



What you need to know about launching your church

This step is the first one in the last phase of the church plant loop – the operational phase. We'll discuss the actual coaching and help you need to lead a church in phase 11 on training, equipping and refreshing leaders and teams. This step describes the birth of the church and those tense moments as you public.

Timing and Team

Leading into launching public worship

One big discussion is how you move towards this. Generally, your team should always know when you plan to go public. Often, the advice is to gather a team 6-9 months before you intend to launch. More than that, and team members won't commit to your preparation time. So the general timings should be known some time in advance. By now you will have trained your team and got a venue.

It's got to be a team thing

Some people have incredible administrative skills. They are able to manage time and resources brilliantly. Even if you're not one of them, you're going people who can see, and take responsibility for the tasks ahead. If you do nothing, every responsibility will default back onto the leader. Spend time concentrating on what tasks are needed, and identifying who will be taking responsibility for them. It's good for the team to know that they exactly that – that they are a team, working together. You cannot just hope that this will happen.

What's changing

It's kind of a big deal – kind of

You'll probably feel as though launching church is a big deal. And in ways it is. You have asked people for belonging, for loyalty, and as you become a church, there is no going back on it. You may be tempted to pull in as many as possible for the launch, and there is real merit to this. It's a way of celebrating something that God has brought to birth. The



downside of this is that it can raise expectations too high. Often, you might get twice as many on the very launch of a church than you do at subsequent meetings. You have to judge the mood of the team, as to whether a softer launch or a bigger launch is more appropriate.

In any case, it's now true, if it wasn't before, that you can't go back without quite a bit of pain. This can be a good thing. People now know that you mean it.

You're a church now

As a church, you are committed to the release of gifts and leadership in the church. As you build up towards launch, you should be developing those areas of ministry. In Diverse Antioch, we aim to have a worship leader in every church. We try to have live worship, but even if you don't (and Oldhams Church never has) it's great to have someone who takes responsibility for the prayer and worship life of the church. We usually expect the leader to take direct responsibility for the teaching programme, but this too, could be delegated. You have to work out how you are going to encourage and teach children – and their parents! You might have someone with a pastoral, or prophetic gift. As a church, you should be differentiating gifts clearly as you move towards launch.

You're a community now

As a team, rather than a church, it would be fine for people to join with you once a week. Now you are community, the body of Christ. You belong to one another, and carry responsibility for one another. Not only that, but you are a community into which you are inviting others. You have to create a space where people can thrive and grow as new Christians. While you can share some things, particularly with other Antioch churches, you also have to be a space where people belong. That takes time. As new people come in, your church will need to spend time in one to ones. That will affect your invitations – it can be difficult to invite someone to a church that only gathers once a week.

If there is sin, dissension, or trouble, your community will need a way to heal, to solve the issue. When you are gathering all sorts of people with different background there is bound to be tension, conflict and mis-understanding! As the overall leader or a member of the launch team, you need to be ready for these moments.

It's important that your team now understand the time commitments needed around launch. We've seen the impact of core team members not fully accepting the time needed – at least 4 hours a week – and it seriously distracts the group.

You're a mini-institution now

A public church has a series of obligations. There is a network contract for the Antioch Network, but each church has its obligations. You have to budget and to handle money carefully and legally. You need safeguarding procedures in place for children and vulnerable adults. You probably need some kind of insurance. You need to make sure that your legal and financial obligations are up to date.

Making it all work

Why Sunday still matters

There are probably two equal and opposite mistakes in thinking about your 'Sunday' whenever that is. The first is ignore it – say 'we're a community, not an event'. It has an appealing ring, particularly to those frustrated with structures and seeking authenticity. The problem is that people need a way to join a community, and they need teaching and worship forms that they can understand. Many less structured churches struggle to attract people, because their community uses a series of unstated codes that are clear to the core members but not to others. An event is calculated to be accessible and is public. As part of our church planting process, we have to ask whether our meeting patterns make sense to the community that we're trying to reach. Sunday provides a very effective front door for people to join a church. In most cases that we've seen, churches have grown when their main meeting was an inspiring time where people sensed the presence of Christ.



Where this didn't happen, or the meeting was governed by numerous social codes not easily understood by outsiders, the church struggled to grow. One way of tackling this is explaining what's going on throughout the service.

The second mistake is to be so focused on the event that it becomes exhausting or so formal that it loses the character of a small community. In our Antioch small churches we don't want to be sloppy or haphazard, but equally we want to foster a culture of participation and ownership. Members of the church should be able to look at what's going on and say, "One day I'd love to do that." Our meetings are gatherings of a community under Christ – they should reflect an offering to Christ of our time and thought without becoming a burden or a performance.

Keep it Simple

In order to make Sunday worship manageable to small churches, we intend to use a simple format. The service is coordinated by a leader alongside, if there is one, a sung worship leader and whoever is doing the teaching. This simple form allows small churches to lead Sunday worship without overstraining their capacity, although it is often done with support from paid staff helping with some of the teaching.

The sacraments of the Church

You need a way to practice the two sacraments/ordinances that Jesus left the church: baptism and holy communion. For Antioch as a Church of England network, communion is a tricky issue. You can't do a formal communion without an ordained minister present. You can do agape meals, and depending on your theology, that might or might not make a big difference. You can invite a minister from time to time. The important thing is to talk to your church overseer about working this out.

Obviously you might feel as a community, you want to be free something Jesus himself commanded, but we are people under authority, and although this can seem burdensome, creativity and patience should allow us to work this out.



Baptism is a little easier. You can do the preparation and take part in the actual baptism, and any ordained minister can focus on the day itself.

Evangelism and the Church launch

It's tricky inviting people to a church that doesn't yet exist. When you launch on Sunday, you also need to launch something public in midweek, so that people can feel that they clearly belong to a community. That, in turn, gives you something to invite people to. So if you launch public worship once a week, but don't have any other track to disciple people on, you risk only inviting them to an event, not a church. The same can be true when you only invite people to a midweek meeting. For them to truly belong, they probably need to have both.

You're not the end product

In all the stress of launching, you may feel that just rocking up to the first Sunday is a huge achievement. And it is. But the Lord has many surprises in store for you – and you're in it for the long haul. You'll lose people, gain people, have moments of sadness, joy, excitement and pain. But don't worry, don't panic and don't feel you have to work feverishly to make everything happen instantly. You're a church, a community and you need rhythms of rest and enjoyment so that church is and remains a place of refreshment and encouragement. As we like to say in Antioch – you should usually be enjoying it – and always be praying for it.