communities on a frequent basis for corporate worship.
- **Parachute/Pioneer –** A church planter is positioned by themselves, or with their family, in a new community to start a church, ideally accompanied by a planting team
- **Strategic Missional Housing** – Houses are bought in a new development for planters to live in and work with each other in that community.
- **Parallel Church** – A declining church sets up a new church to thrive while caring for the sending church.
- **Integration** – A renewed church takes over a declining church to see it thrive, with those in it becoming part of the new expression.

[1] See Appendix 1 for a more detailed exploration of the most probable models a Uniting Church congregation is likely to move toward.

- **Merging** – Where two churches, commit to a workable strategy toward missional health and come together for the sake of the local community, taking on a new identity and missional approach
- **Fresh Expressions** – Think café church, Messy Church, Dinner church moving away from traditional expressions of church.
- **New Start with Team** – Planter and team is sent out to independently start a new church.
- **Franchise Sending** – New church has a set of non-negotiables from sending church, but complete freedom everywhere else.
- **Unique Sub-Culture** – Examples might be, church for the homeless, church in the workplace.
- **CALD** – Specific culturally and linguistically diverse groups are reached with the Gospel to establish a full expression of church.
- **Age Focussed** – Specific age groups are reached with the Gospel to establish a full expression of church.
- **Affinity Based** – Specific interest groups are reached with the Gospel to establish a full expression of church.

A helpful framework of thinking about this might be aided by the next illustration:



The horizontal access is the spectrum of responsibility maintained or released by the sending body. The vertical axis is the investment required by the sending body. Each of the approaches to church planting examples prior, sit in one of these quadrants. They may sit differently from sending church to sending church, based on the detailed arrangements and expectations associated with the Church plant.

E. Who is important to be part of the process and when?

The nature of this document allows anyone and everyone to find themselves on the journey toward planting a church. It offers a framework which Presbyteries can adapt to adopt, and which individuals, congregations and Church Councils can use to understand what is required to fulfil regulatory requirements of the church.

If you are a Presbytery Minister, or part of a Presbytery Committee, your investment, support and encouragement cannot be underestimated and is imperative to the planting of more churches.

If you are a Church Council feeling led to plant, with a strong vision, but don't have the resources, there are conversations you will need to have with other local congregations, the Presbytery and the Synod.

If you are outside of the Uniting Church, but sensing a call to join the vision God has given us, a conversation with the relevant Presbytery Minister is appropriate.

If you are sitting in a church with a growing calling to plant, but no idea what to do next, speaking with your Minister, Pastor or Church Council Chair is an excellent first step.

Depending on who God is calling and what they are being called to do, different requirements of formation may be needed to prepare the planter, the church and the mission field for the church plant. This is a process of prayerful discernment, balancing the gifts and graces of the planter, with the opportunity and challenge of a church plant.

Flow Chart of Action:

If You Are:	**Your Next Step:**
Member of existing congregation with growing call to plant, but no idea what comes next	Contact your minister, pastor or church council chair
Uniting Church minister or pastor wanting to explore planting	Contact your Presbytery Minister, or the Synod MAT
Church Council member feeling led to plant, with a growing vision, insufficient resources	Contact your neighbouring congregations Contact your Presbytery or the Synod MAT
Outside the Uniting Church but feeling call to join the vision God has given the Uniting Church	Contact Minister in local Uniting Church congregation, Presbytery Minister or Synod MAT
Presbytery Minister or Presbytery Committee Member wanting to be involved in a church plant yourself, or to help shape Presbytery church planting strategy	Contact Presbytery Minister and Synod MAT

F. Should we plant? Or are there other options?

Not every church in the Uniting Church in Australia, Queensland Synod has the capacity right now to consider planting. But every church has the responsibility to ask, “How can I contribute to the planting of more churches?” What resources do you have that you could offer to a church plant?

The following list might help inspire and inform your discernment about how you can contribute to the mission of God:

- **Corporate and Personal Prayer:** Praying “Come Holy Spirit”, that God would use your congregation to plant a church or assist in the planting of a church
- **Releasing and sending people** from your church into other church planting teams, who go and plant a church
- **Commitment to pray** for:
    - Church planters/pastors/teams
    - Church plants
    - A Gospel movement in your town or city
    - That God would prepare yours and other churches
- **Pray with other churches** and sending people to join prayer teams to pray.
- **Giving financially** to the planting efforts of another church or to the Synod Church Renewal Fund
- **Sharing of Connections -** using your network to connect new church plants with potential supporters, other churches, and community leaders. You can also advocate for the new churches in your own networks to help build credibility and attract more resources
- **Prayer Walking -** sending intercessors to prayer-walk the streets where a new church plant will be
- **Sharing of your resources -** what strengths, particular to who God called you to be, can you invest in a church plant or offer to a church planter?
- **Contributing specialised support** like Website design, administration, music skills, computer skills, audio/visual support, Op Shop development, Justice and Mercy ministry
- **Use your reach and audience** to advertise and market a church plant near you
- **Offering your property** for church plants to meet in, worship in or hold team meetings in
- **Assist with Community Context Research** for the plant to deeply understand the community so as to position itself to respond with the gospel
- **Volunteering with Projects and initiatives -** offering your time and skills to support them, eg short-term trips to help with setup, participating in outreach events, or bringing specific skills to mission or ministry initiatives
- **Seasonal Help where some of your members are released** to help at a church plant for a designated season of time, to help them build a team, launch the church or become established in a regular rhythm
- **Multi-Cultural Exchange -** offering cultural insight and language assistance to church plants that are trying to reach diverse communities

- **Budgeting** to put aside an amount in your annual budget to invest in your or other's church planting endeavours
- **Fundraising** to support other Church planting efforts when they are happening

It may be that one of these opportunities is how your congregation contributes to developing a church planting culture and movement within the Uniting Church in Australia.

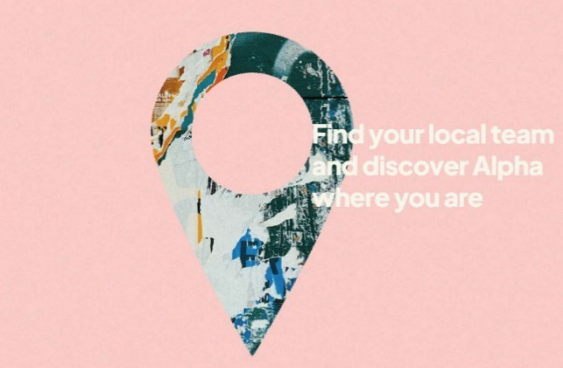
G. Finding the people to go

One of your main concerns around church planting, if you are gripped by the necessity and urgency of it, is "Yes but, we don't have the people to send." In the Uniting Church in Queensland it is the greatest issue we need to solve.

Where do we find such people? The people God wants to send on your next church plant are not yet believers in the Gospel. Our vision to plant churches needs to extend beyond the assessment of our current resources.

These people are already in the community your church is situated in, they are your unconverted friends, and family, neighbours and co-workers, sporting teammates and parents of your children's or grandchildren's friends.

The Alpha course (https://alpha.org.au) is a proven resource, that when run in accordance with Alpha's learnings and guidelines, will see people come to faith, who are potential church plant team members and even church planters. The most enthusiastic church plant team members are often those who have recently encountered the saving grace of Jesus for the first time and given their lives to Christ.



If your greatest challenge is a lack of people who you might send, start with the Alpha course. Follow their instructions diligently, reach out to them for help, and pray that God would bring in a harvest. Alpha is completely free, with world class quality videos that facilitate discussion about faith, and lead people to the opportunity to put their faith in Christ.

CHURCH PLANTING STORIES

UNITING FLAGSTONE: Several years ago, the South Moreton Presbytery bought a house in the developing region of Flagstone and turned it into a community centre. The goal was to plant a church, and it has taken several years for this dream to begin to take shape. Now under the faithful and loving leadership of Rev. Faye Talatonu a community of faith is beginning to grow.
Here is that story

PHASE 2: FORMATION

Dig the hole – Establishing a vision, who will go, where they'll go and how to be ready

Formation of the church planter and their team is the most important factor of the longevity and health of a church plant, regardless of its expression.

> *The hole dug for a plant needs to be carefully prepared and ready to receive the plant, requiring the correct depth and breadth. Failure to take this seriously will jeopardise, severely limit or even cause the plant to be unable to grow.*

A. Who is the Planter?

This question is essential to the future health and fruitfulness of a church plant. Not everyone can plant a church, and not everyone who wants to, can. We encourage a thoughtful, thorough and comprehensive exploration in this phase. The following questions may be of help, and MAT can walk with you through this process.

- Does the person have a clear call to plant a church?
- Has a Period of Discernment been undertaken?
- What are their gifts, strengths, skills?
- What study have they done, or need to do?
- Have they been assessed and approved, and by who?
- What of their experience contributed toward this assignment?
- What vulnerabilities will they face and how have these been mitigated?
- What is their shadow side and how will this impact what they will need to do?
- Are they humble, emotionally intelligent, able to lead, and passionate to reach the lost?
- What areas of growth would they and their future church plant benefit from them investing in?
- Who is their supervisor? Mentor? Coach? And what further support would be helpful?

This isn't the work of a JNC, but the work of presbyteries to mentor, guide and enable a person to clarify the call of God in their lives and if that call is to plant, to then be equipped to do so. This phase can require far deeper exploration and collaboration with the potential planter to ensure they are ready and appropriate for

the task of planting. It is important that those embarking on the adventure of church planting are consistently supported.

It may be that Phase One was instigated by a person sensing a call to plant. Regardless, Phase Two, cannot be rushed past, and requires careful attention and discernment.

B. Who is on The Launch Team

This team will likely be different to the eventual leadership team of the church plant and is commonly known as a Launch Team. It is the group of people committed to seeing the church started. A healthy team supporting the planter is as important as finding the right planter.

While the Team does not require the same level of formation as the planter, equipping and orientation to the task ahead is still advised.

The team should comprise of people who are mature in their faith, have a heart for the lost, are emotionally intelligent and of reliable character. Church plants are fragile, and destructive conflict has the potential to destroy a plant before it becomes an established church.

You will also need certain roles filled. These may include, depending on your model, someone to work in the ministry of:

- Leadership
- Discipleship
- Hospitality
- Small Groups
- Children
- Treasurer
- Administration
- Youth
- Young adults
- Mission
- Worship
- Pastoral Care
- Community Care

You may be able to find others to support and resource your endeavours through relationships you have with the sending church and nearby empathetic churches.

C. How will we care for Planters, their families, and team?

Church planting places enormous strain on marriages (if married), mental health, personal finances, and brings up issues of identity, while evoking insecurities in both the planter, spouse or family, and the team. The isolation of a planter, the expectations placed on them externally and internally, and the results sought, can take their toll. Many planters leave ministry entirely after failed plants, which need not be the case if they are well supported, upheld and cared for.

D. How will we uphold them in prayer?

In the Acts of the Apostles (13:2-3), we see the church enter a period of fasting and prayer before sending out those who were called. In the same way those being sent out need to be prayed for and supported spiritually. Developing a prayer support network for those venturing out shouldn't be overlooked. As Jesus said in Luke 10:2: pray for workers.

E. Training and Assessment

Planting a church requires a specific set of skills, that are particular to church planting. Formation, involvement and collaboration with a trusted training facility is necessary to move through this phase, recognising the potential requirement for study, training, assessment and approval.

Identifying what preparatory training is required for the team and those who will be joining the planter should not be overlooked. This may include formal education, practical experience, coaching, reading, courses, etc. It is essential for the longevity of the planter and their team that this aspect be taken seriously and treated carefully.

Within the Uniting Church in Queensland, both Newlife Church and the Centre for Ministry and Leadership offer church planter training. MAT will work with you to identify appropriate options to suit the type of church plant you are planning.

F. Location of Plant

Where will the church be planted and what do you know about the community in which you are planting? It is possible to do too much community consulting, but it is more likely that not enough is done. When planting, aside from demographic census information, you want to know what the following reality is for those in the community you are reaching:

- Fears, concerns and worries
- Idols, time consumers, and attention grabbers
- How and where they gather
- Values and things of importance
- Persisting and dominant social issues

G. Vision

Answering these three questions clarifies the foundations from which vision is formed:

- What does the community need?
- What can the church faithfully offer?
- What is God already stirring and intending to bring about?

The convergence of these responses becomes the raw material of vision. They identify the missional gap, the ecclesial capacity, and the divine initiative. Vision emerges where those three realities intersect.

At this stage, the task is not to draft the final vision statement of the future church. The task is to articulate the vision for the planting of that church. This is directional rather than declarative. It sets theological intent, missional posture, and strategic shape.

That framing will strongly influence the vision the church eventually adopts once established. However, it should not be confused with it. A planted church must ultimately discern and own its own vision. The planting vision creates conditions; it does not predetermine the final expression.

CHURCH PLANTING STORIES

VILLAGE CHURCH: Village Church is a postcode church, established to serve its postcode and see the lives of 4220, transformed by the grace and love of Jesus. In this interview Rev. Ralph Mayhew reflects on the journey and learnings he encountered to lead the church to where it is today.
Watch the video here

PHASE 3: SHAPING

Choose the plant – Clarifying local mission shape, culture, strategy and roles

The type of plant established in a community is an important decision not to be taken lightly, but to be carefully discerned.

> *The plants in a garden can often require differing amounts of sunshine to shade ratio, acidic levels in the soil, they will grow to different heights and take up different spaces. Knowing which plant is best suited to which part of the garden is a very important decision for the health and future of the garden.*

Perhaps the overarching question to be grappled with in this phase is "How are we positioning ourselves missionally (i.e. Evangelism, Justice, Care for neighbours)?" The following sections will help you work through this.

A. To whom will we go? (i.e. Who is our neighbour? What needs are in the community? What needs will we meet? What is God already doing? etc.)

Inner city Brisbane has a different culture to inner city Cairns, and even though the needs may be similar in both places, the way those needs can and should be met will likely vary considerably. Understanding and clarifying who the people group are you are trying to reach will dramatically shape the decisions you make as a church. If you feel called to seniors, it will look very different than a calling to the homeless, or to young adults, or to a neuro-divergent community. Joining in the ministry God is already doing is so important, as you bring hands, feet, bodies and voice to the work of the Holy Spirit.

B. How should we pray?

Prayer mapping the community (or communities) God is calling us to is an important aspect of this phase. Ensuring that the community has been prayed for, seeking God's awareness of what issues are present and what spiritual tensions exists, can all impact a church plant.

C. What will our culture be?

The culture of a church is the feel you get of a church, when nobody is there to explain it. Culture is more important than vision or strategy, and naming what your culture will be, forms the behaviours and values those in the church adopt.

D. What is our strategy?

This is the 'how' question. How will you achieve the things God is calling you to achieve? What are the steps you need to take, what needs to be established, recognised and done for the mission and ministry of God to thrive? This may mean thinking through pathways of evangelism, discipleship, pastoral care and leadership, to name just a few.

E. Where shall we meet? (Building)

Even if the church plant doesn't meet in a building, it will meet somewhere which will have implications for those meetings. Identifying where you will meet, when and for how long, will enable you to identify the issues presented by that meeting place, and begin to find solutions. Plants can meet in a variety of locations and will likely change their meeting place as they mature.

F. How do we fund it?

There may be finances available through the Synod, your Presbytery, a funding source outside of your church, your sending congregation or another local congregation. There may also be none, which is not a disqualifying factor. Don't underestimate the generosity of those planting with you. It's beneficial to establish a healthy culture of financial stewardship, both for the disciples planting with you and for the future of the church plant.

G. What do we call the church?

At some stage it will be necessary to use a name to identify the church plant. Move into this process carefully and prayerfully. You may wish to use the location to be the descriptor, but you could also use Scripture, or a metaphor to capture what your hopes are for the church. It is best to involve as many of the team as possible in this process, to share ownership of this new thing.

CHURCH PLANTING STORIES

MANDARIN SPEAKING SERVICE: Pastor Amy Yang, a passionate, wise, empathetic Jesus-defined leader felt the call of God of to start a Mandarin speaking service out of Albert St Uniting Church. We sat down with her to hear her story; the challenges and amazing things God is doing in the Mandarin speaking community. Here is her story, and an early account of how God is transforming lives. **Watch the video here**

PHASE 4: LAUNCH

Putting the plant in the ground – Starting to meet and going public

By this phase you've done all the groundwork to start the church, so what comes next is both the hardest and the most rewarding part of the process.

> *Putting a plant in the hole, requires watering the hole, pulling the roots loose of the plant, lowering it into the hole and then gently re-filling the hole and watering it down with an initial dose of fertiliser. This will give the plant the very best start in its new forever home.*

There are many micro-decisions required during this phase, which may need to be altered and changed as the church understands who it is and how it works. Here are a variety of questions it would be sensible to explore.

A. Prayer

- How and when will we pray together?
- Who will commit to prayer and when?
- How can we build a wider prayer network to support us?

B. Evangelism

- How will people come to faith?
- How will the gospel be proclaimed clearly?
- How will non-Christians encounter the church?
- What is the pathway to faith?
- How will we train our team to share their faith?
- How will we preach to a gathering of both Christian and non-Christian people?

C. Governance, Leadership & Team

- How do we understand leadership governance, decision-making, and accountability?
- Who do we have on team and what gifts do they have?
- Is anyone paid? To what degree? For what purpose?
- What are their KPIs, who sets them, what is their purpose, are they Biblical and who offers accountability for them?
- How do you choose a leadership team?
- Would the planter benefit from coaching?
- Who is the planter's supervisor?

- What leadership or governance requirements of the denomination do we need to meet?

D. Safety, Boundaries & Policies

- Are we implementing effective safeguarding practices? What is required of us by our denomination and by government regulation to ensure vulnerable people are protected?
- Are there boundaries requiring clarity? Are there protective policies that require announcing?
- What other risks do we need to manage (Insurance, WHS, Emergency procedures)?

E. Launch Strategy & Early Formation

- Where will we meet and what do we need to make that space functional and welcoming?
- What rhythms of gathering will shape our life together (weekly, fortnightly, seasonal, large group, team, small groups)?
- Do we have a launch service or grow into who we are?
- What do we do the week after we officially open our doors?
- Do we run Alpha and if so when and how? Before the launch? After the launch?
- What advertising do we want to use (signage, social media, flyers, letterbox drop, business cards, etc.)?
- Do we have social media channels, or a website? Who are they for? What content do we have?

F. Community Life, Groups & Discipleship

- What is the pathway from: Visitor → believer → disciple → leader
- How do we help people move through this pathway?
- Do we have small groups and how do they work?
- How do we disciple our children, young people, young adults, and adults?
- How do we mobilise people for mission?

G. Membership, Belonging & Care

- How do we understand and exercise membership?
- How do we transition a launch team to church members?
- What is the expectation and exercise of pastoral care for people and how is this maintained, monitored, and recorded?
- Who is providing pastoral, spiritual, and organisational oversight for the planter and core team?
- How will we ensure the wellbeing and sustainability of the planter?

H. People Flow & Pastoral Dynamics

- What do we do when new people come along?
- How do we deal with conflict or difference of opinion?
- How will we disciple people new to faith and mature in their faith?

I. Operations & Administration

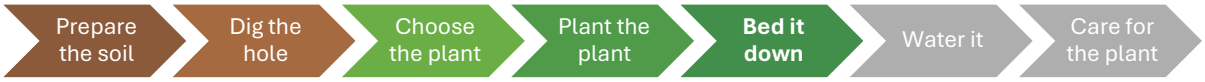
- How do we keep track of our finances, who oversees this and how is it transparent and accountable?
- How will we review what is working, what is not, and what needs to change?
- What markers of health (spiritual, relational, missional) will we pay attention to?
- Do we roster people? How? Who does the rostering and what system is used?
- How do we keep track of everyone's details and ensure their security?

It is very important that the answers to these questions reflect the heart of the Basis of Union, are in line with the Constitution and Regulations, and are consistent with the Code of Ethics. Advice from your Presbytery can help ensure you meet these standards.

CHURCH PLANTING STORIES

NEWLIFE COOMERA: The story of Newlife Coomera begins with Uniting North, Coomera inviting Newlife to partner with them and plant a church that reaches the lost, builds community, engages young families and sees the world change. This is a snapshot from Ps. David Schembri a couple of months after the launch of this new church plant. **Watch the video here**

PHASE 5: ESTABLISHMENT



Bedding the plant down – Navigating the first year or two.

Once the church is open to the public, the real work of church planting begins.

> *All plants once put in the ground, require a period of settling down, consolidating and establishing themselves in their new home.*

The first year of a church plant is its most important and is measured from the time it becomes a public welcoming entity. By now the previous phases have been fulfilled and the life of the church is underway.

This is a fragile phase of a church plant where:

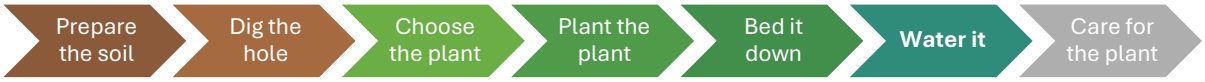
- Small conflicts can turn into church splits
- The planter can be disheartened
- The team will fluctuate in its composition and commitment
- Differing opinions of how the church should operate will surface
- The strategy will need to be recalibrated and adapted to how the community is responding to the church
- Relations between the plant and sending church can be strained
- Dreams of fruitfulness can be unfulfilled
- Financial challenges can increase pressure.

These and other factors are why church planting is frequently referred to as difficult or tough. Ensuring that the planter and team are aware of these potential factors, are prepared to lead through them and are well supported is very important.

CHURCH PLANTING STORIES

NEWLIFE COOLONGATTA: Pastor Scott Wrigley planted Newlife Coolangatta three weeks before COVID shut down the world. In this candid interview he shares the essentials for church planting and the faithfulness of God. **This is their story**

PHASE 6: SUSTAINABILITY



Watering and feeding the plant – Identifying and delivering ongoing support

We live in a culture of high immediate expectation, where we can expect that the work we are doing has an immediate result. This is not the story Scripture offers us.

> *Plants grow at different speeds to each other and their growth is determined by the season they are in. They require frequent watering, pruning, fertilising, and care to ensure they are ready for the upcoming season and can make the most of it.*

While it is easy to assume the church plant is most vulnerable in its first year, most planters can endure a year of disappointment and hardship. It is the second year they are most likely to resign or burnout. Because of this it is important that the planter doesn't have to shoulder the weight of these pressures alone. They need to have a supervisor, a coach is suggested, as well as healthy relationships with the sending church, the Presbytery and other key people creating a network of care.

Within this time frame are significant transitions, including movements from:

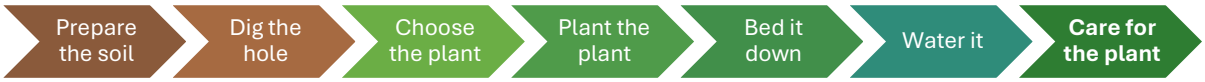
- A small intimate group of people to a larger public gathering where not everyone is known
- Being governed by an external Council of the Church to an internal one
- Ensuring all health and safety (WHS, safeguarding, etc) operations are fulfilled, to taking responsibly of their management
- Having the finances held to account by an external council to being completely responsible for their auditing
- Being understood as a Faith Community of a sending church, to being recognised as a congregation.

Some church plants will mature into independence, but due to structural and systemic imperatives, remain part of a larger network connected to the sending church. In this case they may not be known as church plants but may take on the status of a mature campus.

It would be remiss to say that while financial independence is to be encouraged and pursued, it is not a defining mark of church health. Many churches don't attain financial independence, requiring continued revenue support from a variety of sources. Even the Apostle Paul in Philippians 4 indicates a sharing of resources across the church, where when one church or missionary was in need another church who had been financially able, contributed to meet that need. Self-sustainability should not evolve into a theology of self-reliance, which can lead to misunderstanding the place of the gospel in the heart of a church.

(Ripley Church Plant)

PHASE 7: REINVESTING



Caring for (pruning, mulching, covering) the plant – Leading the church toward growth

This phase classifies the transition of a church plant into a church, which will plant more churches and produce leaders who can plant churches.

> *There is a point in a plant's life when it is no longer a seedling or even sapling but considered a mature plant. For different plants this occurs at different speeds and may be associated with fruit and reproduction.*

For some church plants, this may be when they plant their first church. Research from Colin Stoodley indicate this to be in the first 18 months if possible. For other churches it may be around the 5-year mark. Five years is a healthy target to aspire to, where the church plant can establish itself independent of any other support mechanisms.

This phase implies that the church has completed the Phase 6 transitions and understands itself in a different season. This will require a different leadership style than what has been required in Phases 1 – 3 and Phases 4 – 5. Failure to recognise this can turn what has been an incredible and fruitful expression of the Kingdom of God into a season of stagnation or even decline. Planters should be aware of the limitations of their gifts and clarity of their call, and the Presbytery needs to be strategically prepared to enable the church to continue flourishing, realising this may require intentional leadership development or transition.

CONCLUSION

Regardless of the size, approach, theology, and missional context of the church plant God is calling you toward, be reassured of its absolute importance to the work of God in our world. The Queensland Synod (through the Mission Accompanying Team), together with your Presbytery, is here to walk with you and would love the chance to meet with you, help you identify which phase you are in, identify your next steps, and assist you in making them.