



UNIDUS AND - BEYOND

The story of Unidus community centre



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01 Origins

Before Hope Church Brisbane was established, I was dreaming of a church which would function 24/7 and it would one day have facilities that would be open every day. The church facility was not just to be a sanctuary for believers but a gathering place for the community. From this was gradually birthed the concept of a church in a community centre. Being an engineer by training, I had even made a basic sketch of an auditorium layout back in 1992. Little did I know then, how this little dreaming would turn out into reality.

Over the early years, the dream began to take shape in my heart of a place where hope was to be found for the hurt, weary and lost. A place where hope would be nurtured, where souls would be healed and strengthened. A place from which hope would be spread into the community and beyond. This tied in with our slogan “Hope To All” and carried the intent articulated in our church name.

Unidus was to be a hub, from which the church would impact the community and beyond.



02 The Name

In seeking for a name, I wanted a unique name for the centre to capture something of its essence. Incredibly, one day as I was browsing through an English dictionary (not something I do much, actually), I came across the word “nidus”. It means “A nest or breeding place. A place in which something is formed or deposited; a site of origin”.

In a burst of inspiration, the name Unidus came to mind. It captures the sound of Unite Us and nidus. Unidus is pronounced to sound like “unite us”. So Unidus is intended be a place to bring together to initiate, develop and nurture. The idea is that Unidus would be a gathering place, a mixing pot where ideas, dreams find expression in new initiatives and ventures. Where the church and the community interact with positive and life-impacting results.

Daniel Sim Design developed a beautiful logo that captured the essence of Unidus. Symbolizing two streams, two mountains (representing the church and community) merging together into one under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The curves allude to the first 2 letters U and N joined together.



03 Search & Purchase

Around 2001, I felt prompted by God that the time to purchase our own property has arrived. We started fund-raising and formed a search committee and the search began in earnest. In mid-2002 as Kang Toh drove to the Willawong dump site, he noticed a For Sale sign on a nearby land and alerted us.

After some investigation and much prayer with our leaders and intercessors, we felt God confirmed that the rural land was for us. But the caveat was that we would face many obstacles. Little did we understand then, how challenging the obstacles would actually be. We knew that because it was designated a rural land, we would have to change its land use to be able to build Unidus. Land use regulations in Australia are very stringent.

By faith we commenced negotiations with the owners and in March 2003, we purchased the 7.01 hectare land for only \$480,000. We had raise just enough funds from the past 2 years to just cover it and all the legal costs! Praise God for His provision.

Below is a picture of the actual property, basically bushland with over 80% covered with trees.

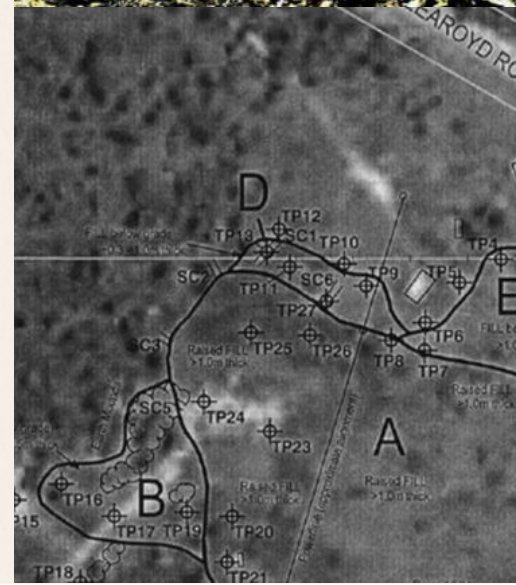
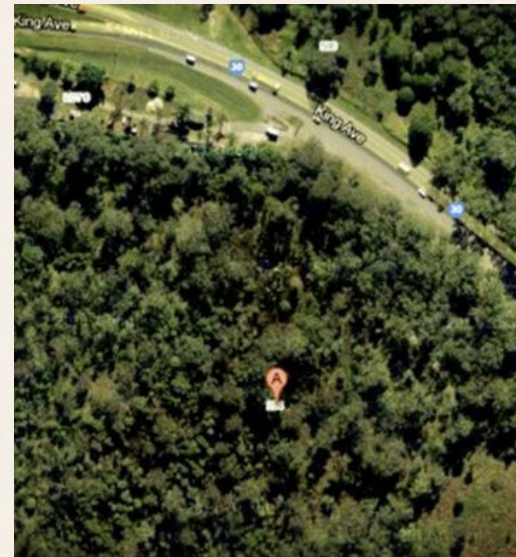
04 Land Issues

During our due diligence investigations, we discovered illegal dumping was done on the land. There were 2 adjoining blocks of land for sale by the same owner. The southern land had a tributary flowing through it but had been filled with up to 6m of junk landfill. The junk covered almost half of its site (about 3 hectares as shown in picture) and was hidden by a thick layer of earth. Imagine how huge a volume of junk there is.

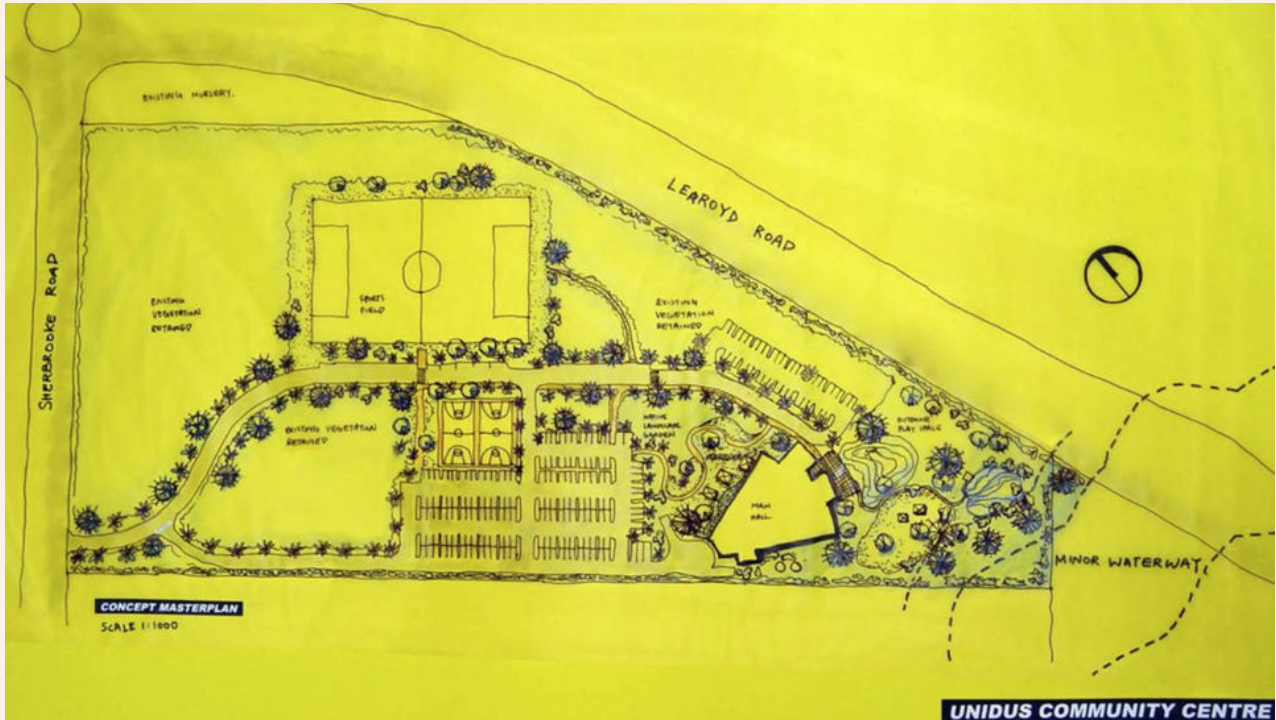
Even though God said the land was for us, He did not say whether it was both or only one. It was important that we did our research to fully understand the realities of the situation. And important part of hearing from God, is to do it with both eyes open at the same time.

After praying about it, we decided to only purchase the northern block which had significantly less illegal dumping occur. This was to avoid potentially very costly remediation efforts on the contaminated land as Council regulations would require. Plus the costs of trying to build buildings upon basically unstable grounds.

At a reasonable cost, we managed to clean up the land we purchased and succeeded in having it certified non-contaminated shortly after purchasing the land. We were now poised to begin master-planning and initial designs of the building, before approaching the City Council. The excitement was increasing!



05 Council Challenges



When we first approach Council we were told that we were only allowed to build a rural church building as the land was designated rural. That seats no more than 99 people. We were over 200 people by then and were planning for much greater capacities. However, we managed to negotiate some criteria that the Council was willing to consider under a material change of land use.

A building committee was formed. Town planners and engineers were engaged to undertake preliminary studies and architectural plans drawn up over a 2 year period. We went back to Council and addressed many concerns that were raised, proving that most of their concerns could be addressed.

To our dismay, we discovered that the criteria changed several times, just as we thought we had got close to passing the line. Council now wanted our building to be totally hidden behind large mature trees so that the whole block would retain its “rural” look. Council even recommended shifting our proposed building right in the middle of the trees. Yet at the same time, they wanted us to minimize cutting trees.

By late 2007, we realized after years of work and negotiations that we would not get pass this bureaucratic impasse. We have heard of big churches failing to break past such Council restrictions. One even sued the Council, spending over A\$1M and losing. We needed a different route. God had to open new doors for us. For no challenge is too great for God.

Do pray with us as we face the challenge of retiring A\$2.4M of debt over the next 2 years.
[Update: debt is paid off in 2017!]

Below is a picture of the original masterplan concept.
m which the church would impact the community and beyond.

We had started holding our annual Christmas4Kids event (through our community arm Hands of Hope) in a nearby suburb in anticipation of our eventual move to Willawong. In December 2007, we succeeded in inviting the Lord Mayor to attend for the very first time. As we had won the Lord Mayor's prize for the Best Community Event in Brisbane in 2006 (see pictures below).

He was impressed with what we had achieved over the years. We shared with him our dream of a community centre and raises our difficulties with the Council. We even had a short moment to show him our land nearby. He liked what we were trying to do. He granted us access to a key assistants to help move us through the bureaucratic challenges. God has opened a powerful door!

Even with such help, we still had to fulfil all Council regulations. More studies, more reports, more meetings and negotiations continued. And finally in one nerve-wrecking final meeting, the head assessor finally agreed to our development plans. In 2009, we finally obtained our official approvals for development.

We still had to provide detailed designs to Councils satisfaction and had to engage an entire team of architects, engineers and specialists. In early 2011, the building approvals were finally given. It meant we could commence construction. A long challenging journey, but glory to God.

By comparison, a major church which had started their journey to build years before us was still stuck with Council. Even until today, they have not had approvals after nearly 2 decades.

Join us in prayer as we believe God for another breakthrough, to raise A\$1M this year.



07 Architectural Design

I had tossed around some thoughts about auditorium design. I finally settled on the idea of a fan-shaped auditorium. Just like a hand fan that could open up, the auditorium could expand to double in size in the future. I had seen many church buildings that were built without any possibility of increasing the auditorium size and were later forced to build an entirely new building. I wanted a design where most rooms were adaptable and multi-use. Rooms that could open up to each other and to the auditorium.

With these ideas, Kuan Ong, a young graduate architect began preliminary design sketches (see early sketches below). He put the whole concept together and developed a fan-shaped auditorium design where every seminar room could open to each other and into the auditorium. He introduced the concept of an iconic pavilion with a grassed amphitheatre in front, hence serving both as focal entry point and open stage area. As the building was to be a community centre, we did not want any overt Christian symbols. But the inverted V shaped pavilion was a subtle nod to the 19th and 20th century roof shape used by many parish churches.

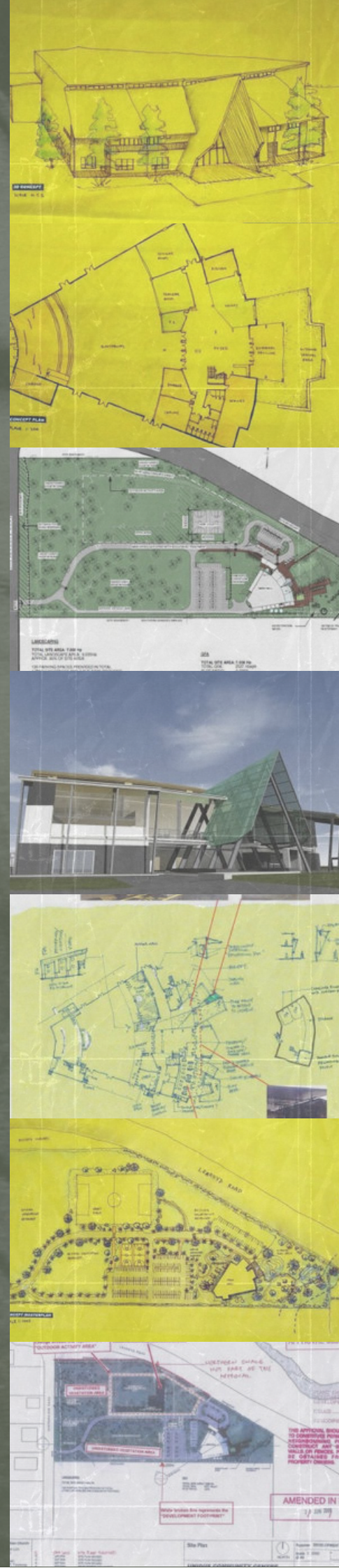
He also developed the masterplan with social outdoor areas and with the unique northern car park with a loop road designed for buses. The looped road is intended to allow for future entry from Learoyd Rd, though currently not acceptable to Council.

Later stages of the design were taken over by MLDDesign, an architectural firm we engaged with (the late) Ravi Karan responsible for the detailed design work. The design continued to evolve until the present design. The iconic pavilion was re-envisioned to be shorter but translucent so lights could shine through the roof at night. A special lightweight but strong roof material called Danpalon was used to achieve this. This design proved to be a winner and is today the most iconic feature of the building (see near final design depiction below).

The resulting design utilises large expanses of glass at the front and is intended to provide an airy open atmosphere that interacts with the outdoors. The ground floor foyer was treated like an alfresco, open to the outdoors, taking advantage of the sub-tropical Brisbane weather. It also reduce the overall built up area to within the agreed limitations with Council.

Alvin Toh oversaw the electrical and lighting design through the company he worked for. He developed the lighting for the front façade. My brother, Edwin Lim of Limington Design provided pro bono interior design advice and is responsible for much of the interior colour choices. He introduced the unique splayed fan shaped concrete areas connecting the foyer and the amphitheatre.

If you have never visited our new building before, we hope you will drop by one day.



08 Raising Funds

Since 2001, the church has raised funds for Unidus under the campaign “Build Unidus”. We resolved from the very beginning that this was not just to be a capital fund-raising campaign. But an opportunity for the church to travel on a faith journey with God. That together we may invest in building a portion of God’s Kingdom. A challenge for us to rise up together and be willing to make equal sacrifices.

Rather than just asking for Hope Brisbane attendees to work out what they can afford to give, we emphasised the importance of seeking God. Each should seek to hear from God what He would like us to contribute. This will stretch each to encounter God in a fresh way. The challenge is also to receive God’s rhema word with faith in our hearts and to make a generous, sacrificial commitment. For we believe that when we respond directly to God, God will honour our faith and intervene in our context.

I have been humbled by the faithful sacrificial sacrifices of so many over the years. Particularly the significant percentage of overseas students we have, who have contributed and left their legacy at Unidus. We have also seen year after year testimonies of God’s provision to those who heard from God. To date, we have raised A\$6.6M.

On completing Unidus Community Centre, in 2013 the campaign changed in emphasis to Unidus & Beyond. More than retiring the outstanding bank loan debt of A\$2.4M, our intent is also to fund community and missions work. For that is what Unidus is intended to facilitate. The multi-media below captures this concept. This year our faith goal is to raise A\$1M.



09 Construction



Construction proper commenced in April 2011 and moved very quickly. It started with clearing the land where the building was to be located and soon the building began to take shape. There were many aspects of the building design that had to be continually resolved as construction progressed.

Many challenges occurred during the way. The GFC flow on effects caused the construction industry to be very subdued and various companies bankrupted. During construction, the steel structures, civil and door sub-contractors went bankrupt. This led to some delays and issues along the way. But praise God the builder was able to eventually resolve most of these issues. Shortly after construction of Unidus, the electrical sub-contractor went bust therefore complicating warranty issues.

The M&E engineering firm was bought over by a large national company during the final design stages and this introduced significant problems in some areas. The construction company itself merged with another company along the way. This was further complicated by many changes in project management staff at the construction company. These brought many challenges for our building committee and particularly myself who was primarily dealing with the builder, as we had to address multiple issues that had arisen out of these situations.

Despite all these challenges and probably lots more white hair amongst us, the construction progressed rapidly until the building was handed over to us in July 2012.



10 Soil Challenges

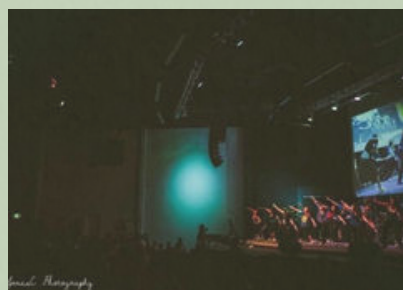


During the construction phase, it became obvious that we were going to have significant problems with the soil. About 0.6 to 1.0 m of the top soil was useless for construction of building, roads or even our lawns. In wet weather, it become like slushy mud. In the end we had to remove the entire top soil and replace as well as compact a new layer of soil over about 3 hectares of land. At one stage, we had trucks rolling in and out continuously like trains to dispose of the soil.

Further, in a corner of our land where swales were used, some leftover contaminated landfill was discovered. To avoid digging up further contaminated junk, the design of the swales were changed to huge underground pipes. All these necessary changes increased construction costs by nearly A\$1M.

With each new challenge the building committee had to work through with the builder the possible solutions and the cost implications. It reinforced in my mind that the work of the Lord is not always easy. I recalled reading of pastors who turn pale when confronted with a church building project. Now I understand the response.

We truly appreciate our building committee who had spent many 1000s of hours over the project for almost a decade. Those who have been part of the building committee over the years include Kuan Ong, Wai Tong Wong, Joseph Ng, Ravi Karan, David Tan, David Law, Michael Ngugi and myself.



This marked the beginning of a new phase in our church life. A portion of our church moved to Willawong as the Willawong Morning and Ablaze youth services. We retained our service in St. Lucia which now largely comprised of students and young working adults. This meant our multi-site church has expanded to 2 main centres and outlying centres in Gold Coast and Ipswich. In 2013 we also split the St. Lucia service into a morning and afternoon services to cater for growth.

11 Openings

Unidus Community Centre was completed and our staff started moving in on 18 July 2012 to prepare the facilities. In 26th August 2012, we held a celebration service at Unidus. Giving God the glory for the journey that has reached this epic milestone.

A special Unidus Open Day was held for the community on 22th September. On this auspicious occasion we were honoured by the Lord Mayor Graham Quirk who officially opened Unidus. Other VIPs attended including local councillors, state and federal MPs, State Opposition leader and Aboriginal elder, including Annastacia Palaszczuk. It was a fantastic day, introducing ourselves to the local community. See video clip below.

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12 Uses & Future

Unidus was fully paid for in 2017. Unidus is now the most prominent building in the surrounding suburbs and has helped us open doors to interact with the local community. Since the opening of Unidus to the public, it has been utilised for a wide range of activities including seminars, weddings, social functions, performances and conferences. There have been conferences with Heidi Baker, Randy Clark and others held at Unidus.

Unidus has also helped enhanced our church activities and ministries. It has provided our expanding staff with a more conducive work environment. Provided new avenues for ministries to expand. Improved worship experiences and new outreach opportunities.

Our intent is that we continue to increase community use of Unidus and our interaction with key segments of the local community. With the amount of land available to us, we hope to be able to add a childcare centre one day as it will further help us connect with the community.

Exciting days lie ahead to maximise what God has provided for us.



Unidus Community Centre Reminiscence





Unidus Community
Centre since 2012.

CONTACT US

<https://www.hope-church.com.au/>

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