

# Local Church, Church Health and Church Planting in the Christian Community Church Movement



*By David Wraight*

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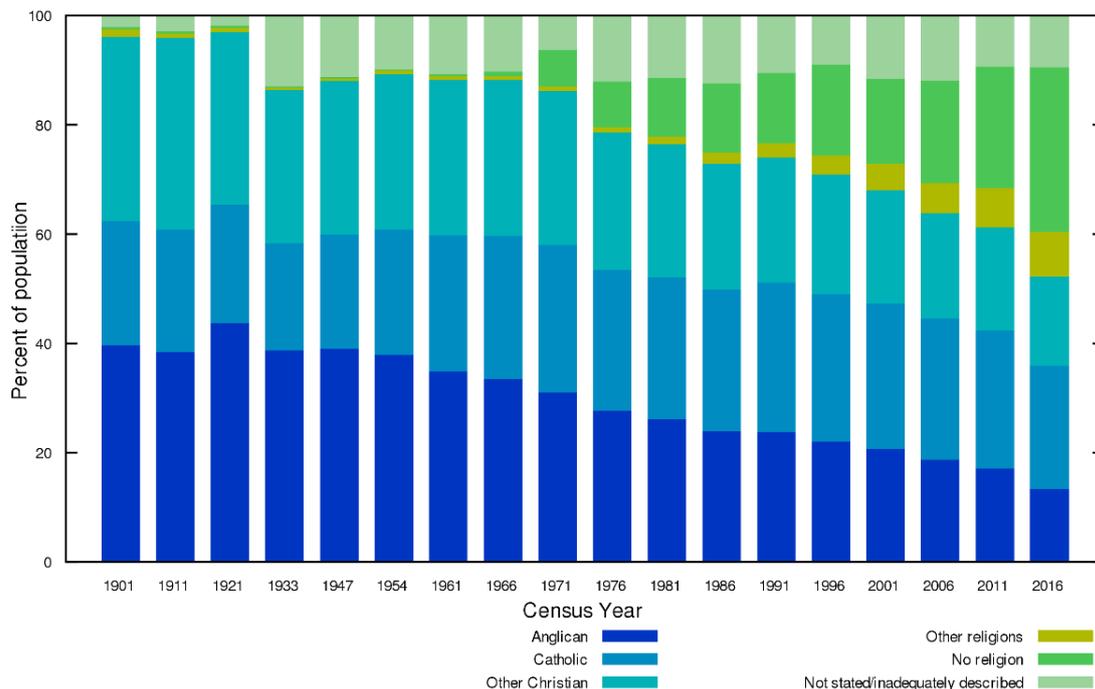
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## The Church in Australia

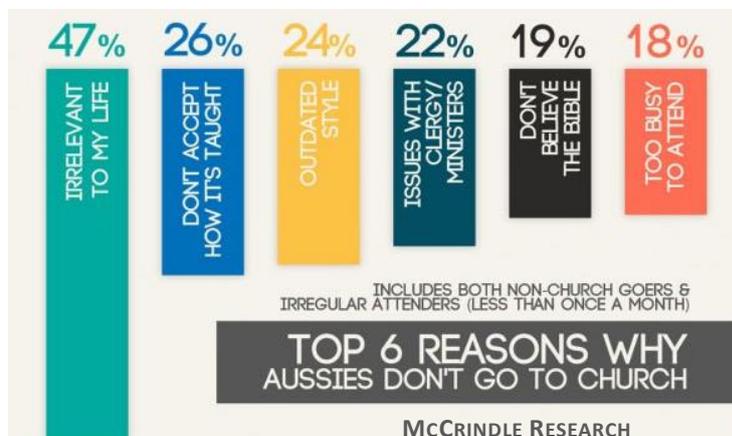
Whilst just over 50% of Australians identify with having a Christian belief, only 15% say they attend church monthly or more, with only 7% saying they are actively involved in a church and about 5% attending church in any given week. That means that with a population of about 25 million people, 21.25 million people in Australia are not directly connected with any local church.

The only information, representation and experience over 21 million people in Australia predominantly receive about Jesus and his Kingdom is from people who don't even know him, and the most vocal of those are often negative and hostile to Christians.

Major religious affiliations described in Australian censuses



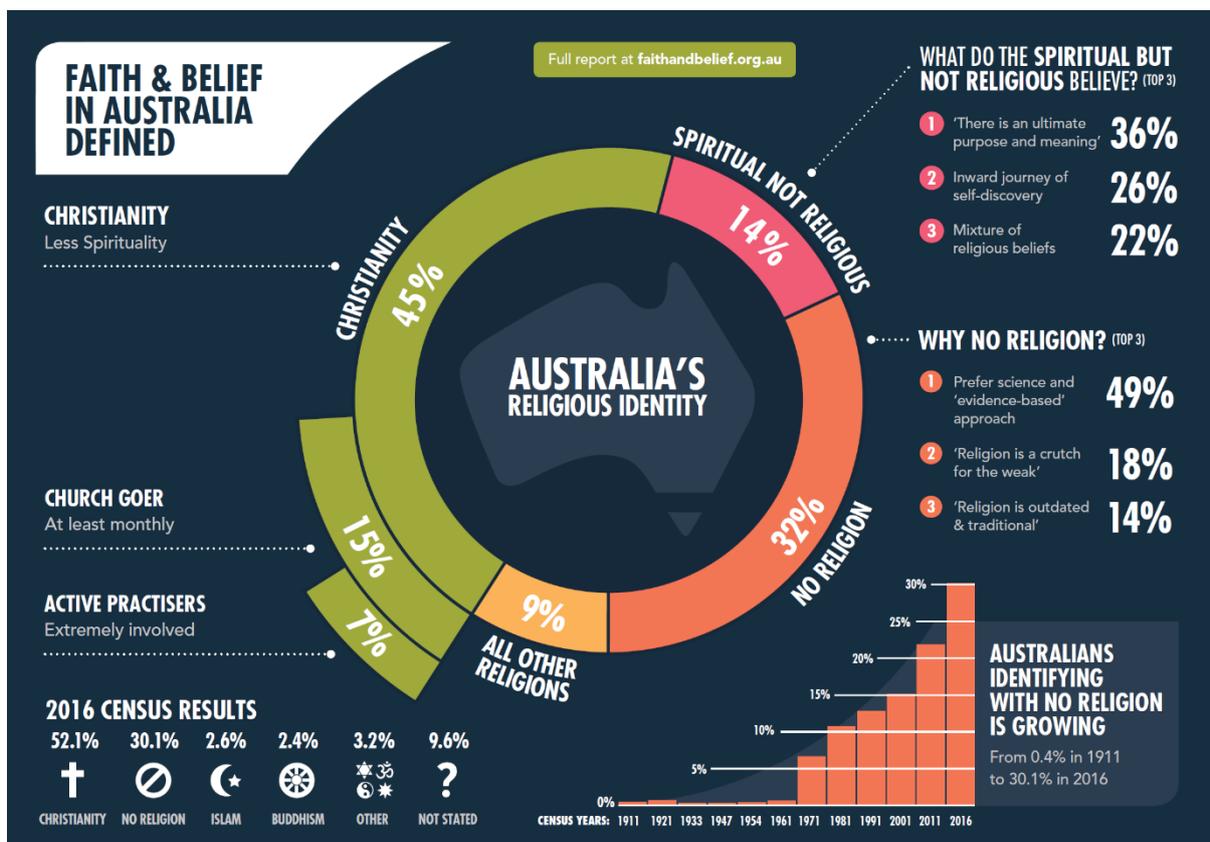
The Church in Australia is in decline. Many people in Australia have a negative view of the Church and a vast majority of Australians believe the Church is irrelevant.



Overall the Church in Australia is not doing well at engaging the unchurched and dechurched and representing Jesus and his Kingdom values in the context of Australian society. There is a significant disconnect with what Jesus called the Church to be and do and what the Church actually is perceived to be by the majority of Australians.

If the trend of decline is to be reversed, we need to consider how the Church can be repurposed and repositioned in Australian society, proactively seeking to reengage the Australian public in new ways that better convey the good news of Jesus and the values of his Kingdom.

The purpose of this paper is firstly, to investigate and define a biblically prescribed and validated expression of local church, and secondly, to explore the characteristics of *healthy* local church; and then—in the context of these definitions, characteristics and attributes—to investigate the most effective methods and processes to plant, nurture and grow healthy new churches.



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## The Church

The intention of Jesus Christ is for his followers to live communally as the *ekklesia*—those who are called out (Matt. 16:18; 18:17, 20; John 17:20-23)—and in the context of community, to fulfil the purposes of God for his people.

The church has two expressions—the larger *invisible* church, comprising of all those who have committed their life to Christ (Matt. 16:18; Eph. 1:22; Eph 2:20, 21; 1 Tim. 3:15; Heb. 12:22-24) and the *visible* church, a geographically localised gathering of followers of Christ (Acts 9:31; 1 Cor. 1:2; Rev. 1:11).

The most common usage of the word *ekklesia* in the New Testament denotes a localised community of believers—the *local church*.

### What is the local church?

Wherever the word *church* is used in the New Testament it is referring to *people*, not a building, event, activity or institution. In most instances the word is used to refer to a cluster of believers in a geographically defined area who deliberately and formally identify with each other because of their common belief in and devotion to Christ.

Acts 2:41-47 provides the first description in the New Testament of the nature and activities of the local church.

These early believers met together regularly in public places to share the story of Jesus, proclaim the gospel and baptise new believers. They also met in homes for shared meals, communion (the Lord's Supper), teaching and prayer. They were characterised by fellowship and generosity, sharing personal resources with each other, boldly sharing the good news of Jesus with others, providing for any in need and encouraging each other in their faith. New believers were added to their community daily.

*They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity—all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved. (Acts 2:46, 47)*

Whilst you cannot build a comprehensive ecclesiology from this one passage, it clearly identifies the key elements of a legitimate expression of local church. This is validated in further descriptions of local church throughout the New Testament, both what the church shouldn't be, as well as what it should be and do as a localised community following and representing Jesus and his Kingdom.

***A local church is a geographically localised community of followers of Jesus Christ who intentionally identify with each other, are strongly enmeshed relationally, meet together regularly for teaching, prayer, fellowship and communion and are proactively engaged in evangelism, baptism of new believers and meeting the needs of others.***

## Healthy Local Church

The capacity of the of the *invisible* Church to achieve its overall purpose is intrinsically tied to the health of local churches. Much of what was written in the New Testament to local churches addresses issues of church health.

Today there is an endless array of expressions of local church, but in assessing the vitality, effectiveness and overall health of a church we need to identify the biblical imperatives that transcend cultural, structural, operational, situational, traditional and contemporary expression.

### Metrics

We do the things we measure. Without measurement we are likely to become immobilised and stagnate.

If we are serious about establishing and growing healthy local churches, then we need to ascertain what the biblical imperatives and commands are for the Church so that we can measure progress towards our God-given purpose. As followers of Jesus we are accountable to him to be the people he has asked us to be and do the things he has asked us to do (John 14:15, 1 John 2:3-5).

Establishing metrics that are grounded in the Church's purpose will drive us towards more healthy expressions of local church and enable us to be more effective and faithful stewards, directing—or redirecting—the resources of the local church to achieve the purposes of God.

### Contemporary measures of local church health and effectiveness

Whilst the biblical definition of a local church is a *community of believers*, most contemporary metrics and descriptors used to assess and report the health of local churches focus on the functionality of a localised institution or organisation.

The most common contemporary measures used to determine church health are:

- *Numbers of attenders* – the number of people attending the primary church service (usually the Sunday morning worship service).
- *Buildings* – the size, appearance, comfort and functionality of the building/s the church meets in and whether the property is owned by the church.
- *Funding/money* – the financial status of the church (income vs budget), how much is being given to the church by its members (offerings), the amount of debt and the capacity to service that debt.
- *Staff* – the number of staff and the performance of staff (including the pastor's sermons and leadership).
- *Style/culture/form* – the level of compliance with liturgical, cultural and behavioural expectations (music, sermon style, language, attendance of primary events).

Whilst the above metrics are important and valid measures of the operational viability, capacity and sustainability of a church, they are not biblically sound measures of the *health* of a church; in fact, a local church could score highly in all of these areas, and yet be unhealthy and ineffective from a biblical perspective. This is the case for many of the local churches addressed by the writers of the New Testament, such as the Corinthian church and the seven churches in Revelation chapters 2 and 3. All appear to have their 'functional' elements correct, yet they are clearly identified as unhealthy.

## Biblical characteristics and attributes of healthy local church

The biblical measures of the effectiveness and health of the local church are grounded in the overall God-given purpose for the Church—the *Great Commission*—that everyone in our world will have an opportunity to know and follow Jesus (Matt. 28:16-20). 2 Peter 3:9 reinforces this command by stating that God's will is that none should perish, but that *all* will come to repentance; and 1 Timothy 2:4 states that God our Saviour wants *all* people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

Whilst the New Testament does address some core elements of governance, leadership and structure, these are not in and of themselves measures of health. Getting the structure right, whilst providing a framework for the church to function well, does not guarantee healthy church. Specific mention of the health or otherwise of local churches does not address methods, form, numbers and programs, but focuses more on the fruitfulness, character, relationships, transformational impact and spiritual vitality of the people in the local church community.

The following are the biblical metrics of healthy church:

### Fruitfulness

A primary biblical measure of the authenticity, spiritual health and vitality of followers of Christ is *qualitative* and *quantitative* fruitfulness.

Jesus states in John 15:8:

*When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father.*

### Quantitative Fruitfulness

The only 'numbers' mentioned in the Bible regarding the effectiveness of the local church refer to *new* believers being added to the local church community (Acts 2:41, 47; Acts 5:14; Acts 6:7; Acts 9:31; Acts 11:21; Acts 11:24; Acts 16:5).

Whilst the number of believers attending a local church has relevance in assessing the viability and capacity of the church to fulfil its purpose and calling, it is not mentioned in the scriptures as a measure of church effectiveness or health.

Quantitative fruitfulness (new believers) is identified by Jesus as a key determiner of the authenticity and vitality of those who follow him (Matt. 13:23; John 12:24; John 15:2-8, 16). In the parable of the sower in Matthew 13, Mark 4 and Luke 8 the numeric reproductive fruitfulness of the believer is the measure that differentiates those who genuinely respond to the Gospel and those who don't.

In the stewardship parables (Matt. 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-27) believers are called by Jesus to utilise what they have been given to grow his Kingdom. Being good stewards in a local church context means utilising the resources that God has given the church—funding, facilities, spiritual gifts and the time and talents of the people—to reproduce and multiply; to make more disciples.

The call for the Church to be outwardly focused and to invest much of their attention and resources to rescue the lost is reinforced in the *Parable of the Lost Sheep* (Matt. 18:12-14; Luke 15:3-7). The shepherd leaves his flock, which is safe and secure, and focuses all his attention and effort on finding the lost sheep and bringing it into the safety of the flock. We are told this is what brings joy and celebration in heaven, rather than the state of those already in the flock.

***Healthy local churches will be outwardly focused, intentionally, proactively and effectively sharing the good news of Jesus and his Kingdom with those outside the Church. Much of the attention and resources of the church will be directed towards***

***relational engagement with unchurched and dechurched people, providing them with an opportunity to make an informed decision to become followers of Jesus.***

### Qualitative Fruitfulness

Whilst quantitative fruitfulness evidences the authenticity, faithfulness and obedience to Jesus' purpose and calling of those in his Church, it needs to be accompanied by *qualitative fruitfulness* which has more to do with the character of individual believers and local church communities. In Matthew 7:16-20 and Luke 6:43-44 we are told by Jesus that it is by their fruit that people will be known as authentic followers of him. The fruit Jesus is referring to in both these passages is Godly character. This fruit is a product of genuine repentance (Luke 3:8) and a transformed heart (Matt. 15: 8, 18, 19; Matt 22:37; Ezek. 36:26; Psalm 51:10; Jer. 17:9-10).

The fruit by which we are to measure the health of a believer or church community is listed in Galatians 5:22-23: *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.*

The characteristics of the fruit of *love* are detailed in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8:

*Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.*

Jesus' desire for his followers is that they will be a light in the darkness (Matt. 5:16). The way we shine our light into the world is by exhibiting spiritual fruit (Eph. 5:8, 9). People outside the church will be drawn to Jesus by the love his people have for them and each other (John 13:34, 35; John 17:25).

***Healthy local churches will be communities that epitomise the fruit of the spirit. They will be known in their local community as people who love and care for others; as peace makers, patient with those who disagree with them or oppose them, uncritical and non-judgemental, humble, kind, good, reliable, gentle and not aggressive or retaliatory.***

### Loving God and others

On two occasions Jesus articulated overarching imperatives that he said summed up *all the law and prophets*:

Matt 7:12 *...do to others as you would have them do to you.*

Matt 22:37-39 *Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind ...and ...Love your neighbour as yourself.*

In the context of the command to love our neighbour as ourselves Jesus was asked "who is my neighbour?" He answered with a story about a person who epitomised the command, and this person—a Samaritan—was not a validated member of the established church, nor did he help someone who was a member of his ethnic or religious community. The imperatives of *loving others as yourself* and *doing for others what you would have them do for you* are to be applied to any in need, not just to those in the Church.

For the local church, the answer to the question "who is my neighbour" would be any in the *connected community* of the church, which would include all in the local church, anyone who lives or works in the broader local geographical community of the church, and beyond that to any who are relationally connected with members of the church.

Proactive love of and service to others is a validation of the authenticity of our faith (1 John 4:19-21; James 2:14-17).

***Healthy local churches will be communities of faith where knowing and serving God is paramount and where the authenticity of this devotion to God is expressed in proactively discovering and meeting the needs of those within the “connected community” of the church.***

## Establishing God’s Kingdom

When Jesus was asked by his disciples how they should pray, he provided them with a model of prayer that has become known by his followers throughout history as *The Lord’s Prayer* (Matt. 6:9-13).

*Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from the evil one.*

In this simple but profound prayer Jesus provides guidelines for our petitions and requests to God, but it is far more than a catalogue of subjects we should address in prayer, it is a list of imperatives for those who follow Jesus. After acknowledging and worshipping our Father in heaven, the first thing Jesus instructs us to ask for in our prayers is that God’s Kingdom will come and his will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Establishing God’s Kingdom and working to see his will done on earth is an essential part of following and serving Jesus. People who live in proximity to a local church should not only be aware of the church because of a sign or cross outside the building and the cars that fill the carpark on Sunday, they should notice the church because of the positive impact it has on their community. The local church should invest themselves and their resources in blessing others, demonstrating in practical ways the values and imperatives of the Kingdom.

The metaphors that Jesus uses to describe the Kingdom of God convey pervasive infiltration and transformation of the world—yeast in bread, a mustard seed becoming a large tree (Matt. 13:31-33). Local churches shouldn’t be enclaves for Christians, rather they should be Kingdom of God service centres that mobilise, equip and send out *ambassadors of Christ* (2 Cor. 5:20) to bless and serve others. Jesus declared, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10). Jesus’ desire for all people is that they will be everything they were designed to be—that they will have the opportunity to live life to the full.

Authentic followers of Jesus should infiltrate, impact and transform the world around them.

***Healthy local churches will have a life-enhancing transformational role in their local community. They will be instigators of initiatives that enliven the community and will be known for their unconditional love for others, generosity, integrity, sacrificial service, authentic representation of Jesus and courageous stand for justice and truth.***

## Unity with diversity

Jesus' prayer for the church was that the world would know and be drawn to him by the love and relational unity of his people:

*My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. (John 17:20-23)*

In Ephesians 4:2-6 we are instructed: *be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

In John 13:34-35 Jesus commands us: *Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*

How believers relate to each other is a key element of how they represent Jesus to the world. One of the greatest impediments to healthy church is disunity expressed in bickering, factionalism, splits, judgementalism and elitism (Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 1:10; 3:1-3; 4:6; 11:19; Phil. 2:14). However, we are not called to be one-dimensional communities where everyone agrees with each other and thinks and acts the same. Rather, it is the unity we practice and display in the context of diversity that will testify to the world that we love and follow Jesus. Unity is what Jesus requires of us, not uniformity. We are unified not because we all look, think, speak and live the same, we are one because we all follow Jesus and are all called to a common purpose.

In a healthy expression of local church the individuality of the people in the church community is synergistically leveraged, not only enabling a church to grow, but also creating a welcoming environment where newly connected people immediately feel that they belong, and along with all the other members of the church, are provided with the opportunity to be everything that God has uniquely designed them to be (1 Cor. 12; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 4:10-16).

***Healthy local churches will be communities where all who relationally connect with the church feel they belong. They will celebrate the unique background, giftedness and talents of all, leveraging this uniqueness to characterise unity and grow the church.***

## Church Health Measures

Consistently, church leaders and consultants engaged in assessing and revitalising churches in Australia identify some key measures common to all growing/thriving and biblically healthy churches:

- >7% baptisms per annum of the church's total attendees/adherents
- >20% of regular and meaningful relational engagement is with unchurched
- >65% of attendees/adherents are involved in recognised volunteer service roles
- Medium age of attendees is consistent with medium age of local demographic
- Number of first-time visitors per annum equals or exceeds number of attendees
- Proactive and systematic newcomer process/system
- Clearly articulated outwardly focused purpose and strategic priorities (consistent with purpose) and rigorous measurement of strategic outcomes

## Growing Healthy Local Churches

### Leadership

The integrity and character of the leaders of a local church are intrinsically tied to the health of the church.

Servant-hearted self-sacrificing leadership, accompanied by a personal integrity that is grounded in mutual accountability, is essential to God-honouring, Kingdom-advancing local churches. Church communities reflect the lifestyle of their leaders. Leaders who model Kingdom values—humility, generosity, love, compassion and selflessness—will grow churches with these values.

The tendency when appointing leaders to oversee churches is to first consider their competency, status and/or availability. However, the Bible instructs us to appoint leaders based on their character.

In Mark 10:43, 44 we are told by Jesus that “Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be a slave of all.” Servant leadership is the only leadership model endorsed by Jesus (Matt 20:25-28; Luke 22:25-27).

In 1 Timothy and Titus we are told that a leader in the Church needs to be self-controlled, hospitable, able to teach, gentle, not violent, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money, not a recent convert, of good reputation with outsiders, not overbearing, not quick-tempered, good, upright, holy, disciplined, above reproach, blameless, monogamous, temperate, respectable, not given to drunkenness, sincere, tested, honest, able to manage their family well and a person who holds to the truth (1 Timothy 3:2-10; Titus 1:6-9). Every one of these qualifications for leadership are to do with character and integrity. So, from a biblical perspective, character is the foundation upon which leadership is built and maintained.

If we elevate giftedness, capability, popularity and perceived success above character in the selection of leaders, we are acting outside of the mandates of God’s Word. Rather, we should assess and appoint leaders based on their alignment with Kingdom character attributes:

- Do they practice a life of self-sacrifice and integrity?
- Are they humble and honest?
- Are they accountable to others and give others the authority to speak into their life?
- Do they genuinely care about others, going out of their way to bless and serve them?
- Do they allow others to lead, sharing their leadership responsibilities and empowering people to serve to their full capacity?
- Do they want the best for others and desire for those around them to excel in their unique areas of strength and giftedness?
- Are their lives under the authority of God’s Word and do they value prayer as a vital component of their walk with Jesus?
- How do they treat people who can do nothing for them?
- Do they live what they preach?

Character-based leaders will measure their effectiveness by the character of the church. They will be constantly asking questions such as: How well is our church exhibiting the fruit of the spirit? How can we foster greater unity and mutuality in our church? How are we using the resources of the church to serve others rather than ourselves? Are we known in our local geographical community as people who care about them? Does anyone who encounters our church feel welcome and loved—do they feel they belong? Are all people in our church being nurtured to be everything God has designed them to be? What is the purpose of our building and facilities—to serve us or to grow the Kingdom?

Our ultimate leader is Jesus, but he appoints leaders within his Kingdom to serve and inspire others by modelling a life of humility, love, grace and self-sacrifice. There are many who claim to be leaders, but only those who lead like Jesus are the ones we should follow.

***Healthy churches will have Godly servant-hearted leaders of impeccable character who lead by example, modelling the values of the Kingdom and applying the imperatives of Jesus in all aspects of their life and leadership.***

## Healthy orientation

Ends determine means. If your 'end' is to reach the lost by growing and mobilising fruitful followers of Jesus then your activities, programs and church facilities will all be directed to this end. If your end is to care for, educate and nurture those in the church, then your facilities, programs, culture and activities will be directed to that end.

In their book *The Shaping of Things to Come*, Allan Hirsch and Michael Frost observe:

*CHRISTOLOGY (what is the gospel?) shapes MISSIOLOGY (what is the purpose of God and his people?) which in turn shapes ECCLESIOLOGY (what is the form of the church in this particular context?)*

*When you start with the prefabricated product, you're not going to allow the context to shape the structures and patterns of the church. Ecclesiology shapes missiology and reduces it to a mere shadow of what it should be.*

*When you prefabricate what kind of church, you're planting your mission becomes church marketing.*

When those who are your target community—those you are trying to reach—shape the culture, facilities, programs and activities of your church, you will be effective in engaging and nurturing them and providing an opportunity for them to know and follow Jesus.

A recent study in the U.S. researching over 1000 churches found that 87% of those churches had 100% of their activities (programs, etc) focussed on serving their existing church community. In the context of these disturbing statistics, it should be no surprise the Church in the U.S. is in decline. In fact, according to census data church attendance and affiliation are declining in all developed-world nations.

However, census data and church-life research in Australia, the US and Britain, identify some churches and church movements that are countering the global trend of decline and experiencing significant growth. Common to these growing churches and movements is their outward focus. Their activities, programs and facilities are oriented towards connecting with the broader community. They have a strong emphasis on mission, on reaching the unchurched/unreached, and they are proactively engaged in church planting. They have contemporary church cultures, are highly visible in the community and are attractive and relevant to young people, validating and allowing young people to lead. They provide for young families and their children's programs are modern, innovative and well-populated. They leverage technology and are early adopters of the latest platforms of communication and social media.

***To grow healthy churches, you need to be outwardly focused and have the biblical imperatives of healthy church as the 'end' that shapes your means.***

## Church Planting

Every local church was once a church plant. Across the world the church is growing predominantly through church planting.

In his book *Church Planting for a Greater Harvest* Peter Wagner states: “The single most effective evangelistic methodology under heaven is planting new churches.”

In 2002 Tim Keller wrote a brief article entitled *Why Plant Churches?* That article has now become one of the most quoted and referenced publications regarding the necessity of church planting in growing the Church. In it, Keller writes, “The vigorous, continual planting of new congregations is the single most crucial strategy for 1) the numerical growth of the Body of Christ in any city, and 2) the continual corporate renewal and revival of the existing churches in a city.”

Reports from the North American Mission Board (NAMB) suggest church plants are the most evangelically effective mechanism of the Church in North America. In Canada, churches planted since 2010 account for 71% of the Canadian Convention’s baptisms. Kevin Ezell, president of NAMB, states that “church plants baptize more people per attendee than do established churches—a 67 percent better attendee-to-baptism ratio. New churches account for a significant percentage of evangelistic achievement in numerous jurisdictions.”

Interestingly, existing churches that focus on church planting experience significant growth themselves. In a Ph.D. dissertation (2007), Jeffrey Farmer researched 624 Southern Baptist Convention churches that had each planted a church. The end result? The parent churches witnessed a 21.5% increase in their own attendance for the next 5 years from the time of the church plant. His conclusion was that planting new churches helps established churches to renew their missional heart and passion. It brings back the focus of the local church to the Great Commission.

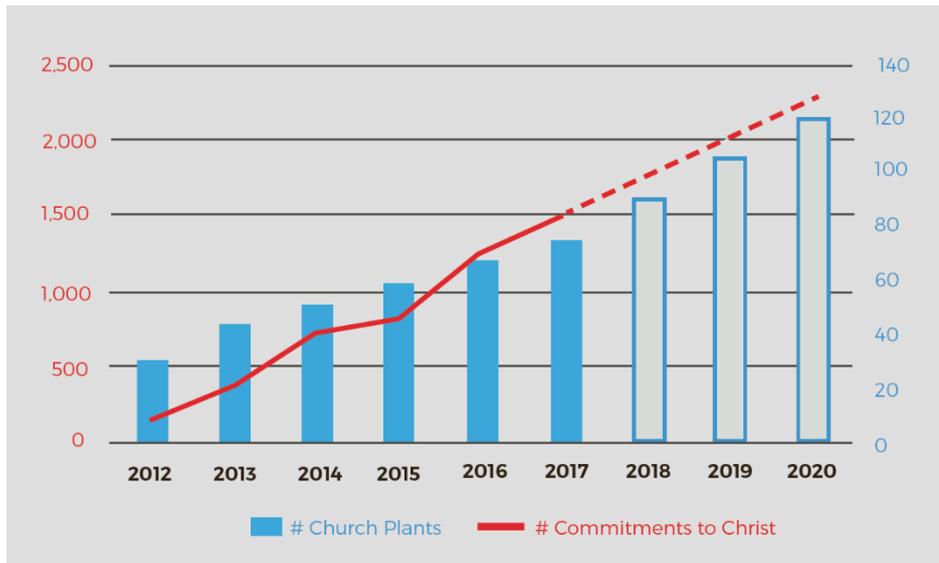
### Church planting in Australia

Why plant churches in Australia? Because it is working. New churches are reaching far more ‘new’ people than existing churches and seeing many of them become followers of Jesus and joining God’s kingdom. Church plants are particularly effective at relational engagement with ‘unreached’ people who have no past or present connection with local churches.

***“Church planting in Australia is working. It is mobilising groups of people to reach people who haven’t previously been reached. We’re talking about on average 1 convert per 12 members of church. Church plants are per head having a bigger impact than established churches.”***

Andrew Heard, Geneva Push Founder

Geneva Push is one of the leading church planting services providers in Australia. From statistics they collected over a six-year period (2012-2017) Geneva Push recorded over 1,500 first time or re-commitments to Jesus in the 70+ church plants across their network. Projections for the future indicate exponential growth in church plant evangelistic outcomes. Other Australian church plant service providers and organisations are reporting similar trends.



## Church planting research

### US study

The most comprehensive study of church planting undertaken in the U.S. was by Edward Stetzer, Ph.D. (Lifeway Research) and Warren Brid, Ph.D. (Leadership Network).

This research collated and summarized salient findings from multiple church planting studies, 54 doctoral dissertations, 41 journal articles, and over 100 church planting books and manuals. It gives particular attention to a 2007 study by Leadership Network, which itself involved fresh research among more than 200 church-planting churches, over 100 leaders from 40 denominations, 45 church planting networks, 84 organic church leaders, 12 nationally known experts, and 81 colleges and seminaries.

Until recently, there was little research that addressed the health and survivability of new churches. Several oft-quoted statistics, such as those indicating an 80% failure rate for new church plants, seem to have no basis in actual research. The actual statistics indicate that around 68 percent of church plants still exist four years after having been started, and that the assessment, preparation, and coaching processes for the pastoral leader have a dramatic impact on both the well-being of the planter and the vitality and survivability of the new church.

Some primary findings of this study regarding the church plant leaders were:

1. Spousal support is a must.
2. The importance of casting vision cannot be overemphasized.
3. Material resources are less important than one might believe.
4. Coaching plays a significant role in the life of the planter.
5. It is vital to have a plan for developing leaders and involving them as soon as possible.
6. Church planters need to be sure of their calling.

Statistically, the chance of survivability increases by over 400 percent when the church planter has “realistic” expectations of the church-planting experience. Odds of survivability increased by over 250 percent where leadership development training is offered in the plant. When there is a proactive stewardship development plan within the church plant, survivability is increased by 178 percent, and

chances of survivability increase by 135 percent when the church planter is meeting with a group of church planting peers

In fast-growing church-plants: 88% had church planting teams; 63.3% had a core group of 26 to 75 people; 75% used a contemporary style of worship; 80% put ten percent or more of their budgets toward outreach and evangelism; 16.8% had a higher rate of full-time pastors than struggling church-plants; 63% of fast growing plants, compared to 23% of those that were struggling, raised additional funding.

Churches focused on reaching the unchurched, as opposed to creating an attractive environment for Christians, will not grow as quickly numerically as those which are not.

Church planters who were assessed led churches that are approximately 20 percent larger than those who were not assessed (averaged over a four-year period). The third year is the most substantial with a 27 percent difference in church size.

By the fourth year, those who meet with a mentor weekly led churches that were more than twice the size of churches whose planters did not have mentors.

#### Canadian study

A similar church plant study was conducted by Ed Stetzer in Canada. While the relevance of the findings of the US study to church planting in Australia could be questioned, due to the significant difference between the more evangelical US and higher church attendance, the Canadian demographics and cultural context more closely mirror Australia.

The research found that new Canadian church works (including church plants, revitalizations, mergers, and new sites) that pray, equip leaders (volunteer and staff), and share Jesus with unbelievers have more commitments to Christ and are more likely to be majority-unchurched congregations.

What's fascinating is that by year five, about a third of church plants that were surveyed in Canada were financially self-sufficient whereas amongst those surveyed in the United States, it was over half. So, it takes much longer for church plants in Canada to be financially self-sufficient than in the United States.

*The researchers observed that the U.S. religious climate has been historically different than the Canadian one. Consequently, the patterns that lead to successful church planting in the U.S. are often different than those in Canada. Canada's post-Christian context is more similar to many countries in Europe where the lift-off for church plants is sometimes slower, takes more perseverance, and is not yet at the multiplication level occurring in many parts of the United States.*

When a church planter was involved in a peer to peer network, the research found that the number of new commitments to Christ in the church was triple in year one and almost double in years two and three compared with church plants whose church planters were not involved in a similar type of equipping. This is not surprising, since peer-to-peer networks offer an environment for mutual accountability, learning, and intentionality when it comes to development.

Having a higher public profile by meeting in a public facility appears to have a positive relationship with having more opportunities to share the gospel and seeing more people make a commitment for Christ. In fact, amongst surveyed church plants, the number of new commitments to Christ is more than double each year for church plants that meet in a school compared with church plants that do not meet in a school.

## Australian study

In the context of the U.S. and Canadian study, Geneva Push contracted Dr Ed Stetzer to conduct a similar investigative survey of church plants in Australia.

The survey results in the report represent the largest, most thorough survey done yet on church planting in Australia. The survey asked 728 leaders of new church works (including church plants, revitalizations, mergers and new sites) to share their experience in a 30-minute online survey across many different denominations and church planting networks.

The average number of weekly worship attendees in Australian new church works surveyed ranges from 38 in the first year to about 70 by year four. As a matter of perspective, the average weekly worship attendance of new church works surveyed in Australia is very similar to church plants surveyed in Canada according to the Canadian study. While the average number of people attending worship services in church plants surveyed in the United States seems to be much higher than new church works surveyed in Australia. The more evangelical context of the United States probably explains this difference.

New commitments to Christ, on average, appear to be lower in Australia compared with the United States. The annual average for the number of new commitments to Christ in new church works surveyed is under 5 for the first few years in Australia, while it is well above 10 in the United States.

New Australian church works that have supportive systems, experienced leaders and intentional ministries are more likely to have higher weekly worship service attendance, higher annual commitments to Christ, at least a 25% unchurched congregation and be financially self-sufficient.

New church works surveyed that have supportive systems such as conducting orientation for new members and enlisting prayer partners generally have higher weekly worship attendance. New church works that are funded by personal networks of church planters as well as church plants that finance other church plants are more likely to be a quarter or more unchurched congregation. New church works that have financial accounting help from their denomination are associated with a higher likelihood of financial self-sufficiency. New church works with experienced leaders, such as previously being part of a church planting staff team, have higher weekly worship attendance. Similarly, new church works with church planters having worked previously as a bi-vocational pastor are more likely to see a greater number of new commitments to Christ. Lastly, new church works whose church planters' expectations of the church planting experience met their reality have higher weekly worship attendance.

Finally, new church works who are intentional in offering a variety of ministries such as prayer walking, ministry evangelism (e.g., food banks, clothing, shelters, drug/alcohol recovery) and community service projects meeting practical needs are more likely to be a quarter or more unchurched congregation.

By year five, about half of new church works surveyed in Australia were financially self-sufficient.

New church works enlisting prayer partners to pray also seem to have higher weekly worship attendance. Although the attendance difference is not as great as for those new church works with a new member orientation program, there is generally a 10-person difference in the average weekly worship attendance between new church works with and without prayer partners.

## Sydney Anglican study

In 2015 a study was commissioned by the Strategic Research Group (SRG) of the Anglican Diocese of Sydney to investigate effective church planting in the diocese. A key source of information for this study was church leaders who have been on the frontline of church planting in the Diocese.

### *Models of Church Planting in the Diocese*

The study identified five basic models of church planting in the Diocese: Pioneering church plants, Mother-Daughter church plants, Repotted churches, Non-English-Speaking Background/Aboriginal congregations, and New Church Services (these models will be explained further in *Models of Church Planting*). Most common were Mother-daughter church plants and NESB/Aboriginal congregations with more than 60 of each type being identified. The most common model of church planting has been the establishment of New church services; it is estimated that up to 400 new services had commenced during 2002-2011.

### *Major outcomes of the study:*

#### *Survival rate*

Around 60% of Mother-daughter church plants and 70% of NESB/Aboriginal and New church services that commenced during 2002–2014 remain in operation. All of the Pioneering and Repotted churches identified in the study remained open.

#### *Missional impact:*

It was found that average levels of newcomers and individual missional activity at off-site and NESB/Aboriginal church plants generally exceeded Diocesan averages. On average, Pioneering and NESB congregations had the highest levels of newcomers and NESB congregations had more than double the Diocesan average of *first-time* newcomers. Nevertheless, the study found a wide variation in newcomer levels among Mother-Daughter church plants and only average levels among a sample of attenders of New Church Services, suggesting varying degrees of missional impact.

#### *Financial viability and attendance growth:*

There is evidence that many off-site church plants have relatively low attendances, with about half of Mother-daughter church plants having less than 70 attenders (adults and children). It is likely that many Mother-daughter church plants receive continuing support within the parish structure. Financial viability is an ongoing issue for Pioneering church plants which maintain support from a variety of sources.

#### *Comparison of models:*

The report identifies that Mother-daughter church plants are easier to implement than Pioneering or Repotting models, but that failure rates among Mother-daughter churches are higher. NESB congregations have particular requirements around implementation that make them harder to establish than conventional church services, with around 70% surviving. There is a need to promote best-practice among parishes to increase the likely survival of church plants, especially Mother-daughter church plants.

#### *Factors that contributed to church plants succeeding or folding*

The report outlines a wide range of factors that contribute to the success of church plants. Primary factors include:

1. *The church planting leader:*

The leader should be an evangelist with a passion for reaching the *lost*, an innovator and with a relational approach to leadership. For NESB congregations, the leader's ethnicity is a key factor. What the church planter does 'on the job' can affect success including being fully available for the task, being a good communicator, seizing opportunities and perseverance.

2. *People who support the leader:*

The launch or core team needs to have the same convictions about mission as the leader and commitment to making the church plant succeed. There needs to be an agreed vision between the leader and core team about what it is they want to achieve. A range of gifts and skills are needed, covering central functions: outreach, worship, children's program, finance and property. Ideally the core team should have at least 30 adults. For the leader, spousal support is critical and mentoring or coaching is important to ongoing success.

3. *Contextualising the church plant's ministry and mission:*

The church plant should be undertaken for missional reasons with a target group/locality clearly defined. Culturally appropriate church services, meetings (eg. around meals) and outreach must be developed. The profile of the church plant in the wider community needs to be increased and effective connections made with the target group/local community (eg. through participation in community events, practical service). Appropriate systems for keeping track of attendance and timely follow-up are beneficial.

4. *Partnerships and financial viability:*

Successful church planting requires a host parish and/or supporters in order to become established and sustainable. A firm financial footing is a key factor.

## Church planting movements

Church planting is most successful or effective in the context of a movement rather than an institutional or hierarchical environment. One of the leading exponents and authorities on global movements is David Garrison. In his book titled *Church Planting Movements: How God is Redeeming a Lost World*, Garrison cites many examples of phenomenal church growth, and then through careful analysis of each example, identifies the fundamental characteristics and values that are common to all: *extraordinary prayer, abundant evangelism, intentional planting of reproducing churches, the authority of God's Word, local leadership, lay leadership, house churches, churches planting churches, rapid reproduction and healthy churches.*

Steve Addison, a well-known instigator and scholar of disciple-multiplying movements, in his book titled *Movements that Changed the World*, examines the nature and uniqueness of movements of God that have significantly impacted the world and identifies five key characteristics that are endemic to all of these movements: *white-hot faith, commitment to a cause, contagious relationships, rapid mobilization and adaptive methods.* Addison revisits and further expands these elements in his latest book *The Rise and Fall of Movements*, describing how movements are grounded in Identity (Word, Spirit, Mission) and Strategy (Pioneering Leaders, Contagious Relationships, Rapid Mobilisation, Adaptive Methods). Addison examines each stage of the life cycle of movements, where the pressure points are, and how to keep a movement from collapsing in on itself. He decries the "missional fog" in which mission is reduced to sociological and justice terms, that are the fruit of mission, but not the mission itself. He contends that one of the marks of a movement in decline is that it shifts from proclamation as its primary task.

Much can be learned by the study of Kingdom-advancing movements. The elements and characteristics identified by Garrison and Addison are present to varying degrees in all effective church plants and need to be prioritised as essentials in CCC church planting and church revitalisation initiatives.

# Church Planting in the Christian Community Church Movement

## Models of church planting

There are five predominant models of church planting. Each has advantages and disadvantages, but all are valid and have high capacity to grow healthy churches because they are built from the ground up and are not generally restricted from customisation and alignment with the target demographic, nor are they required to comply with existing unhealthy practice and culture.

### Pioneering/Greenfields church plants

Church plants that are established utilising a small plant team (10 to 20 launch team members) and are grown predominantly *through* evangelism. They are shaped both culturally and programmatically by their target demographic, implementing strategies and activities that have relational engagement with the unchurched as their primary rationale. The church plant leaders and most of the team members live locally and are highly immersed in their target community, connecting informally with 'locals' throughout the week as well as through highly customised programs and activities.

*Advantages:* The most effective church plant model for engaging the unchurched with the fastest 'connected relationships' growth rates. The highest percentage of new believer growth.

*Disadvantages:* Slowest growth rates of church 'event' attendance numbers. Require long-term external support (particularly financial) to achieve self-sustainability.

### Mother/Daughter church plants

Church plants that are established utilising a large plant team (30+ launch team members) that are *sent* from and supported by an established church. They are mostly attractional in nature generally launching with a contemporary church service that is well advertised in their target community. They tend to be programmatic adding various programs and activities such as home groups and children's programs as they grow.

*Advantages:* One of the fastest growing models of church planting (church event attendance). They require less external support and reach self-sustainability relatively quickly. They are particularly effective in engaging the de-churched. The mother (sending) church almost always grows as well with a renewed outward focus.

*Disadvantages:* Evangelical outcomes are far lower than pioneering church plants. They often transplant a 'Christian' culture that unchurched people struggle to fit into. They tend to attract 'disaffected' Christians who are looking for a different experience of church and may pressure the church plant to cater for them rather than the unreached.

### New Services/Congregations

New church service initiated by an existing church to reach a specific unchurched target demographic. The service is generally culturally and structurally different than the primary church service and is the *attractional* event used to build a new congregation with significant relational engagement with the target community outside the service.

*Advantages:* As an additional church service hosted by an existing church new congregation plants require little financial investment other than the allocation of church staff time and are sustainable from their inception. They have a high potentiality of increasing the evangelical effectiveness of the existing church providing people in the church an additional and often

more appropriate event to invite unchurched people to attend. Also, they provide opportunity for church members to engage in relational evangelism.

*Disadvantages:* Unless it is strategically oriented to reaching the unreached the new service can often predominantly attract existing believers—or at best dechurched people—from the target demographic. Also, measures of success tend to focus on attendance of the new church service rather than relational engagement and evangelism beyond the event.

### Replanting/Repotting

The model applied when an existing congregation becomes too small to be viable. A church plant team is deployed to plant a church utilising the facilities and often the remaining financial resources of the church and generally incorporates, but isn't controlled by, the existing church members.

*Advantages:* Is a lower cost option than a pioneer or mother/daughter church plant. In most cases the existing church facility provides a footprint in a gentrified high-cost suburb that has little evangelical church representation. Can be as effective as a Greenfields church plant with the additional advantage of being in a highly visible location.

*Disadvantages:* Existing congregational members may try to control or influence the nature and activities of the church. The denominational owners of the church facility may impose expectations of style and denominational validated activities. Unchurched people may be reluctant to attend events in the church because of the negative image of the institutional church.

### Ethnically Specific/Non-English-Speaking Background church plants

Church plants that target a specific ethnic group often providing bi-lingual and/or non-English monolingual services and events. Ethnic church plants can utilise all the models of planting—Pioneer/Greenfields, Mother/Daughter, New Congregations/Services and Replanting.

*Advantages:* Fast numerical growth with extensive relational engagement beyond the church events. Strong sense of community. Highly culturally relevant. Provides for all ages with intergenerational participation in most events and activities. Usually achieves self-sustaining quickly and tend to self-replicate more readily than other models.

*Disadvantages:* Only relevant to a specific ethnic demographic. Can tend to predominantly attract Christians. Don't provide well for Australian-born young people from the ethnic demographic, especially teenagers. A recent study by Australia Christian Churches (formerly AOG) found that 95% of ethnic monocultural LOTE (Language Other Than English) churches planted in their movement close down within a generation.

## Planting healthy churches

Our desire in the Christian Community Church (CCC) movement is to not just plant churches, but to plant *healthy* churches. Beginning with this end in mind, our undergirding purpose is to establish new churches/congregations that:

- are outwardly focused, intentionally, proactively and effectively sharing the good news of Jesus and his Kingdom with those outside the Church.
- epitomise the fruit of the spirit being known for their love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.
- live by Jesus' *Golden Rule* and are known for unconditionally and sacrificially loving and serving others, particularly those outside the church.

- have a life-enhancing transformational role in their local community.
- celebrate the unique background, giftedness and talents of all in the church community, leveraging this uniqueness to characterise unity and grow the church.

### Essential elements of a CCC church plant

The research outcomes above provide much detail of both essential and helpful elements of effective church plants. Drawing on this research, CCC church planting experience and consultation with leaders of church planting ministry organisations both in Australia and globally, the following are essential elements of a CCC church plant:

#### 1. *Church Plant Leadership*

The starting point for establishing healthy new churches is the identification and empowerment of Godly church plant leaders. These leaders need to be of exemplary character, have a clear calling to reach the lost (make disciples of Jesus) and the appropriate gift mix and accompanying competency to plant churches. Consequently, CCC invests in church planters rather than church plants. We look for those who are already engaged in ministry with unchurched people and have the vision, passion, calling and capacity to plant a church that is uniquely customised and culturally appropriate for the target demographic.

CCC will only endorse, support and invest in a married couple as church plant leaders. Both husband and wife need to have an equal sense of calling and vision and passion for the church plant. The unique biblically described and endorsed mutuality of a married couple not only provides and capacity to persevere and succeed in a very challenge pioneering Kingdom venture but also to model foundational values of love, family relationships and companionship in a world that is sadly lacking these building blocks of healthy community.

In most cases one of the married partners will be fully engaged (salaried) in the church plant and the other employed elsewhere to provide financial viability for the family. Regardless of the employment status of each married partner, both are considered leaders of the church plant.

#### 2. *Church Plant Team*

A new church cannot be successfully planted without a dedicated and multi-gifted team. Recruitment and empowerment of a church planting team is an essential competency of the church plant leader. The team must also be fully aligned with the purpose, vision and strategic priorities of the church plant.

#### 3. *Church Plant Strategy*

It is essential that the church plant has a clearly articulated and documented strategic plan that defines the purpose, values, strategic priorities and key measures and activities of the church. Accountability for delivery of the plan is important with regular reporting to a mentor, a representative of CCC, and the sponsoring church and/or funder of the plant.

#### 4. *Mentoring*

For the church plant to not only survive but thrive, regular mentoring of the church plant couple is essential. The church planters need to be assigned a competent mentor who is well aligned and experienced with the church plant model being employed. The mentor will be required to meet with the CP couple at least once a month.

#### 5. *Financial Support and Sustainability*

Financial support of new church ministry is a vital factor in establishing long-term sustainability, with the external funding contribution gradually diminishing over an agreed period of time. Experience and studies have shown that Greenfield/Pioneering church plants require the longest-term external financial support, with three years being a minimum. A more

realistic support period would be five years. Often, for long-term financial sustainability the church plant needs to be positioned as an outreach ministry of the church movement/denomination and as such attract ongoing financial support as the seeding organisational funding is withdrawn.

6. *Church Plant Venue*

Securing a suitable and affordable venue for gatherings, services and events that has high visibility in the target area and long-term tenure is challenging but highly desirable. Access to the venue on the days and times that best serve the target demographic is essential. Priority access and use of a venue throughout the week as well as weekends is the ideal, which is possible with repotted church plants using existing church facilities or church plants that are housed in new purpose-built facilities. Having income earning capacity such as a café or venue hire opportunity exponentially increase the viability and long-term financial sustainability and of a church plant.

7. *Networking*

Networking and interaction with other church planters is vital. The mutual accountability and solidarity provided by such a network is often the difference between the church planters persevering or withdrawing from the ministry.

8. *Validation*

Validation and celebration by the sponsoring mother church and/or movement/denomination is another factor that greatly enhances the longevity and viability of a church plant. Elevating the visibility of the church plant in the broader movement/denominational community provides opportunity for much-needed encouragement, prayer, financial support and participation by others.

## CCC church planter assessment

CCC Church plants should be considered as *missions* of our movement that target the unchurched and de-churched of our society who have little or no engagement with the mainline Church and no current opportunity to know or become followers of Jesus. The CCC movement has a strong heritage of strategic investment in evangelism and missions which has largely involved support of local and overseas mission pioneers. Consequently, support of mission consistently required assessment of the character, calling and competency of mission pioneers and leaders.

Church plants are contemporary evangelical mission initiatives of our movement and as such require comprehensive assessment of church planters as leaders of these mission initiatives. The following is the process utilised in assessing the character, calling and competency of potential CCC church planters and the viability of a church plant strategy.

Note: The majority of CCC church plants fall into the category of *Pioneering/Greenfield* church plants, although the assessment process is appropriate for all models of church planting.

### The assessment process:

#### *Church Planter Identification/Profile*

- Married couple with joint calling with one partner identifying as the church plant leader (family financial sustainability generally requires one partner to have other employment income as the church plant can only provide a part-time salary for the church plant leader)
- Specific calling to the unchurched/unreached
- Relational connection to target demographic
- Proactive extant engagement in outreach ministry
- Have formed, or are starting to form, a church plant team of others committed to partner with them to plant a church

#### *Preliminary Assessment of Suitability*

- Initial meetings (with DMM, GM & Prayer Director) with CP couple to assess calling, spiritual integrity, gifting, ethos and missional alignment with CCCVaT
- Period of prayer (CCCVaT prayer Team & CP & Team)
- Second meeting to determine whether there is a sense of calling to partnership in planting a church
- Meeting with CP team if already formed
- Agreement to move to the next stage

#### *Completion of Assessment Inventories*

- Completion of *Gift and Calling Assessment* inventories by CP couple
- Three ministry/church leaders who know couple well complete an assessment inventory for each marriage partner (further follow-up with referees if needed)
- Assessment report produced and provided to couple
- Meeting with CP couple to review and discuss assessment results and report
- Decision whether to move ahead to next stage

#### *Completion of Application for Funding*

- Completion of CCCVaT Funding Application Form
- Submission of a three-year Strategic Plan with purpose, mission, values, strategic priorities and annual ministry KPI's and self-sustainability targets/measures
- Submission of three-year budget
- Meeting with CP leaders to review and refine plan and budget.
- Meeting with CP launch team and assessment of gift-mix, appropriateness, viability and capacity of the team.

- If funding application approved, commitment of three-year reducing funding (1<sup>st</sup> year - \$35,000, 2<sup>nd</sup> - \$25,000, 3<sup>rd</sup> - \$15,000)
- Commitment by CP leaders to provide annual report along with measures

#### *Genesis Funding Application Support*

- Support/assistance in application for Genesis CP funding (matching CCCVaT funding)
- Preliminary Enquiry application submitted in September, full application in October, notification if successful in November; first funding allocation in March the next year

#### *Incorporation & Organisational Support*

- Assistance with application for incorporation
- Assistance with application for tax exempt status
- Assistance with establishment of financial systems and reporting mechanisms.
- Marketing and branding support including name choice, domain registration, website development, signage, etc
- Assistance with securing a venue for the church plant

#### *Mentoring, Equipping and Ongoing Support*

- Appointment of mentor/coach for church planter (expectation of monthly meetings)
- Sponsorship of CP couple to attend *DNA of an Acts 2 Church* training.
- Completion of CCCVaT CP Orientation Training
- Integration of church planter into CCCVaT Church Planters' network
- Intercessory Prayer support provided
- Regular visits to Church Plant by CCCVaT CP support team members

#### *Launch of Church Plant*

- CP team commence regular gatherings and ministry initiatives
- Official launch of church plant

#### *Final Assessment*

- Independent assessment of church plant at the end of the three-year funding period
- Comprehensive report provided and submitted to CCCVaT board.

## CCC Unifying Essentials

The CCC movement has a set of distinctives that express the unifying characteristics, values and biblical imperatives that all in the movement ascribe to.

CCC church plants are established in the context of and in alignment with these unifying essentials:

### *Movement not a denomination*

CCC is a movement of like-minded local churches, predominantly from a Christian Brethren heritage, that have united under a common vision and mission, set of beliefs and core values.

### *Leadership by influence*

Leadership of CCC is via relationship, trust and influence rather than hierarchical authority and enforced compliance of organizational obligations, liturgy, leadership validation and behavioural expectations.

### *Autonomy of church affiliates*

We believe in the autonomy and self-governance of the local church, but we affirm and value unity and mutuality across our movement and are committed to support and empower each other to advance God's kingdom and provide opportunity for many others to know and follow Jesus.

### *Evangelism and discipleship*

We are driven by the Great Commission of Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:18-20). We are committed to take the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all people and to provide a ministry of discipleship for each new believer, that they will become all that God has designed them to be.

### *Scripture*

We are committed to the Bible as the foundation and final authority for life and ministry. We encourage all in our movement to study it diligently, apply it daily, and teach its truth to others.

### *Prayer*

We are committed to prayer as the means by which we communicate with God and He communicates with us. We view prayer as the 'powerhouse' of the Church and essential to effective ministry and mission. We are dedicated to pray for the salvation of the lost, the advancement of God's Kingdom in the world, and for the empowerment of God's Holy Spirit of all in our movement so that they may live by the commands and teachings of Jesus Christ.

### *Priesthood of all believers*

We celebrate and practice the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:4, 5, 9; Revelation 1:6, 5:10). We believe that through Christ we have been given direct access to God (1 Timothy 2:5), God is equally accessible to all believers, and every follower of Christ has equal potential and validity to minister for God in all aspects of faith and church, according to the gifts God has given them (Romans 12:3-8 & 1 Corinthians 12:7-13)

### *Plurality of leadership*

We believe in the plurality of leadership where the local church is led by a defined group of leaders with equal authority, with the pastor being viewed as one among equals.

### *Ordinances*

We observe two ordinances, full immersion baptism and communion. We practice full immersion baptism as a public declaration and representation of a Christian's spiritual union with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection (Romans 6:3-8). We regularly celebrate communion in our local churches, usually weekly, following Christ's instruction to do this to remember Him (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).