



## INFORMATION STATEMENT FOR INTERVIEW AND DISCUSSION GROUP PARTICIPANTS

### Enliven Churches Project

#### Researchers:

Chief Investigator: Ruth Powell, PhD, BA  
Director, NCLS Research  
Associate Professor, Public and Contextual Theology Research Centre

Co-investigator: Miriam Pepper, PhD, MScTech, BEng, BA  
Researcher, NCLS Research  
Research Fellow, Public and Contextual Theology Research Centre

Co-investigator: Kathy Jacka, BEd, GradCertEdLead  
Consultant, NCLS Research

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#### Invitation

You are invited to participate in a study of vibrant, flourishing churches and how they enliven their ministry.

The study is being conducted by Dr Ruth Powell and Dr Miriam Pepper from NCLS Research and the Public and Contextual Theology Research Centre, Charles Sturt University and Kathy Jacka from NCLS Research.

Before you decide whether or not you wish to participate in this study, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take the time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish.

#### What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of the project is to understand how churches that are flourishing have developed their vitality, so that other churches can learn from and be encouraged by them. Previous research has focused on assessments of church vitality and descriptions of vital churches. This research aims to dig deeper, asking how churches became vital.

#### Why have I been invited to participate in this study?

NCLS Research has identified your church as a vital church, according to results from the 2016 *National Church Life Survey*. Your church was strong on at least four of the following five measures of vitality: the religiousness of the congregation or parish; strength of relationship within and beyond the church; agency or capacity to take action; the proportion of newcomers attending the church; and the proportion of young adults attending the church. NCLS Research invites your church to participate as a case study in the research. You are being invited to take part as a person in leadership who can offer a perspective on the vitality of your church.

#### What does this study involve?

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to take part in a 75-minute individual interview (if you are the senior clergy person at your church or senior lay leader if no clergy person present) or otherwise a 90-120-minute discussion group with others in leadership from your church (e.g. church or parish council, church committee, diaconate, ministry team leaders). Interviews and discussion groups will be conducted between May and July either at your church or in the neighbourhood.

Interviewees will be asked:

- Their perspective on the health of their church currently; a narrative of the past few years of growing health and vitality in their church; actions the church took to build vitality; motivations or situations that led to actions; contributing factors that may have helped their church to flourish; leadership strategies that may have been effective; wisdom and learning they would share with others.

Discussion group participants will be asked:

- Their perspective on the health of their church currently; a narrative of the past few years of growing health and vitality in their church; actions the church took to build vitality; motivations or situations that led to actions; contributing factors that may have helped their church to flourish; leadership strategies that may have been effective; wisdom and learning they would share with others.

Interviews and discussion groups will be conducted by Kathy Jacka, Ruth Powell or Miriam Pepper and will be audio recorded and transcribed.

### **Are there risks and benefits to me in taking part in this study?**

There will be no benefit to you in participating in this research, other than encouragement to you that the researchers have identified your church as one that is flourishing and satisfaction that you may gain from knowing that through this project your experiences may help other churches.

The risks involved in participating in this project are low. This study is a positive one, about how churches are flourishing and how they have become so. It is possible that you may recall challenges in ministry throughout the interview or discussion group that cause you discomfort. You may wish to access your usual pastoral support or supervisory arrangements if this occurs. You may withdraw from the study at any time.

### **How is this study being paid for?**

The project is an initiative of and draws on resources from NCLS Research, with additional funding from two foundations: Genesis Foundation and Yajilarra Trust. The Genesis Foundation and Yajilarra Trust provide seed capital and strategic support to Christian churches and ministries. Neither body has input into the research results or the conduct of the research.

### **Will taking part in this study (or travelling to) cost me anything, and will I be paid?**

There will be no reimbursements or payments to participants in this study.

### **What if I don't want to take part in this study?**

Participation in this research is entirely your choice. Only those people who give their informed consent will be included in the project. Whether or not you decide to participate, is your decision and will not disadvantage you.

If you choose to participate in the study, you may choose not to answer specific questions that are put to you in the interview or discussion group.

### **What if I participate and want to withdraw later?**

If you are participating in an individual interview, you may withdraw from the study and withdraw your data (the interview recording and transcript) up until four weeks after the interview.

If you are participating in a discussion group, you may withdraw from the group during the course of the

discussion. However it will not be possible for you to withdraw your data due to the interactive nature of the discussion and the impact that withdrawal of your individual data could have on the discussion.

Your church may withdraw from the study altogether up until four weeks after the interview or focus group (whichever occurs later), through notification by your senior clergy person or lay leader.

### **How will my confidentiality be protected?**

Any information collected by the researchers which might identify you will be stored securely and only accessed by the researchers unless you consent otherwise, except as required by law. There are limits on assurances of confidentiality as law may subpoena research data/records.

Interview participants are asked to give their consent to being personally identified in project outputs – that is, to consent to: 1) quotations from interviews being attributed to them and their church, and 2) being named in case studies.

Discussion group participants will not be personally identified by the researchers in any outputs, but are asked to consent to their quotations being attributed to their church. It may be possible for discussion group participants to be identified indirectly, for example an internet search may yield the name of the leaders of the church, and quotations may indirectly identify individuals to some knowledgeable readers.

Data will be retained for at least 5 years at the offices of NCLS Research.

### **What will happen to the information that I give you?**

The results from this study will be reported in the following project outputs:

- Church-friendly resources sharing the stories of flourishing churches to encourage and equip church leaders, provided to over 3,000 local churches across Australia
- Workshops and/or webinars around Australia for local church leaders on the findings of the project and practical stories and strategies they can learn from
- Presentation to the Religious Research Association/Society for the Scientific Study of Religion conference in the USA in October 2019
- Research paper/s published by NCLS Research.

The information that you provide will be used in two ways: 1) interview and discussion group data will be coded and analysed to identify common and unique methods in fostering vitality, and quotations will be used to illustrate the findings of the research; and 2) information from interviews, discussion groups and other sources such as newsletters will be used to construct a case study for your church.

You will be given the opportunity to review or edit your contributions prior to publication as follows. Case study writeups and all sections of the research report and resources where local churches are identified will be sent to senior leaders for review prior to finalisation. Senior leaders will be given four weeks to provide comment. Senior leaders from case study churches may seek input from discussion group participants.

Participating churches will receive copies of the resources and research papers that are prepared from the research.

### **What should I do if I want to discuss this study further before I decide?**

If you would like further information, contact Dr Ruth Powell, [rpowell@ncls.org.au](mailto:rpowell@ncls.org.au), phone 02 9139 2525, or visit <http://www.ncls.org.au/research/enliven-project>.

### **Who should I contact if I have concerns about the conduct of this study?**

Charles Sturt University's Human Research Ethics Committee has approved this project. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this project, you may contact the Committee on (02)

6933 4213 or [ethics@csu.edu.au](mailto:ethics@csu.edu.au), and quote reference H19094. Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

### **Conclusion**

Thank you for considering this invitation. This information sheet is for you to keep.