

HUB Q+R

SEPTEMBER 2025

Please could you include an agenda in future Hub notifications, to help us know what topics are already going to be covered and therefore don't need a question?

Great point. Absolutely, we'll try to remember to do that – and harass us if we forget.

Can we see the responses to the recent feedback questionnaire?

Yes you can! I know we normally share some early takeaways in the weeks after the survey but this year the complexities of moving towards multiple gatherings again and pursuing potential buildings filled up our calendar and communications.

It took us a little while to match across the questions between different survey years to allow a longitudinal analysis but we got there in the end. If you know how to use an MS Excel pivot chart, you can chart basically anything you want here:

[Survey 2021-2025.xlsx](#)

If there's something particular you'd like us to dig into, just email matt@. Generally, the results are encouraging. A few quick highlights:

- About 20% of survey respondents joined Hope City within the last 18 months.
- 96% of respondents were familiar with our primary purpose "we exist to multiply followers of Jesus" and 73% reported actively trying to join in
- 56% of the church reported they were actively taking small steps to try and share their hope, a small increase from last year, with 42% getting into spiritual conversations.
- 80% agreed or strongly agreed they regularly engage with non-Christians, a significant increase from last year (~67%)
- Still lots of work to do: only 33% agree/strongly agree they feel fluent at "speaking naturally about spiritual things and spiritually about natural things".
- 69% agree/strongly agree you've cared for others in our church family – way to go, church!
- 51% strongly agreed they had a meaningful connection with at least one person at Hope City from another generation (and not in your own family!)

Is there a way we can see the attendance numbers over the last 9 months?

Absolutely – we track lots of metrics as a church (Matt's data background – he can't help himself) and you can see all our data here [Metrics Deck.xlsx](#)

For attendance, look for the blue tab at the bottom (there are lots of other interesting tabs, too)

Finances: What's the current position? What would we do with more? How would we cope with less?

See our [Metrics Deck.xlsx](#) for detailed financials but the short answer is regular giving has dropped again and we are no longer covering regular expenditure from regular giving. The gap is about £11k over the last 3 months, and £20k over the last 12 months. We have reserves so we don't need to take immediate action to reduce costs and last month (Sept) regular giving rose suggesting the gap is closing after a weaker summer.

If regular giving consistently falls significantly below regular costs, we would review expenditure and see where savings could be made – but many of our costs are not easily controlled. The main controllable expense is staff (53% of our total expenditure) so a material shortfall would likely only be resolvable by reducing staff. The Elders have not sought to identify specific potential reductions as we hope we won't need to take that step.

Increased giving would first enable us to meet our regular expenditures. If there were a significant increase in giving, the elders have discussed adding a staff worker for HCKids as our likely next addition. We are conscious, however, that adding to the team is not as simple as picking a target position.

We've had mixed results from external recruiting so we would be cautious about simply advertising a position publicly and would greatly prefer to appoint internally where we can see a track record of participation, and know there is vision and value alignment. When expanding the team, we would also be influenced by who is available; though our ideal would be to hire for HCKids, we may have an outstanding internal candidate for another valuable position. In this case, we would likely choose to appoint into a position fitted to the available candidate rather than try and fit a "square peg in a round hole".

Obviously a new and larger building would have significant operational cost implications which will impact on our ability to increase staffing from regular giving.

We should also note we have a number of staff who are directly supported by patrons and partners, not paid from general church giving – and a number of staff who generously donate their time to the work of the church. If you would be interested in exploring being the "patron" for a new staff role, please do speak to the elders.

Is the ministry partnership with the West's still under consideration or has that door closed?

The West's are still fundraising and hoping to come and serve at Hope City as a part of a wider mission - but the sums required are substantial and recent changes to the UK's immigration system increase costs and complexity for them so we're not sure how this will turn out in the end.

Have you heard of Aquila church fund? Aquilachurchfund.com

Yes, Matt has spoken to them several times about what we are proposing at various points along the journey.

It's not currently a fit for them, unfortunately – they focus on helping church plants get into their first building, so feel we are not their "target market", and also tend to support churches acquiring traditional church buildings with an order of magnitude lower prices than the space we are proposing. What we are proposing is both outside of their scope and price range.

We don't believe there is a suitable traditional church building available to acquire in our target geography. We're looking for a larger building that any of the CoS spaces currently on the market – but if you see something you think we should consider, please do pass it on to Matt.

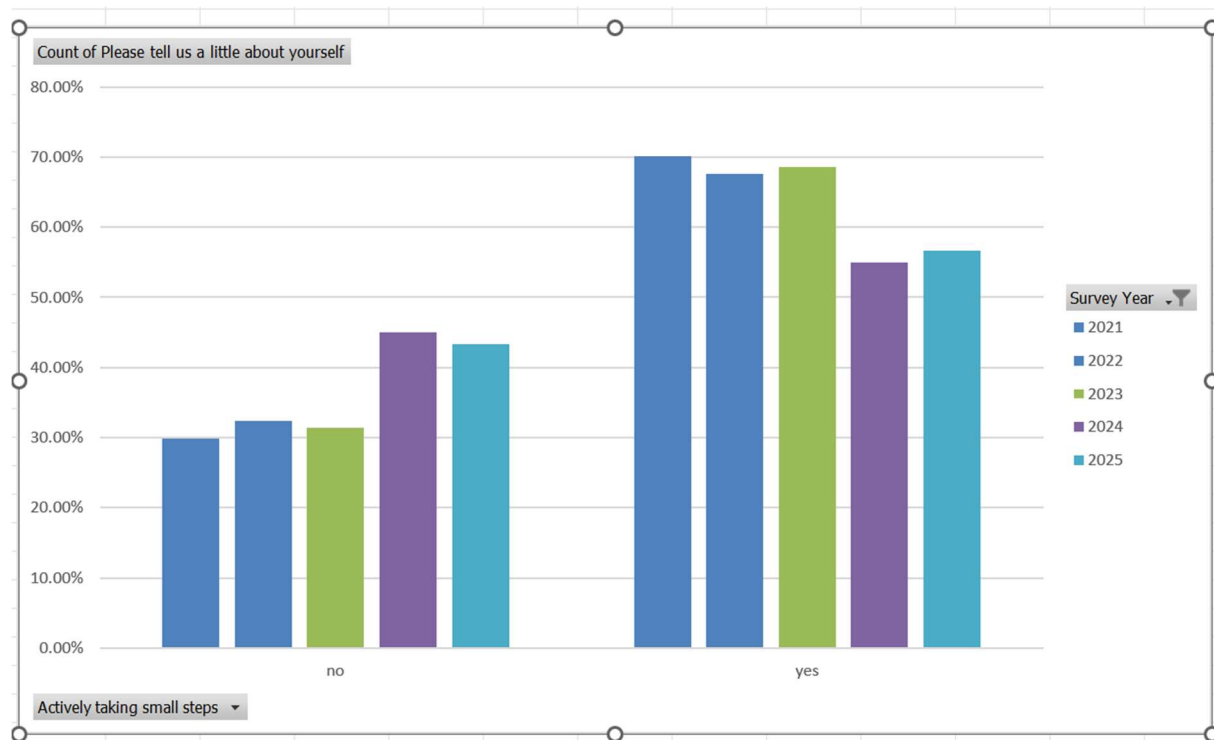
The Aquila Fund have given us some very helpful introductions to potential partners and other mechanisms for support, though – we're glad they're here and helping other church plants in need.

How's our disciple-making mission going? How do we measure it? How have those measurements changed over the years?

We'd love to see more new followers of Jesus and we're seeing some. It's not super-easy to track this, though. The best, though imperfect, proxy we have for new followers is baptisms - and we have 7 baptisms so far in 2025, 2 in 2024, and 4 in 2023 – Praise God! A good number of these are children of the church – we particularly celebrate their salvations. We believe there are more new followers of Jesus among us who haven't yet been baptised, too.

We believe conversion is ultimately the work of God, bringing the dead to life through sovereign grace, so even as we measure proxies for salvation, we acknowledge this is completely outside of our control.

We feel the best thing to measure and seek to drive in terms of seeing a sustained disciple-making mission is congregational engagement in taking small steps to share our hope, our principal model of mission as a church. In our annual church survey we've asked people to indicate their active participation for five years now so we have a reasonable track on this.



There was a step-change in 2024 which seems to be primarily driven by reduced participation from newer attendees – when you filter out those who’ve been at Hope City under 18 months, the decline is much more modest but still present. This makes sense as it takes some time to inculcate our patterns of mission into new joiners. And we’re pleased to see over half of the church actively engaged in taking small steps.

We have just had a fascinating connection with i61m.org who shared some additional ideas for how to better measure this, though, so we might enhance this for next year.

Are we achieving the exponential growth you talked about last week? If so, what's the value of the exponent? If not, what do you think are the key blockers?

Disciples who make disciples are the fundamental building block here. The first question you should ask yourself is whether you are one of them or not. If you want to see an exponential movement, strive to be a part of it yourself.

Anecdotally, the grounds for exponential growth are here: we know of people who have become disciples who are themselves now seeking to make disciples. This needs to be replicated across our church and sustained down through “generations” of believers, though.

We see few new believers in total, little fruit from our engagement in everyday mission as a church. We’d love that to be different and we’re always delighted to hear your input on how that might be achieved. Given research showed the average journey to faith was 2.4 years some 20 years ago, probably longer now, it’s not immediately obvious our model of mission is ineffective, though. We’d need a long time to evaluate whether we

really are seeing new disciples. And longer still to see if they go on to make new disciples themselves.

We also would need the rate of production of new believers to exceed the rate at which believers go to be with Jesus for genuine exponential growth – again, our sample size and data window are probably too short to reliably evaluate this.

Proxies like total attendance do somewhat support us experiencing exponential growth at least in attendance (though we freely admit this is not principally growth through conversion). See attendance numbers over our church lifetime in the metrics deck where we have attempted to curve-fit an exponential growth. Note there are counterpressures such as seating capacity which limit growth and thus obfuscate attempts to demonstrate an exponential.

Want to talk more or dig into the data? We'd love that – come chat to any of the elders.

When is the next opportunity to find out about joining the Core?

You can find out about joining the core any time! Just ask any of the elders or Andrea for a coffee and a chat. You can read about what you are committing to as a part of the core on the application form: <https://hopecityedinburgh.org/joincore>

We appreciate we've still not done a great job of explaining what we mean by Core or routinely inviting people towards becoming a part of it as a natural next step in their engagement with Hope City. Andrea is actively working with the elders on improving that – but we'd be delighted to hear any suggestions or ideas you might have.

I'm concerned about the high factor fees of the building we're exploring. Can you tell us more about that?

We've built quite a detailed model of expected transaction and operational costs which you can review here: [Detailed transaction and operational cost model.xlsx](#)

The biggest anticipated operational costs of the new building are:

- Estate service charge £34k (2025 figure)
- Utilities estimate £28k (conservative estimate)
- Runoff water £27k (function of "rateable value")
- Insurance estimate £15k

In total, we anticipate operational costs will be in the region of £130k vs. our current £33k. This is a dramatic increase - but we are expecting to enter the new property debt-free, or at least with zero/low-interest debt – so we think the more relevant comparison is total space costs: currently £80k (£33k operational cost + £47k rent) vs. the expected £130k.

We believe this £50k increase in operational costs can quickly be absorbed through ongoing growth in attendance and giving. Giving rose 30% year over year; a further 17% increase would cover the operational cost growth. We anticipate some donors will be willing to support additional operational costs for a short time while we “grow into” the new space.

Wouldn't a delay be good for us since we need to fundraise?

To some extent. We do expect it to take many months to fundraise. This is why we have conditioned our purchase on planning change-of-use which will take months to achieve and negotiated for phased payments. But we would like to have the property under offer and then in contract relatively soon.

We believe the building will be plausibly affordable for only a limited time window. Post-COVID, out-of-town office has seen demand slump, radically reducing property value. We anticipate office demand will begin to return over the coming years, with some industry insiders claiming that is already happening. This demand will quickly take property prices out of our reach (the current other interest in the building would value it at £5-6m vs. our £1.5m offer; we believe this interest will not develop into an offer – but over time, similar interest will).

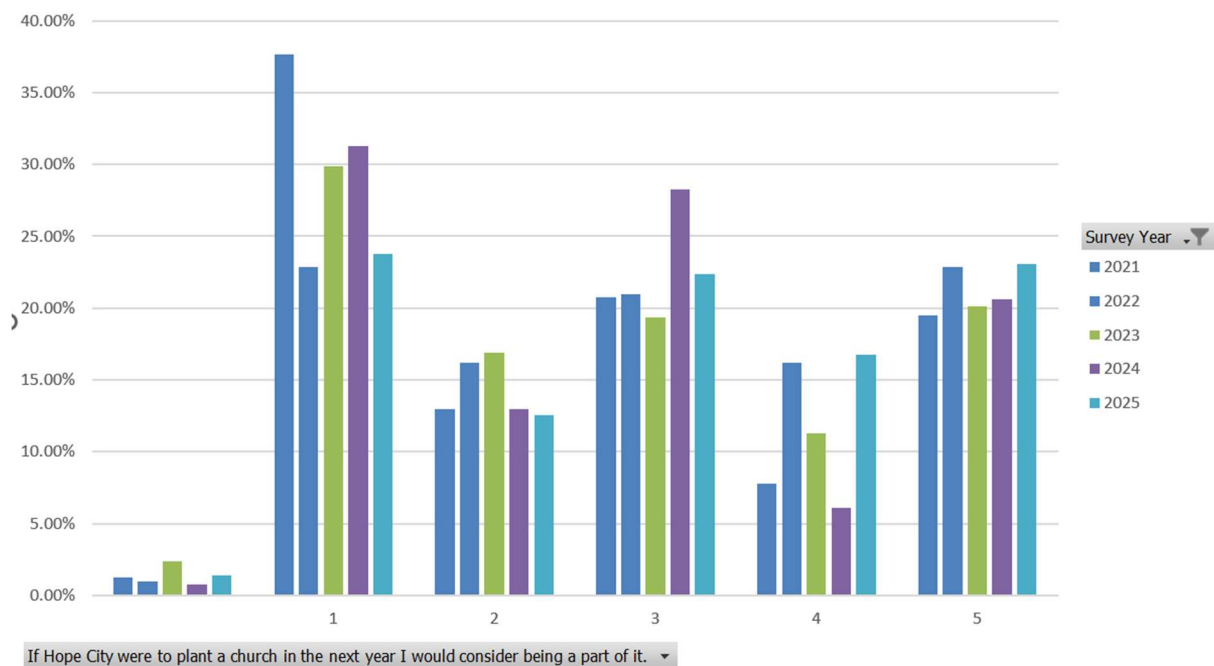
Our next option to leave our current lease is in May 2026 with us giving notice Jan 2026. We'd only like to give notice if we have high confidence of a new building and this hinges on planning change-of-use which we expect to take 10-20 weeks. This means we'd like to start the planning process about now. That's why we want the counterparty to accept our offer, not delay.

We could give notice without final approval for our proposed use of the new space, accepting the limited risk that we would be denied planning. If the seller were to delay accepting our offer until January, this is likely the route we would take given we have a professional planning opinion that our change of use is likely to succeed, and we don't anticipate there would be any other takers for our current space, so in the event of a planning failure on the new space, we could make a plea to our current landlord to write us a new lease or void our notice.

I've heard the over half of hope city would consider joining HCC church plant. Would it be good to get these people together for prayer and see where God leads?

Here's the survey data: this year over 20% strongly agreed they'd consider being a part of a church plant in the next year. This is amazing and exciting – the multiplication

urge is strong among us!



This doesn't mean we can simply send these ~50 people off to plant a church, though. Many of you will remember we explored planting with Patrick in the north of the city some time ago but ultimately drew back as we did not feel we had assembled a strong core to drive forward with the project. That year, a similar 20% of people strongly agreed they'd consider being part of a church plant – and they may well have considered it.

We think there are several factors at play here. First, geography does matter. Those open to planting are unlikely to be open to a plant irrespective of where it is. Second, those open to planting may not all want to plant the same kind of church. High alignment and agreement on the vision, style and form of the church you are creating together is critical when planting. Having enough people willing to do *something* isn't the same as having them all ready to do the same thing! So the headline statistics aren't as easy to interpret as we might like.

Learning from our last attempt to plant, we think a good way to mitigate these challenges would be to think of planting something which looks a lot like Hope City, at least to begin with. Though it might start out quite similar, we would plant an independent church which we'd expect to take on its own personality over time. Hopefully many of our church who are open to planting would be happy to do that in a form quite similar to our church today – so this would be an easier plant for most people to join.

We also think a suitable location will be critical, and we'd be thinking of somewhere with good transport connections, like our current location, but somewhere that'd be

closer, and thus more convenient, for a good chunk of our current church. Another bypass location seems a good bet, perhaps on the South side of the city.

This is not to say that this is the only way Hope City could plant – but it does take a strong vision and passion to create something completely new and to draw others into it. If you feel you might have that vision and passion, please come talk to us – we'd be thrilled to explore.

We think the critical gap is leadership either way, though. We don't think we have the leaders ready to multiply as a church just now. And we don't think we can simply hire them due to the risk they won't have the alignment/agreement with us that's necessary for planting. We need to grow them ourselves – and that's the only way this reproduction can be sustainable anyway.

This is one of the drivers for pursuing a larger scale: we believe it will enable us to develop the leadership multiplication systems we need to plant repeatedly.

All that said, would it be good to get people excited about planting together to pray and see where God leads? Absolutely. If that's you, and you'd like to spearhead a planting prayer gathering, please come and talk to any of the elders and we'll help you get that up and running.

City on a Hill church after leaving Destiny had no income or building and they're still planting. Also not part of a big denomination. Would you speak to pastor Pete?

Matt knows Pete reasonably well and is a part of the Edinburgh Planting Collective with him, a loose grouping aiming to support and encourage church planting locally. We're delighted to listen to him and learn from him.

We think the significantly larger scale of City on a Hill (circa 1,000 attending) is a key part of their ability to multiply leaders. They've achieved this scale through going multi-site rather than operating a single large venue. We've considered that as a strategy option but believe a larger space would be superior if it were to be possible to achieve. That's why we are pursuing it.

City on a Hill are effectively part of a larger denomination: the Go Global Apostolic family (<https://www.cityonahill.org.uk/go-global>). Among other things, this operates a leadership development and mentorship programme; we'd anticipate needing something similar for sustained leader multiplication and we'd be delighted to see what we can leverage from Go Global and Pete's learnings.

You say we need to grow more in number so we have more leaders who plant. What are we as a church going to do differently to make sure leaders rise up?

We've learned that many of our key leaders will be – and should be – “home grown,” and we acknowledge a greater focus on leadership development is essential if we are to

deliver on this. It's a real struggle when combined with the busyness of the team behind the scenes, though.

We've experimented with several different patterns of leadership development over the years from the original "Multiply" programme's day a week of focused input and training (which we found to be unsustainable to deliver internally) to appointing external candidates as interns who undertook formal theological training alongside the work of ministry to our Leadership Pathway spearheaded by Dustin some years back.

We now have team members engaged with various training pathways ranging from BCUK's Biblical Counselling course to Cornhill's Ministry Training Course and Pastor's Training Course to formal theological education with a seminary via distance learning; some of these are supported by the church and others are self-supported in donated time. We think this varied set-up in terms of more formal training is substantially stronger than a one-size-fits-all model, and suits our context well. If you'd like to think about training of this kind, please do speak to any of the elders – we'd love to explore that with you.

Carolyn has also been donating her time over the last year to lead a broader process of calling our senior leaders to systematically invest in raising other leaders. We've put together a curriculum in the form of a set of key books which have influenced our thinking and practice as a church, and we're gradually reading through these with these earlier-stage leaders, discussing how the patterns and ideas play out at Hope City, how they impact on us personally and as leaders, and where we still have room to grow.

While our delivery has been far from perfect, and we have focused on the core team to date, we are encouraged to have a simple framework which can be employed alongside "doing the work" of ministry, and can complement more formal training pathways which tend to focus on specific kinds of ministry rather than more general leadership.

Why does growth help with this? See the following question!

Why do we think we will do better at raising leaders and planting churches in a larger building?

A larger building makes room for us to grow as a church – and we believe that's key to both raising leaders and planting churches given our model and context.

There are other models designed to reproduce from a lower scale - for example house churches have proven ability to reproduce in developing world contexts; we do not see many examples of this in our context, however. We're open to exploring other lower-cost lower-scale reproducing models you might want to suggest, though.

Why does a larger church help us raise leaders?

A larger church can support a larger team with more specialised roles. We think we need significant staff resource devoted to leadership development to see it become

routine and sustainable: staff capacity to oversee, train and coach developing leaders. Currently the senior team are very stretched, leaving little room for this.

We also feel the time and commitment required to engage deeply in leadership development is often beyond what can be volunteered – this is why we have focused much of our effort on the existing core team to date. We think we need more paid training positions in which people can grow and develop as leaders to see this become routine and sustainable.

Growing the church will create the opportunity for more people to become actively involved in the work of ministry, and in leadership development alongside this. In addition, a larger church means a larger pool from which to draw people into these training roles.

Why does a larger church help us plant churches?

When we moved into our current space, we estimated capacity at 250, and thought we could plant by sending out 50 each time we got full. A few problems with this:

First, we believe our current space's comfortable capacity is more like 180. That's because it's hard to fill every seat in our main space; people often leave a gap; it's hard to find the last few empty seats; and people arriving as a group typically would like to sit together but will struggle to find a group of free seats. Capacity is also limited by children's rooms - and given our typical adult/child ratios, with about 180 people in the building, one or other of our children's rooms is approaching a capacity limit. So it'd be more like sending 50 of 180, a much bigger proportion of our church.

Second, we think we want to send out more than 50 people, too. We started Hope City with 35 committed adults – but we had the advantage that most of them were well established mature Christians ready to serve who already had a high degree of alignment around theology and practice, most coming from a single sending church. Our own growth has been relatively rapid and many of the 50 we'd have imagined sending out would come from that growth, and have diverse church backgrounds – or little church background – as a result. They'd not have been at Hope City so long as to be deeply aligned – so we should anticipate a much less coherent core to plant with. We think a significantly larger group will be needed to end up with the required mature, aligned core group as a result.

Third, given we expect to plant a church initially similar to Hope City, we need to plant at a scale which enables our current model of ministry; as we discovered with the 3pm gathering which we felt was unsustainable at an average of 65 attending, that needs a group quite a bit larger than our original launch team.

Fourth, we think there's a significant sociological boundary around 120 where it's no longer possible for everyone to know everyone, and there's a significant emotional cost to crossing that. We'd love to plant at or above this barrier so that plants didn't need to

go through the pain of crossing it again and again. We'd prefer to plant large and strong, giving our plants a great foundation to grow themselves to a scale where they could also repeatedly reproduce.

A larger church has the capacity to send out a larger group without so depleting the "mothership" that it struggles. That's why we think a larger church will help us repeatedly plant churches.

Have more questions? Want to talk more about any of our responses?

We'd love to do that. Just ask any of the elders for a coffee and chat.