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Compiled by

**Richard H. Harris**

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# Reaching a Nation Through Church Planting

*Compiled by*  
**Richard H. Harris**



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Special thanks are expressed to Dewey Hickey and Tom Cheyney. The tireless effort and diligent commitment to see this manuscript completed has been evidenced by these individuals.

Dewey Hickey helped launch the vision and started the process moving for this book. Dewey wanted the best resource possible for church planters and anyone interested in New Testament church planting.

Tom Cheyney coordinated the gathering and processing of the material from each author. Tom ensured the book stayed on schedule for production in a timely manner.

Thank you to Dewey, Tom, and all of the dynamic Christian leaders who contributed to the success of this book. May scores of individuals come to know the Lord by the churches that are planted by those who read this book.



## Dedication

When we conceived the idea of a book on church planting, we wanted it to be a compilation of chapters by the finest church planting practitioners in North America. One of the first names surfaced by our entire staff was Rick Ferguson. Rick was leading Riverside Baptist Church to quickly become a strong regional church in Denver, but also had a strong evangelized voice for much of the western United States through his television ministry. At the same time Rick had a vision of multiplication through the planting of 100 new churches. In the Denver area alone, he had led Riverside Baptist to sponsor 25 church plants. The new plants were several different models, including ethnic, African-American, Anglo, biker, and cowboy.

Rick's vision would not be realized in his lifetime. He was killed in an automobile accident on July 25, 2002. This book is dedicated to Rick Ferguson's heart and passion for church planting. May the contents of this book inspire and motivate hundreds of pastors, church leaders, and church planters to lead their churches to multiply their churches by planting at least one healthy New Testament church.

Rick Ferguson was one of the finest Christian gentlemen I have ever known. Few men in Christian circles serve the Lord with such passion and joy as this man. He was a great pulpiter, scholar, visionary leader, writer, encourager, soul winner, selfless servant, friend, creative pastor, and kingdom builder! Perhaps the best descriptive word for this brother would be *balanced*. It appears that Rick balanced his commitment to God, his family, and his church as few men do. And his love for Christ and love for people kept his life filled with joy and compassion, fun, and fulfillment.

Perhaps the best way to pay tribute to a man is to look and listen to the legacy that he lives through his family. Read the following words by Rick's son, Brett:

*In the past 20 years, there has been an explosion in research and study about the "Church Growth Movement." Books, conferences, Web sites, papers, and research statistics have all focused on creating strong and growing churches. And there has been much success from these efforts. America is now home to some of the largest, wealthiest, most successful churches in the history of the world. My father, pastor Rick Ferguson, was definitely a student of this movement. He read all the books, went to all the conferences, met with other pastors, all in an attempt to better understand church growth. Perhaps his interest in church growth is part of what makes his journey so amazing. Over and over I heard him tell the story of how one Sunday during worship as*

*he looked out over the worship center of Riverside, God spoke to him in a way that changed his life and the life of our church forever. As he stood there that Sunday he began to ask God to grow our church.*

*Our 3,000-seat worship center had been emptied by conflict before Dad came to be the pastor. Dad had a vision for filling the worship center once, twice, three times, even four times a weekend. If Riverside were to reach this goal we would have more than 10,000 people on our campus each weekend and be one of the strongest churches in North America. On this particular Sunday, God spoke to my father, giving him a vision far different than he previously imagined. The revelation was simply that in a city of over 2 million people filling the worship center four times would produce one of America's largest churches, but it would only reach one half of one percent of our city's population. Ten thousand people on campus would make a great church, but it would still only reach five percent of the population of Denver.*

*There, on the platform right in the middle of a Sunday worship service, God began to birth in Dad a vision for church planting. And not just church planting, church multiplication. What if there were 10 churches reaching 10,000 people each? As great as that would be, in a city of two million people 10 churches reaching 10,000 people each still only equals five percent of the population. God showed my father that in order to really impact our city, we needed to plant churches that plant churches. Kingdom growth and church growth are not opposing forces; they exist in a symbiotic relationship. The vision God gave Dad was really simple. To reach people, we have to plant churches in exponential numbers.*

*On July 25, 2002, by the sovereign plan of God, Dad was taken home to enjoy God forever. He never reached his goal of seeing 100 churches planted along the front range of Colorado. Perhaps, as you read this book you will begin to see my father's vision.*

*I pray Rick's life and legacy will encourage his wife Kathy as she continues to fulfill God's purpose for her life, and may their three children, Brett, Katie, and Justin, always have cherished memories of not only what their father accomplished, but also the godly life he lived and modeled before his family, church, and the world.*

Richard H. Harris  
Vice President  
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# The Great Commission: Making Disciples and Planting Churches

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By Dr. Roy Fish<sup>1</sup>

**T**he burden God has placed on the heart of the North American Mission Board and all Southern Baptists can be stated no better than in what Richard Harris has shared in the dedication of this book. The vision expressed through the life and legacy of Rick Ferguson and the people he served at Riverside Baptist Church in Denver, Colorado, is that to which our wonderful Savior Jesus Christ calls all of us.

There is no better way for us to enrich Christ's reputation on earth than by planting new healthy churches that multiply disciples and purpose to start other reproducing churches. To effectively reach the lost, any church or denomination of churches must make evangelism and church planting major priorities. Engel and Norton write:

"It is a demonstrated principle of church growth that Christianity gains in a society to the extent that the number of existing churches is multiplied. Multiplication of new congregations of believers, then, is the normal and expected output of a healthy body."

Every true believer desires to see the book of Acts replicated in our generation. The early believers did not have the educational opportunities and technological advances we have today. But they shook their world for Jesus Christ and spread His name across their known world. Our world needs to see Him presented again in a similar way. The multiplication of disciples and churches for the Lord Jesus is the way to achieve that objective.

Southern Baptists, know our future depends on continually planting churches through effective evangelism. This is our heritage. Primarily, the founding of the Southern Baptist Convention was brought about, through the work of bivocational pastors. They were committed to Christ and spreading His Good News through the formation of new churches. This is the only way a Christian denomination can remain strong. Today must find us true and trustworthy to



the stewardship our Lord has entrusted to us; otherwise, we forfeit our reason or right to exist. We must model and train people to catch this vision and project it into future generations. In doing so, we follow the multiplication principle of the apostle Paul as expressed in 2 Timothy 2:2. There is ample evidence from biblical revelation and church history that two primary components exist, and must be wisely and faithfully employed if the church is to see effective evangelism and church multiplication. One is wise and faithful pastors; the second is deeply committed lay members.

### Effective Pastors

The church growth movement, which began in the 1960s, produced reliable research, documenting clearly that one of the most effective means for evangelizing those without a personal knowledge of Christ is through the planting of new churches. The founder and foremost spokesperson of the church growth movement and message was Dr. Donald McGavran. In the closing years of his life, this missionary statesman and Christian scholar gave a series of lectures at Westminster Theological Seminary. These lectures were published in a book entitled *Effective Evangelism*. In this work McGavran stated:

“Theological seminaries preparing effective ministers of Jesus Christ should pay considerably more attention to how the correct doctrine and the correct Scriptures they must teach can be communicated and believed by multitudes in order to carry out eternal God’s command. The minister is a communicator of the Gospel. He must know how to evangelize effectively.”<sup>2</sup>

McGavran challenged every seminary to require five courses, helping the leaders of churches fulfill their job description according to Ephesians 4:11-16. The first course would deal with the theology of evangelism; second, how to train laypeople for evangelism; third, teaching how to multiply congregations in North American Anglo and minority populations; fourth, how to accurately assess the state of the church and denominations on other continents. Relative to the fourth course, McGavran asked the following penetrating questions.

“Do they comprise 1 percent or 90 percent of the population? Are they growing or declining? Are they carrying on effective evangelism or merely looking after themselves? How can they be helped to become evangelistically more powerful? Are they sending missionaries to their own unreached populations, or must this be done by other nations-states? Are they working to produce a more Christian social order?”<sup>3</sup>

The final course would deal with understanding the methods of evangelism used by God in accomplishing His redemptive purposes. It is obvious from 1 Corinthians 9:19-27 the apostle Paul learned that effective evangelism requires different methods, dependent on the culture of the areas where he was preaching. The book of Acts shows how the early church adapted its methods during the 30 years covered in the book. They understood that methods always change, but principles never do. One clear New Testament principle is that evangelism and church planting happen when laypeople are skillfully guided and encouraged to participate by effective leaders. The church must understand and appropriate this wisdom from God today.

God loves the church. His Son paid for it with His precious blood. Because of this, He gifts the church with people He calls to share His message with the lost. Though beginning in the heart of God, the vision for bringing in the harvest by making disciples and planting new churches, from the human standpoint, should begin in the hearts of our pastors. They are to model and impart to His people what God is so deeply concerned.

From having ministered in hundreds of Southern Baptist churches, my experience and study have convinced me that a church usually moves forward only as the pastor leads it forward. What an ominous task and great responsibility this puts on the shoulders of a pastor. We must pray for these men as Scripture often admonishes us. God wants for them, and for those who are members, to enjoy Christ's work and see it grow (Heb. 13:7, 17). Our churches desperately need pastors for whom Jesus is their first love. When pastors love the Savior, church members will also love Him and what He loves, that is, people coming to know Him as Savior and Lord.

At Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, where I have taught for most of my life, post-graduate courses and doctoral level courses in evangelism have been offered for over 30 years. Scores of research papers and doctoral dissertations have confirmed, both from the standpoint of history and contemporary experience, precisely what the New Testament teaches—the most effective evangelism occurs through one individual communicating God's message and love with another individual. Since people learn best by example, if the pastor does not model one-to-one personal evangelism, the person in the pew will not practice it either. If the pastor has a passion for sharing Jesus, a significant percentage of people in the pews will follow his example. Romans 10:14-15 implies the sending of the laity must include encouraging, equipping, and providing opportunities to do evangelism and help in the starting of churches. This passage ties in with Jesus' word about a plentiful harvest in Matthew 9:35-38, directing the church leadership to

pray that the Lord of the harvest will thrust forth laborers into the field.

I have often said with respect to my teaching, “When I learn better, I will teach better.” I teach to the limit of my light. The same is true in the pastorate. As pastors take the mantle of leading and training members to learn how to labor effectively in the harvest field, the process of multiplication will begin to grow (2 Tim. 2:2). Every pastor is at a different level of personal soul-winning and equipping. The good news is that our Savior has called us to a job to which He assures our success (Matt. 4:19). As pastors grow in the work of equipping the saints to do ministry, the members grow along with them—and so does our Lord’s kingdom.

The key is in keeping our priorities in focus. There will always be many demands clamoring for us to take our eyes away from our primary work—fulfilling His Great Commission. Paul instructed Timothy to make sure he trained others to reproduce disciples and church leaders (2 Tim. 2:2). He immediately followed this directive with the instruction to persevere in this primary objective. Like all pastors, Timothy was told to stay with the priorities of Christ, like a good soldier serving his commanding officer, or as a dedicated athlete committed to the disciplines that bring victory. The ultimate motivation for doing this work is not so much our love for souls but our love for Christ. If we love Him, His interests will be our consuming interests.

According to Ephesians 4:11, pastors are equippers of laity that they might find their place in ministry. Leading people to help start new churches will, as a rule, guarantee engagement in effective evangelism. Some members might be short-term assistants to a new church. Others may become permanent workers and leaders in a new church. Could there be any greater accomplishment for a church to start a church, and then see that church doing the same? This goal is worthy of the commitment of a life. The pastor who leads his members to be evangelists and help plant other churches, will always have members who will endear themselves to him and his vision, both in time and in eternity.

### **Effective Lay Members**

Christianity has always been a movement of laypeople. The story of the early church was primarily a story of the advancement and growth of Christ’s kingdom, accomplished primarily through laypeople who evangelized and planted churches. Later church history resonates with this same testimony. The history of our own Convention is a similar story.

The early Baptist pioneer and leader of Christian work in the nineteenth century in Europe was Julius Gerhard Oncken. Known as the “Father of Continental Baptists,” he was a one-man mission agency, theological seminary, and producer of evangelistic literature. He left a string of new Baptist churches across Europe as he committed himself to evangelizing and setting up instruction and training for new lay believers. These new believers went out and did the same—planting churches in other places through Europe. He adopted and popularized the motto “*Jeder Baptist ein Missionar*”: “Every Baptist a Missionary.”

The desire of every believer in Jesus Christ should be that of ably confessing Christ to others. The Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20) makes it clear that each Christian is sent to seek and save the lost. Jesus stated these exact words in John 20:21: “As my Father has sent me, even so I send you.” Faithfulness to His command means we will be involved in the work of evangelism and church planting.

In the Bible, and throughout history, as far as evangelistic responsibility is concerned. God has always gifted His children for unique purposes, but He calls every one of them to be involved in His work. Some outstanding leaders in the church, such as Spurgeon and Moody, were never ordained partially because of this truth. The gospel today is rapidly spreading in other countries, such as mainland China, because the laity are the primary advancers of it.

Laypeople should be taught the most effective way to evangelize is by “non-manipulative dialogue.” This is the type of evangelism which took place in the book of Acts. It is what Jesus practiced with the woman at the well in John 4. It is evangelism that allows people to talk, to ask questions, and to share about themselves. In other words, it is by sharing a personal life relationship with someone who has not yet made the wonderful discovery of knowing Jesus Christ. As we get to know people, pray for them, do loving deeds for them, and share what our Savior has meant to us—they are attracted to Him. In fact, it helps a nonbeliever understand much more clearly what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ before they know Him personally. In a sense, they are being disciplined before they become disciples. This helps them become much more productive as Christians when they begin their Christian pilgrimage.

Fear keeps most Christians from ever attempting efforts in personal evangelism. Training can help remove this obstacle, and every Christian should take advantage of opportunities to be equipped for this most important work of life. Even the apostles and early followers of Christ experienced fear at times. The early church found it necessary to pray for boldness. Paul specifically asked for prayer that he would not be afraid to witness unashamedly to others (Acts 4:20; Eph. 6:19-20).

## The Great Commission: Making Disciples and Planting Churches

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The well-known story of Mr. Jenner, of Sydney, Australia, should be an encouragement to us at this point. He simply went up and down George Street sharing a brief greeting and directing a question to people. He would say, “Excuse me, Sir. I would like to ask you a question. I hope you will not be offended, but if you were to die tonight and go into eternity, would it be heaven or hell? Please think about it. That is all. God bless you.” He never realized his efforts had made such a difference until late in his life when a pastor from England, Francis Dixon, visited him. Dixon told him of people all over the world, whom he had met, who told of making a commitment to Christ because of a question asked them on a street in Sydney, Australia.

God has led me to use a simple question in my encounters with people on planes, at restaurants, and in other settings. I ask, “Have you ever made the wonderful discovery of knowing Jesus Christ in a personal way, or would you say you are still in the process?” In thousands of experiences, I remember only twice that anyone was offended by this question. People want something real and wonderful in their lives—and in Jesus we have what they are looking for.

It is God’s intention that every Christian be directly involved in evangelism and in helping to plant churches. He gave us the Great Commission because He knows our fulfilling it will make our lives meaningful. We can be involved in nothing greater than to be a part of this work.

Every church, every association of churches, every state convention, and all our national support entities must give themselves without hesitation or detraction to accomplishing this mission: making disciples and planting churches. Nothing will ever unite us like driving down the unshakeable conviction that this is our highest calling. Our Savior calls us to work together to help one another be successful in carrying out what is the dearest burden on His heart—bringing people to a saving faith and, in turn, helping them to reach and disciple those they are acquainted with in the circles of their lives.

ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> James F. Engel and H. Wilbert Norton, *What's Gone Wrong with the Harvest? A Communication Strategy for the Church and World Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), pp. 143-44.

<sup>2</sup> Donald A. McGavran, *Effective Evangelism: A Theological Mandate* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1988), p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>4</sup> H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987), p. 472.

The content of this chapter, written by another author, has been closely edited and changed in places by Roy Fish.





# Chapter One

## Re-Churching North America Through Church Starting<sup>1</sup>

By Richard H. Harris  
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**T**he goal of every Christian church and organization should be to plant healthy, reproducing churches with evangelistic passion. I can see a day, before Christ returns, when there will be a healthy New Testament church within the reach of every Christian and non-Christian in North America. These spiritual lighthouses would be a place for Christians to worship, fellowship, be disciplined, express stewardship, and experience preaching/teaching of the Word. Through an Acts 1:8 strategy, these believers could also be equipped by church leaders to minister and to be engaged in missions, in their Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the world.

Permeating all these Christians and churches would be evangelism. Proclaiming the Good News by way of life and word of mouth is at the foundational purpose of why a church exists. It should be the driving passion of any church planted. You plant churches to reach unreached communities and unevangelized people groups. If churches are planted just to reshuffle existing members, you are merely playing ecclesiological musical chairs. Planting of churches must impact the “pagan pool” and the growth of a new congregation should primarily come out of the harvest.

If North America is to be reached for Christ, existing churches must look beyond their walls to the needs of those who do not know Christ. Everything a church does must be permeated with and overflow into evangelization of the lost. A church that will not evangelize its community and marketplace of life forfeits its very reason for existence.

The evangelism I am talking about is New Testament evangelism. It is holistic from praying to receive Christ to being mobilized as an equipped, on-mission

disciple of Christ to witness and minister to unbelievers. This evangelism does not stop with praying the sinner's prayer, the baptism, church membership, or just church attendance. Being a pew-sitting, lazy, inactive, or nominally involved Christian is not New Testament. As a matter of fact, to refer to a believer as a "lazy Christian" or an "inactive Christian" is an oxymoron.

Many Christians who are uncomfortable with sharing their faith will cling to a heretical teaching today that says, "only 10 percent of Christians have the gift of the evangelist and they are the ones who should share their faith." That is not a true New Testament teaching. The Bible teaches there is the "gift of the evangelist" given by the Holy Spirit. Nowhere does it teach that there is the "gift of evangelism."

All Christians are to be witnesses (Acts 1:8, 2 Corinthians 5:14,17,18,20). It may be fairly accurate to say 10 percent of Christians have the "gift of the evangelist," the unusual ability to call people to decision. However, all Christians and all churches are to be evangelizers. Therein is the motivation, methodology, and mandate to plant churches.

The Research Services Team of the North American Mission Board estimates that two out of every three individuals in America are lost, do not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. They estimate that in Canada only one in six have a personal relationship with Christ.

How do we reach these people? What is our motivation? What are the best methods and church planting models? Who are the people who can be mobilized to reach them? Is church planting the best vehicle and most effective tool to evangelize the people?

The rest of this chapter will speak to these issues. If Christians and Christian churches are serious about reaching North America, we will give all our attention to discovering where the Father wants to go, and buy a one-way ticket to get there.

### **A Changing World**

During my doctoral work, I was required to take a seminar on "The Change Agent." At the time, I despised the class! In retrospect, a new appreciation has been gained for the seminar. The basic thesis of the seminar was that everything in life is ever-changing. Humans can handle change in small and gradual proportions, but most of us resist change in rapid, significant proportions.

So what do we do when our entire world is changing in rapid and gigantic proportions? We are in a world today that closely resembles the Greco-Roman world of the first century. We would be wise to recognize a couple of changes.

First, we live in a world of globalization. The triumph of the Romans extended their influence in an unprecedented manner with the mobility of people, capital, and ideas. Cities and countries became multiethnic and international in unprecedented ways. The town and country areas were also affected by the globalization of the day.

Today, the cold war has ended, borders have opened, and a marked extension of global capitalism and new technology has created a new form of globalization. In America, 42 percent are first-generation citizens.

Much of this globalization is riding on the wings of the World Wide Web. The Internet has become the “great connector” of people groups and cultures. For example, the little city of Belize gets 35 percent of its income from former citizens who have settled in New York City. Major corporations often are owned in one country but the majority of their commerce is in other countries. Miami often has more in common with Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, than Jacksonville, Florida. New York City may be more connected to London or Tokyo than upstate New York.

Second, we live in a pluralistic world, as did the Romans. For centuries, cultures and nations had a single basic faith or religion root. Now we are rapidly becoming multiple faith or religion communities from all parts of the world. This is also part of the globalization occurring.

Another contributor to this pluralistic drift is the disillusionment with the Enlightenment. The old idea that unaided human reason would solve social ills and answer the heart’s big question is finally facing the dead-end sign. While the Enlightenment reigned, Christianity often found itself competing for influence. There was a naturalized ethical form of Christianity that rose to the forefront.

Now a new competitor of sorts is attempting to chip at the foundation of Christianity. Governments today are tracing characteristics similar to the Roman Empire. Each claims to be neutral about faith or postulate that truth is relative. Often, they promote a “faith” while claiming neutrality, such as secular humanism, atheism, or even postmodernity.

In taking these positions, governments are making an idol of their own power. Just as Caesar was happy to acknowledge many “gods” as long as he was one, in essence, governments will tolerate any and all religions as long as none think they have the right to hold public policy accountable to a higher authority. Such

practice, whether intentional or not, is to make Caesar divine. Such is the world and day in which we live.

All this is to say one thing. No matter how globalized or pluralistic our world has become, if Christianity in the day of the Romans could “turn the world upside down,” so can Christianity greater impact our world today. Our world and our culture are primed and ready as never before for evangelism and church planting movements to occur in unprecedented proportions. The New Testament, specifically the book of Acts, holds the simple, yet profound, strategies and methodologies for the Holy Spirit to bless the church in our day as He did in the first century.

As the Holy Spirit blesses the church in our day, the Christian churches in North America will change. It has been estimated that North America needs 100,000 new churches tomorrow just to achieve the church-to-population ratio that existed in the 1950s. Over the past 50 years, the number of churches has decreased in North America while the population has rapidly grown.

A part of globalization is reflected in the vast number of foreign-born U.S. citizens, many who still prefer their native language. This is what is normally referred to as the “heart language.” Today, over 42 percent of all American citizens are foreign-born. Southern Baptists have planted churches in the heart language of more than 120 of these people groups that globalization has brought to our nation through immigration. Most of these churches have been started intentionally in the past 40 years. Church planting has been found to be the most effective evangelistic tool for reaching these people groups, especially those who speak a language other than English.

### **A Changeless Message**

One of the great challenges of our day is to communicate the gospel and plant churches contextually. Some people use the term “contextualization” to mean one interpretation of the Word is as valid as any other. I disagree. Others use “contextualization” to mean that every interpretive community has a perspective, which helps us see aspects of God’s self-revelation that other communities do not see. That is better, but I still disagree. The Word of God is like God Himself, “the same yesterday, today, and forever.” It is the same for every community and every people group. Contextualization is adapting communication of the gospel to fit the context (i.e., terminology, illustration, application) without changing the essential character or content of the gospel. Another way to articulate this principle is to say, “Methodologies are ever-changing but the message is never changed.”

In Acts 13, Paul shared the gospel in a synagogue to those who believed in the God of the Bible. In Acts 14, Paul shared the same gospel to a pagan, blue-collar crowd. There are differences and similarities in each situation. In Acts 13, the basis for authority is Scripture and John the Baptist. In Acts 14, he argues to the listeners about the general revelation of God, the greatness of His creation. In Acts 13, with the Jews and the God-fearers, Paul ignores the doctrinal issues of God and gets right to Christ (i.e., who He was and what He did). In Acts 14, he stresses to the pagans the very concept of God.

In Acts 13, Paul stresses the need for a relationship with Christ, not religion. He told the religious folks they were good but not good enough. They needed Christ to justify them. In Acts 14, he tells them to turn from “worthless things—idols—to the living God” who is the real source of joy. Life is not in inanimate objects but in the Living God. Freedom is in Christ not being enslaved to dead idols.

Similarities in Acts 13 and Acts 14 include both audiences being told about a powerful, yet good, God (Acts 13:16-22; 14:1-17). In both chapters, he tells the audiences they are trying to save themselves in the wrong way. In Acts 13:39, moral people are trying to save themselves by obeying the law. In Acts 14:15, pagans are trying to give themselves to idols and gods, which cannot satisfy.

In both instances, Paul tells the hearers not to depend on their performances, while stressing how God has broken into history to accomplish our salvation. While Chapter 14 doesn't specifically mention their own salvation is in Christ, it does say salvation is something God has accomplished for us, not something we do.

Paul does not change the gospel, but he does adapt it generously. He maintained a balance of being relevant to the culture while retaining the integrity of the gospel, thus contextualization. If we over-contextualize, we can easily affirm practices God condemns. If we under-contextualize our evangelism and church planting, we miss generations of unbelievers (i.e., postmoderns) who have little to no knowledge of Judeo-Christian truths and see the gospel of the Bible as an antiquated, irrelevant ideology for our day.

Therein is the challenge. We present the gospel and plant churches in a culturally relevant manner while never compromising one iota of truth from the Word to be relevant, politically correct, or to achieve societal acceptance. May God give us the discernment and boldness to do both in our day as Paul did so effectively in his day in evangelism and church planting.

### **A Consistent Method**

The longer I am in ministry the more convinced I am of a basic truth: “anything healthy reproduces.” Healthy Christians, by the empowering of the Holy Spirit,

reproduce other Christians. Healthy churches, by the empowering of the Holy Spirit, reproduce themselves in ministry, Bible study units, and new congregations.

When you look at church planting in the book of Acts, it is not an unnatural event. It is not forced on people by circumstance, nor is it something only a few churches do. When Paul evangelized and discipled, he always planted churches.

There is much discussion today on the purposes of the church. Some say there are five: preaching/teaching, evangelism, discipleship, fellowship, and worship. Others would add ministry, missions, and stewardship. Yet, inherent in all these purposes, or maybe alongside all these purposes, is reproduction, multiplication, or church planting. By ignoring the obvious there is the unconscious suggestion, “That was for Paul’s day, not for ours.”

Church planting must grow out of an attitude and atmosphere in a local church where reproduction or multiplication is a core value. In Acts 14:21-28, you see two phases to Paul’s ministry. First, he communicated the gospel. In verse 21 the text says, “They preached the good news (literally in the Greek, they “gospelled” the city). The result was large numbers who became believers. In verses 21 and 22, they went back to the converts to “strengthen and encourage.” The verbs used mean they established and fortified them. They taught and re-taught them “the faith,” probably a reference to theology and doctrinal beliefs, or what we call discipleship.

Second, Paul helped with church formation by making sure believers were congregated and leaders consecrated. In verse 23, “Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church. . . .” It appears they saw the need to establish new congregations, each of which became a church in its own right, but not under his direct authority, nor dependent on him. He made them autonomous churches commissioned to fulfill the Great Commission. In verse 22, when he returned they were disciples. In verse 23, when he left they were churches.

The fact that Paul appointed a plurality of leaders out of the converts suggests he did not keep them under his direct authority. He “committed them to the Lord,” which suggests his complete reliance upon the Holy Spirit to complete and preserve what had been started with this body of believers.

Paul was traveling to and from Lystra, Iconium, Antioch, Pisidia, Pamphylia, Perga, and Attalia (verses 21, 24, 25). If he was visiting this many places, so were others. A type of globalization was occurring, mobile populations coming to the

cities and the town and country areas. They brought with them their language, culture, and religion, or non-religion.

Pluralization was also occurring. Different generations and people groups were being put together in their new communities. The “native” peoples were no longer homogenous. New opportunities and new models for evangelism and church planting emerged.

Paul’s answer to globalization and pluralization in his day was gospel communication and church formation. I believe Acts 14 would teach us that these two gospel companions are the answer to our day of globalization and pluralization poised against the backdrop of postmodernism. Let us gospelize our communities and get the new believers into healthy, reproducing churches.

### **A Compelling Motivation**

What is the motivation to plant a church? This is a question we are often asked as church leaders. Pastors deal with the possibility of losing members, money, and key leaders to a church plant. When the average pastor thinks about evangelism, he thinks about “what will be added to my church (i.e., baptisms, members, or resources)?” When the average pastor thinks about church planting, he thinks about what he will lose (i.e., members, resources, and focus).

First, allow me to address what the motivation should not be for planting a church. Many church plants occur as a result of people rebelling against doctrine, vision (or revision), a traditional or nontraditional philosophy of ministry and/or a style of worship or leadership. Sometimes those leaving express concern about charismatic issues, cultural relevancy needs, or over differences in “doing church” between first-generation Christians and second-, third-, sometimes fourth-generation Christians. Some of the leaders of such plants go with a pioneer spirit, depending on God and their own resourcefulness. This is the wrong motivation.

A second approach to church planting grows out of the reluctance yet necessity of a church’s leaders to do something. Circumstances force church leaders, somewhat against their will, to agree to planting a church. Sometimes it is because a church is outgrowing its facilities, members move to another area and press for a church “out here,” or members who feel neglected (i.e., younger, older, different music, style of worship, etc.) and begin to drop out or push for a new worship service or an entirely new church. Church leaders will often give in reluctantly, providing token money and support to plant the church. This is



usually not good (though there are some success stories) because the mother church will not sponsor another church until it is coerced to do something. The church planted will likely not sponsor a plant because reproduction is not built in from the beginning. In other words, the motivation is wrong and an unnatural reproduction/multiplication has taken place.

The model and motivation in the book of Acts is that reproduction occurs out of the health of the church by natural process. The church has an insatiable desire to get the gospel to all people. There is a passion to obey the Lord's command to take the gospel to all nations (ethnos people groups). Starting new Bible study units, new ministries, and planting new congregations is wrapped up in a church's theology of evangelism, missions, ministry, and kingdom expansion. Planting other churches is as much a part of who the church is as preaching/teaching, evangelism, fellowship, worship, discipleship, and ministry. Paul consistently exemplified this holistic approach to the reproduction of the church.

The natural reproductive mindset of the New Testament grows out of some basic convictions and commitments:

1. A commitment to use all legitimate, biblical means to get the gospel to an unreached community or people group.
2. A willingness to give away control of money, members, and leaders, because they are not yours but belong to the Father.
3. The desire to give up some control of the ministry of the new church plant, recognizing each congregation is a living organism and may not take a shape totally like the sponsor church.
4. The servant-leader mindset, which wants to care for and build the kingdom more than an empire or even a tribe.

Paul always gave up the churches to the Lord and the kingdom so Christ could be honored and the gospel delivered to anyone and everyone. He was willing to "lose something" if the "kingdom could gain something." It was no accident he constantly emphasized Christ as the Head of the Church and the Church as His bride.

A church planting mindset is a kingdom mindset, a Christian ministry mindset, resulting in reproduction and multiplication. A kingdom mindset is conducive to church health; and anything healthy will reproduce!

### **A Christian Army Mobilized**

The great army of the Lord yet to be unleashed are the individuals we call

on-mission Christians or laypeople. Southern Baptists are not going to reach their optimum effectiveness or efficiency until we call out, equip, empower, and deploy laypeople in large numbers.

The key person to help us make this happen is the pastor. The one person who can keep this from happening is the pastor. If only our pastors will challenge our laypeople and give them “permission” or “validation,” we will be amazed at what God can do. It will not happen as long as we practice an ecclesiology which resembles what I call a “Christian-Papal” mentality. The “high priest” has to bless everything before it is legitimately church.

Please do not misunderstand, I strongly believe in the high office of the pastor-leader. However, out of my confidence in the leadership of the Holy Spirit and the priesthood of the believer, I also have great faith in the potential of the empowered laity. There is a healthy balance in the roles of pastor and laypeople in the Bible.

In Acts 14:21, Paul preached the gospel and a large number of folks came to know the Lord, becoming disciples (not just pew sitters). Paul and Barnabas then appointed leaders to guide the ministry. These leaders were laypeople empowered and entrusted with the ministry. Both pastors and laypeople had significant and complementary roles.

A friend of mine told me his father was a missionary in Central America. He said during the years his family was there, his dad and one other missionary planted almost 250 new churches. I inquired how they were able to accomplish so much. He said they taught the churches to never allow a man to serve as a deacon unless he had a preaching point. So all deacons were equipped, challenged, and empowered to be leading out in ministry at all times. These preaching points often resulted in new churches.

I believe a key principle was evident in these church plants and confirms one of my strong convictions. Nothing has a more explosive impact on lay leaders than when they teach and minister the Word. When they do so, they experience firsthand the power in the Word/gospel and the empowering of the Holy Spirit. They realize the Lord can use them to accomplish the mighty deeds of God.

Now when you couple this empowered teaching and ministry with church planting, real multiplication takes place. Nothing creates more new lay ministry jobs like church planting. Nothing engages, challenges, and matures them like leading in planting a new congregation. Nothing tends to unlock lay ministry and new leadership potential as significantly as involving them in a church plant.

As laypeople participate, they must daily answer: “What will I give?” “What will I do?” or “What contribution would God have me make to this new congregation?” On average, the layperson will pledge much more to the new work (two to three times more) than the existing church. In addition, new relations are established that complement friendship/relational evangelism. There is a renewed dependence on God and an acute awareness of the Holy Spirit working supernaturally among the body. New churches release enormous new energy (i.e., spiritual, evangelistic, material resources) on the part of everyone involved, especially laypeople.

When you have more equipping and more empowering of lay leaders, the multiplication factor becomes apparent. When you have more people serving the Lord, exercising new levels of faith and dependence, more relations being built, more gospel proclaimed, more people involved in fulfilling the Great Commission, the end result is not surprising. We see more baptisms as more congregations are planted and more laypeople are unleashed. We know that the average new church is five times more effective in reaching people than established churches. The average Southern Baptist church, 10 years old or older, averages 2.5 baptisms per 100 resident members. A Southern Baptist church 10 years old or younger averages 10.8 baptisms per 100 resident members. I believe equipped, empowered, and deployed people are at the heart of this equation. Newer churches tend to depend more on laypeople to do the ministry. The older the church the more the church tends to depend on paid staff to do ministry.

### **Church Planting Comparison Models**

When I am around some of the church’s finest missiologists, the conversation will often drift toward the various approaches being used to plant churches. As I have listened, observed, and studied the New Testament, several principles stand out in my mind.

First, there are far too many churches that are plateaued and are not intentional in their evangelistic outreach. Most of these churches have spiritual health issues. The large majority have grown as big as they want to be. This is one of the biggest reasons why we need to aggressively plant healthy, reproducing churches with evangelistic passion. The Holy Spirit moves in many ways across our nation, and we know church planting is not the only way to reach new generations, new residents, or new people groups, but it certainly is one of the best ways.

Second, evangelism and church planting may be the best prescription for plateaued and dying churches. I often say, “Nothing adds excitement to the family like a baby.” Like human babies bless families, spiritual babies bless

churches, renewing enthusiasm—and motivation for the mission of their church will result. The focus of the church turns outward again and helps the church move from an internal maintenance mentality. The new spiritual babies can be new congregations to reach people the existing churches are not reaching.

The big question then becomes, “How do we plant a new church?” If you are asking this, you may want to begin by ordering a copy of the manual, *Seven Steps to Planting a New Church* from the North American Mission Board at (770) 410-6212 or [www.namb.net/cp](http://www.namb.net/cp). This manual has become one of our most popular resources. Also you can access extensive church planting how-to resources from the [www.namb.net](http://www.namb.net) site or better yet from [wwwChurchPlantingVillage.net](http://wwwChurchPlantingVillage.net).

### **Third, there are four very prominent models to planting a church:**

1. **Split cell**—This is where a mother church sends out a portion of its membership to establish a congregational core for a daughter church. This “hiving off” or sending out of members can be five to ten individuals/families. Often, it may be 25 to 30, and occasionally it may be as many as 100-200. Though some church “splits” are the result of division and disunity in the body, this healthy plant results from the intentional reproduction and sending out. This plant is generally in the same geographical area as the mother church.

Johnson Ferry Baptist Church in the northern Atlanta suburbs is a healthy church that chose to reproduce itself by the split-cell method. Dr. Bryant Wright, senior pastor for Johnson Ferry, and I met to discuss a vision for planting a new church in a growing suburb about 25 miles from Johnson Ferry Baptist Church. The following plan began to unfold. Dr. Wright and the church leaders had discovered about 300 families who were members of the Johnson Ferry Church, living in the target area. Dr. Wright indicated he would like to bring a church planter on staff. This new staff member would have the opportunity to meet the families who live in the target area and recruit them for the new plant. All this time Dr. Wright was mentoring this church planter. This is a pattern that Johnson Ferry Baptist Church has followed for some other church plants. The church was launched about two years before this chapter was written.

2. **Team plants**—This is much like a split cell but is often in a different geographic area than the mother church. A core is established by two or three staff families and a few church families, all moving to a new area. This “colonization” of these families establishes the congregation core.

First Baptist Church of Woodstock is my home church. Pastor Johnny Hunt has a heart for mentoring young pastors. He also has a heart for starting new churches. One of the methods Woodstock is utilizing for starting a new church in the Las Vegas area is team church planting.

First Baptist Church brought the prospective church planter on staff in May of 2000 to serve under the mentorship of pastor Hunt and church staff. Two other staff members were brought on staff in September for the Las Vegas church plant. Several lay couples made commitments to transfer their employment and residency to Las Vegas. Moving from Georgia to Las Vegas, they became a part of the core group for the new church.

The Las Vegas church planting team began the relocation in January 2000. A core group was formed in the home of the church planter in early 2001. During the next few weeks, the church planting team set a goal to grow the core group to 60 by late summer. Their goal was to launch Hope Baptist Church on Labor Day weekend. The goal of 60 was reached in the first few months. The core group had reached more than 100 by early summer of 2000. Hope Baptist Church was launched with more than 200 attending the first service.

3. ***Apostolic plants***—The planter and his family go into an area, occasionally with one or two others, and plant a church out of the harvest. Some Christians are often attracted to the cause, but the vast majority of the members are led to the Lord and disciplined into the new congregation. We often refer to this model as a frontier or pioneer church plant. The planter will tend to stay six months to two years, at which time the apostolic church planter assists the church in locating and discovering its pastoral leadership. The planter then leaves to plant another congregation.
4. ***Cluster partnership plant***—This is where two or more congregations cooperate and pool resources toward the planting of a new congregation. This may be in the same geographical area or it may be a sizable distance from the sponsor congregations. Often, two or more people groups are cooperating. One may provide the planter and mentoring. Another may provide financial resources or a facility in which to meet. Sometimes all partners will share in resources and members. This model is the most underused by smaller churches but is possibly the best strategy for small churches to become intentionally involved in church planting.

The model to use for planting a church may be determined by cultural or contextual issues. All models selected should primarily focus on reaching people for Christ. As new believers are disciplined following their believer's baptism, they

should be daily growing in spiritual health. As they grow, the church should be daily growing in spiritual health. The ultimate measuring rod for any model adapted in church planting is whether or not the congregation becomes a healthy, reproducing body of believers.

In his book *The Habits of Highly Effective Churches*, George Barna speaks to the church health issue. Barna's definition of effectiveness is important to understand. "Throughout this book, I will describe a ministry as being effectible when lives are transformed such that people are constantly enabled to become more Christ-like."<sup>2</sup> Barna identified the nine habits of highly effective churches:

- Highly effective churches rely on strategic leadership.
- Highly effective churches are organized to facilitate highly effective ministry.
- Highly effective churches emphasize developing significant relationships within the congregation.
- Highly effective churches invest themselves in genuine worship.
- Highly effective churches engage in strategic evangelism.
- Highly effective churches get their people involved in systematic theological growth.
- Highly effective churches utilize holistic stewardship practices.
- Highly effective churches serve the needy people in their community.
- Highly effective churches equip families to minister to themselves.

### Conclusion

Healthy churches should be reproducing churches with evangelistic passion. Most any church could reproduce itself today by simply looking around to see what people group it is not reaching. Begin a Bible study, a ministry, or plant a new congregation for the people group. Your existing church will not lose anything. Your church and members will gain a great deal in spiritual blessings out of being obedient to the Lord and the Great Commission.

### Principles

1. The heartbeat of the church must be evangelism.
2. All Christians are mandated to share their faith.
3. The world is primed and ready for evangelism and church planting.
4. Great need exists to present the gospel and plant churches in a culturally relevant way without compromise.
5. Anything healthy reproduces.
6. Equipping and empowering laypersons is a key element for future kingdom growth

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### Notes

1. Thanks are expressed to Dr. Tim Keller, senior pastor, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York City, for helping stimulate my thinking on some of this subject matter through a couple of his Sunday sermons. Dr. Keller is one of America's finest missiologists for New Testament church planting.
2. George Barna, *The Habits of Highly Effective Churches* (Ventura, Calif.: Gospel Light/Regal Books, 2001), p. 15. Used by permission.



## Chapter Two

# The DNA of a Church Planter

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**I**t was a dark and rainy day as my expectant wife and I arrived in the New England coastal town of New Bedford, Mass. We were tired from the long trip to our destination, but highly excited as well—it was there that we would boldly pioneer a new church start.

A small core group had gathered to plant a Baptist church in this highly Catholic northeastern community. What would it be like to begin a new work in an area that needed a strong witness for evangelicalism? Would we find and build friends, flock, and perhaps people of faith? The answer was a resounding yes to all three questions.

Yet skepticism was the core value of the community. Survival quickly became the norm for many other churches in the area. No one was trying any longer—there was no reason to attempt what had become seemingly impossible in such a cocooning community. Better to accept things as they were than to risk your reputation by being different. What had my wife and I sensed from the Lord? Were we correct in hearing God's call on our life to plant and pastor in this seafaring town? I remember feeling as if we had been dropped by parachute from 30,000 feet in the air and told that wherever we landed, we would need to make work for the cause of Christ. All my life I had been a maverick; I was now beginning to realize that to survive, most church planters need that maverick gene deeply embedded in their DNA! Church planting is not for the timid, the faint of heart, or anyone else who lacks the aggressive nature needed to stay on task and persevere.

In many circles, mavericks are in vogue today. A dear friend of mine describes them well: "Mavericks blaze out on new horizons where the established just will not or cannot go!" Most successful church planters possess that quality. They are the revolutionaries, the trailblazers, the pioneers. These trendsetters are the explorers that seek to blaze a new path of nonconformity through innovation and revolutionary zeal. It is fun being a young maverick! It takes

faith and a willingness to allow the Holy Spirit to prove Himself over and over again in your life. It is a fresh indwelling of the One on high who directs your every step. When you are not sure where you are going, it is vital to hear from the One who directs and orders your every step. A maverick is bold, but he knows just how critical it is to follow the One who set all things in motion.

They say that everything reproduces what is encoded in its DNA. Our DNA is the molecule of life, determining everything from our outward appearance, personality traits, susceptibility to disease, and behavioral responses. As the biological blueprint, DNA contains detailed instructions for proteins, the building blocks of life. And it is the only known molecule that has the ability to duplicate itself in a process called reproduction. I have learned that there is a basic component in the DNA of a church plant that affects the region around it. It has little to do with how you look, the style of your music, or even the type of sermons you preach. Neither is the success of a particular plant determined by the quantity of funding (or the lack thereof) received from an association or denomination. The success of a church plant lies in its DNA.

That DNA is encoded in one word for church planting: revolution.

Every revolution in history has been marked by several “maverick” characteristics:

- A harshness of life in present culture
- A new vision of what life can be in the future
- An appeal to the deep part of human personality that motivates a response to take action
- A skilled simplifier who can adapt ideology to suit his present time and place
- Simplification through symbols and pictures
- A certainty and decisiveness that there is no other way than the present course of action
- Risk-taking that sees even setbacks as only part of the process of setting forth justice

While not all revolutions in world history were marked by noble motives or even created by leaders of integrity, revolution is the DNA of a church plant that stands out, stays at the task, and is sustainable. I am referring to a church plant designed and deployed to affect every corner of its region via influence and replication. This is an uncontrollable movement rather than a managed strategy. Mavericks are more interested in getting it done than they are in sitting around talking about

doing it. Deep within the maverick's DNA is a revolutionary spirit, and that spirit is the only thing that will turn our nation toward its need for Jesus Christ. It will not happen through debates, discussion, or detailed deliberations. It will only take place through revolutionary leaders who are willing to lose what it takes to gain what God wants.

A revolution is defined as an “overthrow or renunciation of one government or ruler and the substitution of another by the governed.” It is also defined as “activity or movement designed to effect fundamental changes in the system as is.”<sup>1</sup>

Until we actually see spiritually lost people as God sees them, we will go on with business as usual. When the DNA of a revolution is planted in our hearts, we will burst out and change the nature of our culture no matter what it costs or what it requires from us. Revolution comes because things cannot continue as they are. And they are sparked when someone has had enough and determines at all costs to do something.

### **A Maverick with a Revolutionary Burden**

The DNA of a church plant, then, first begins in a maverick with a revolutionary burden.

Successful pioneer church planters are rarely pastoral in their motivation. They have little time or desire for extensive caring for those already in the kingdom. They have determined to be the church for a specific region that refuses to accept the state of things as they are. They upset others because of their impatience. They are frustrated by meetings that gather to simply talk, but will never really take action. Listed below are a few things that will quickly siphon off any maverick church planter's energy.

### **How to Waste a Maverick's Time**

- Schedule long meetings that have no real sense and purpose. Keep the agenda foggy while wasting long hours that are not redeemable! Major on meetings and disregard the mission.
- Allow the unfit to lead the unwilling to do the unnecessary.
- Collect a group of low achievers around you that mirror your every idea and then collectively decide that nothing can be achieved!
- Stifle your bright stars with various committee works that promote the status quo but fail to achieve greatness.

- Keep the young guns separated from key decisions by top-down bureaucrats whose aim is tightening the grip of the organization.

Understand that the revolutionary maverick always seems to be in a rush. Deadlines are always too far away; nothing is ever good enough; the pace is always too slow. Those around a maverick often feel they can never measure up yet they are drawn to what they perceive as a calling of greater significance than themselves. They feel that if they stay close, they will make a huge difference. They are captivated by the scope of what could happen. A maverick cannot sit still while others debate strategy. It antagonizes his spirit. He is constantly dissatisfied. It is what has been labeled as creative discontent. Something is wrong, and he is someone who can do something about it! The burden of spiritually unconnected people burns within him. The plight of those headed to hell surges through his veins. He cannot stand the thought that even one person will go into eternity without Christ.

### **Qualities All Mavericks Possess**

All this explains why a revolutionary maverick can only be turned loose; he can never be contained. He is like a wild horse that cannot be corralled. He is at his best running free across the plains. Maverick church planters possess tremendous qualities that assist them in boldly planting a new work out of nothing. They are creative risktakers—go-getters who possess:

- Great giftedness
- Aggressive, must-win traits
- Entrepreneurial zeal
- “Don’t play by the rules” mind-set
- Little use for institutional conformity
- A desire to be free to fly and soar to greatness
- Passion (non-mavericks possess paralysis)
- Missional attitude (non-mavericks move to mission-minded mechanics)
- Great vision with the wind full in their sails

These are the kinds of church planters we need to be looking for. They are pregnant with that which must come out. They feel things changing in them, their passions being redirected. Birth pains have arrived and what is inside cannot stay there. It must be born, or both they and that which is developing within them will die.

### **Mavericks Who Made a Difference in Life**

**Stephen Jobs** – The computer geek who began working in his garage

with nothing but an idea. His maverick way of thinking brought Apple to the throne and IBM to its knees.

**Dr. Martin Luther King** – King stood in front of a nation torn by racial strife and gave birth to a dream where racial hatred would no longer be found in the modern dictionary. He was willing to die for a cause and a dream, and the result was that the fabric of life in America was changed forever!

**Paul the Apostle** – Paul moved from being a destroyer of godly things to perhaps the Lord's greatest herald of the transformation that Jesus Christ can make in a redeemed life.

**John Adams** – Pre-revolutionary Boston lawyer and later, our second president. He risked his law practice, his family's safety, and his political future by signing on a piece of parchment that declared a yet-to-be-born nation's freedom.

**Nelson Mandela** – The jailed reformer who envisioned a day when an African would lead his own nation as president with all the fences of apartheid pulled down.

**Martin Luther** – Whether he nailed his treatise on the door at Wittenberg or not we may never know, but those convictions ushered in a change for the church that was so needed in his time.

**Chuck Colson** – Perhaps this modern-day maverick is a reminder for all of us that a changed man with Christ on fire in his heart can become a prophetic voice for Christians everywhere.

**Billy Graham** – When everyone said an evangelistic preacher could make a difference in North America, one said, "I will go with the glorious message that Jesus Christ can set you free if you give your life to Him."

**Peter and John** – Stood before the religious leaders of their day and exclaimed, "We cannot keep quiet about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4: 20, CEV).

**Jesus Christ** – Even the religious leaders of His day were not ready for the simple message of my Lord. He was, perhaps, the greatest maverick of all time.

Every revolution is led by a maverick who cannot allow things to remain the same. They become the voice for change. They initiate action whether they have

the support of everyone around them or not. Our own nation was founded by a company of mavericks. They were nonconformists, but primarily they were adventurers. When these key attributes avail within your church plant or organization, you can be assured that it will squeeze out the juice from your most gifted people. The basic fact is that the older the organization, the less room there is for the truly creative. To change things, it takes a new dose of maverick blood to arrest the slide towards institutionalism. Make way for the mavericks! They are living out on the future's edge. I believe that the maverick can save us from the downward drain of institutionalism. Today—even in church planting—we need to rebirth ourselves. If we do not, we make what might have become a movement into a concrete and unmoving monument. It is sad today that many existing churches kill off the young gun before he can take root. That is why I have said over and over that church planting is primarily a young man's sport! Every church in North America would love to have a maverick if it were not for the messes they make to the status quo.

Church plants that make significant differences are led by revolutionary mavericks, leaders with excellent communication skills and personal charisma, who fervently believe in the cause they are spreading, even if others do not. They are people with immovable courage who will pay any price to see their vision become reality. It is not the destitute and the hopeless who create revolutions; it is those who are losing out or feel life is going to get worse. It is not rising expectations but declining expectations that lie at the core of a revolution.

### **What Are the Specific Attributes of a Revolutionary?**

#### **1. Revolutionary mavericks are driven by decisions fueled by a dream.**

Revolutionary mavericks decide to act whether or not they feel like it, whether or not anyone supports them, or whether or not they see immediate results. They quickly decide and live by their decisions, because they have learned the art of living from the inside out.

Recently I listened to a message by Mark Gorman entitled, "Don't Water the Trees." It spoke to the need for people who want to make a difference as a revolutionary force in their surroundings:

The palm tree is the most grand and beautiful tree of the desert. There

are some real interesting things about the palm tree. One of the things about the palm tree is that it is never watered—unless it's here in your yard in Florida, you may water it. But out in the desert nobody waters a palm tree. That palm tree sends that root system deep, deep, deep, deep under that hot burning sand until it finds water.

You need to make a decision, a commitment that you are going to accept responsibility for who you are and for how you feel. How I feel is not up to you. I don't give you the permission. See, there are some of you—which the next guy that walks through your door has complete control of how you are going to feel. You gave him permission before he walked in the door. He walks into your business with a bad attitude and he ruins your day. Well, why did you let him do that? Now his day may be ruined, but don't let him ruin yours.

I was getting on an airplane two weeks ago [and the airline delayed the flight because of] mechanical problems. . . . I have made it evidently clear to every airline—whenever they have those [situations], I say “You take as long as you want to.” Don't rush them when they are fixing the planes. [Do] you hear what I am saying? Don't rush that! They delayed us; they had all kinds of problems and frustrations, and everybody was grumpy and grouchy out in the boarding area. They [were] all just frustrated and everything else. So we [were] getting on the plane and the flight attendant looks at me. (You know they have to ask you how you are doing even if they don't want to know, [and] you know they are paid to [do that].) So I [was] getting on the plane and she said, “Well, hello, sir, how are you today?” I said, “Fantastic.” She looked at me. Everybody else had [boarded] griping and grumpy. She [asked], “Why are you doing fantastic?” I said, “Because I decided to.” She backed up and said, “That's right, I can just decide to, can't I?” I said, “That's right . . . you just make a decision that ‘I don't give anybody permission to ruin my day.’”

The only reason that they can ruin your day is because you are getting all of your nutrition and all of your refreshing from the surface. You are getting everything from up above on the soil that everybody else can affect. But if you tap way down into the source that is way down underneath everything else that is going on around you, that source is not moderated or supplied by the world. It is not supplied by the system of things around you. It's supplied by God almighty and He is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Revolutionary leaders do not look for support from the words and actions of those



who surround them. They are rarely permission-getters from higher levels of authority. There is a taproot they have driven down into the heart of God. Instructions come via the Spirit. Leadership arrives in deeply devoted times of prayer. They are in constant contact with the moving of God's spirit.

This does not mean they are uncooperative or unaccountable. Mavericks are people whose emotions are the caboose and their God-dreamed vision is the engine. They live from the inside out!

### **2. Revolutionary mavericks cut their losses and consistently move forward for the sake of the cause.**

The focus is on the people yet to arrive. There is no more important person than the one who stands outside the group; they are people of highest value. Time, energy, and human effort remain tightly concentrated on those who have yet to let Jesus Christ change their life both now and for eternity. But there will always be those who arrive, who become homesteaders; those who buck the changes the next group of people will demand.

It is a fact of church planting that very few of the people who start with you will finish with you. That is why a maverick's focus is on the next person to arrive rather than trying to keep those they have content. Mavericks feel pain. But pain is not allowed to detour them from the cause. They are willing to lose now to see the sweeping changes birthed in their heart at the start of the revolution come to pass. They are willing to give up a relationship or sacrifice a possession in a continuous denial of self-preservation because the revolution is all-important. Nothing else matters except that the spirit of change stays in high gear. There is little time to grieve over loss. The cause of Christ is all that matters. True mavericks stay until the revolution is over.

Revolutionary mavericks believe that hell is real and that real people go there. They see themselves as the last chance before people fall off the road's end, which is a cliff into a Christless eternity. They have no assurance of tomorrow. They do not pin their hopes on what could happen. They pour their heart into what needs to happen today. Their time is not theirs to prioritize. Their finances are not theirs to disperse. Their bodies are not theirs to use. They have come very close and stay close to what John the Baptist said, "Not I, but Christ." The decision is never a matter of what will be comfortable, but what will keep the revolution alive and moving forward.

### **3. Revolutionary mavericks do not enter into anything to be a failure.**

I am experienced at failing. I could very well make a David Letterman “Top Ten” list for the stupid church planter mistakes every year I have been in the Lord’s work. But I am not a failure. A failure is a person who quits before the commander says, “It’s over.”

In his book, *If You Want To Walk On Water, You’ve Got To Get Out Of The Boat*, John Ortberg writes:

In the movie *Chariots of Fire*, British runner Harold Abrams runs against the Scottish champion Eric Liddell and loses for the first time in his life. The pain of failure is so great he decides he cannot race again.

His girlfriend Cybil says, “Harold, this is absolutely ridiculous. It’s a race you’ve lost, not a relative. Nobody’s dead.”

Harold moans, “I’ve lost.”

“I know. I was there. I remember watching you; it was marvelous. You were marvelous. He was more marvelous, that’s all. On that day the best man won. . . He was ahead, there was nothing you could have done. He won fair and square.”

“Well, that’s that,” Abrams says.

“If you can’t take a beating, perhaps it’s for the best.”

“I don’t run to take beatings—I run to win!” Harold shouts. “If I can’t win, I won’t run.”

Cybil pauses, and then says to him firmly, “If you don’t run, you can’t win.”

To run the best race you can, to give it everything that is in you, and win—that is glorious. To run the race, to give your best and lose—that’s painful. But it is not failure. Failure is refusing to run the race at all.<sup>2</sup>

A maverick never allows failure to stop him from going forward. In the movie *Apollo 13*, the flight director exclaims as the crippled spacecraft makes its way back to earth, “Failure is not an option. . . not on my watch.” That is the heart of a revolutionary. I have been down, discouraged, and often doubtful. I have been misunderstood, misguided, and have poorly managed critical moments over and over. I have felt that the thing I am encountering right then, is that which will

finally spell the end of me. But time and time again God has taken me back to the spirit of the revolution. “There are so many people out there. . . so many who feel they cannot go to church. . . so many people who feel that they could belong. . .”

I am absolutely convinced that there is no hope for a person’s future, no health for a person’s present, and no healing of a person’s past without a vibrant relationship and daily experience with Jesus Christ.

To be a failure, then, is to start having church for those who are already members of the club. Mavericks are too preoccupied with a “holy heartburn” to see people yet to join become members of the revolution. It bothers them that too many of their new friends will burn eternally in hell if they die without Christ. They sit up nights worried about the spiritual state of those they met that day. They keep track of the progress of moving people closer to a relationship with Christ and his family, the local church.

They may fail over and over at getting it done right, but they know they must create a place and keep the place created—one where sinners can be turned into saints; beggars can become belongers and consumers can morph into contributors. Mavericks create a place where people with no future find faith in God’s future for their life.

### **What a Maverick Fears**

Mavericks fear what they will do next might not be big enough to move one’s life towards.

### **What Organizations Should Fear**

Our organization, like any other, should fear that should we lose the mavericks—if they are not given the chance to do their work for this organization—they will do it for someone else!

It is an “old way/new way” dilemma. The old way is the Henry Ford way; the new way is the Jack Welch way. The old way wanders from men to movements to mechanization, and finally ends at building one’s own monument to nothing. Mavericks understand that the key to change is Holy Spirit-led and Holy Spirit-inspired movements that remain flexible! Mavericks are neither troublemakers nor malcontents; those are the rebels. We must give the mavericks room to flourish. Mavericks need to feel liberated and not weighted down. Unless we shift with new young maverick blood, our best days will be our past days. If we do not fix it, we will fade into irrelevance.

Revolutionary mavericks are building a house of hope, health, and healing. They have a hunger a meal will not erase, a desire one evening of pleasure can never satisfy, a thirst, which can never be quenched.

They can fail; but they will never live as failures.

### **4. Finally, revolutionary mavericks do everything with specific intent.**

Personally, my focus is what Bill Easum calls the “keeper of the DNA.” The natural tendency of a church is to concentrate on the needs of its members. I consistently am pulling on the ministry rope to direct our attention to the plight of the unreached. To do so, I readjust my calendar and energy at the beginning of each day and at the close of each week in order to model the primary priority of the yet-to-arrive.

In my years of planting churches and pastoring, the last calls I made at the close of each day were to members. The top priority calls were always to those yet to join. Every hobby strategically included someone I knew who was spiritually lost.

Ask yourself about every call, every time commitment, every meeting, every social encounter: “What is this doing that will lead a specific person or group of people to be drawn to the revolution?” Nonrevolutionary activities will drain you of the energy to keep the revolution of reaching spiritually lost people in high gear.

Check your schedule before the day starts and at its end to see where your time was spent. Adjust accordingly. Too often, we have a tendency to think that we have worked when the majority of our time has been spent in minor things that absorb loads of time and do little or nothing to further the revolution.

The captain is constantly monitoring the direction of his ship to stay the given course; the crews were brought on to arrive at the close of the journey. This is your job as a leader. It cannot be delegated. If you are unwilling to assume responsibility for this job, then you need to allow someone else to captain the ship.

### **How Do You Encourage a Maverick?**

Give them a longer leash than you would someone who is older. Mavericks need a little room to grow. Let them fly, and they will take you with them.

Put them in various leadership situations they can grow from. It gives them own-

ership and a sense of worth and accomplishment.

- Hear them (really); don't just appease them.
- Allow for growth in what they do not know.
- Let the mavericks work alone sometimes to discover their giftedness.
- Leave them alone. Stop looking over their shoulder and don't second-guess them.
- Give them room and time to stretch and flourish.
- Reward the BIG thinking and BIG successes!

We will not change the fabric of our nation without such a maverick-styled revolution. A few thousand new churches and 5,000 sponsoring churches reaching a few thousand new people will look good on the Annual Church Profile, but seems so faithless in the face of a God who with a word spoke creation into being. What we need today are those who burn with revolutionary fire to step forward. We need to back these change agents without reservation. They do not always act the way we like; they are often blunt, noisy, hardheaded, and rarely fit well into our ministry slots. But they are the ones who contain the DNA needed to affect the very course of this new century.

What if we started to plant churches only to give them away? What if we had a vision for our region so big it demanded a break with the past and a total embrace of the power of God? What if—for the first time in our history—we sought to do it differently? What if we started to live in such a manner that if we were no longer there, we would actually be missed?

### **Is There Room For the Mavericks in Your Organization?**

- It is simple to visualize where there is room for the mavericks in your organization.
- If you are too preoccupied with the status quo, you are not open to mavericks.
- If policy and protocol are critical, you are not open to mavericks.
- If procedures and guidelines are your mantras, you are not open to mavericks.
- When conformity is paramount, you are not open to mavericks.

It is not up to God to launch this revolution. It is up to a few of us who will move past our fear and be willing to trust that God is in this even when we cannot see His hand. After all, it is not His hand we need to see; it is His face. It is the face of the One who started the revolution on a hilltop crossbeam. No one gave the One who

was nailed there much of a chance either. But their lack of faith could not stop what was done. Neither can those around you stop what God wants to birth within you. Birth pains of a maverick are deep within you because God is about to bring forth a child of His creation. It is your baby. Defend it with all you have!

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### Principles

1. Successful church planters are often driven more by reaching new people than pastoral concerns.
2. Many of the people who start with the planter in a new Bible study fellowship or mission effort will not finish with the planter.
3. Opportunity to effect change is a strong motivating factor for the new church planter.
4. The church planter is focused on the future, not the past.
5. The service will be preoccupied with an emphasis on reaching the lost.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 10<sup>th</sup> ed. Springfield, MA:Merriam-Webster, 1994. 1003.

2 John Ortberg, *If You Want To Walk On Water, You've Got To Get Out Of The Boat*



## Chapter Three

# Mentoring a Church Planter

By Johnny Hunt, Pastor  
Woodstock Baptist Church  
Woodstock, Georgia

**T**hey are coming! God is sending them! Have you seen them? They are the next generation of preachers and church planters, pastors, and missionaries. They model what they do by what they see other pastors do. The gospel they see in us is what they learn. There is a generation of preachers coming behind us who are watching our every move and, as pastors, we must take the responsibility to mentor them. What Paul gave to young Timothy we must give to them. They are too valuable for us to do anything less.

My greatest joy in ministry is investing what I have learned in young preachers. I love to spend time mentoring them, whether by having them come in for a year under my tutelage, go with me overseas on a mission trip, or spend months at our church before they launch out and plant their own. By mentoring other young men in ministry, I see one of my life's goals accomplished. The delight of my heart is to live my life so other people reach their God-given potential. I believe that is why I am here—for other people. In fact, I told my wife if I precede her to heaven I would like one word to be on my epitaph—"Others." This one word describes how I would like to be remembered. By giving myself away for others through mentoring, I reproduce myself a hundred, even a thousandfold.

Relationship is a word that describes mentoring and ministry in general, to me. Mentoring is the process of modeling while investing in deep, strong relationships. Mentoring is more about relationship than instruction. Relationships are key in ministry, especially church planting ministry. The young men whom God sends to me to mentor come not because of what I know or what I have done; they come to me because somewhere along the line we have built a relationship. I often think of the Lord's ministry running on two tracks. One is stewardship, and the other is relationship. Everything I do in ministry runs on these tracks. If I need to evaluate a ministry opportunity, I do so based on these two principles. An opportunity may involve a great



relationship but is not the best use of my time for the kingdom. On the other hand, it may be a great investment of my time but does not capture my attention because there is no relationship. Mentoring young preachers follows these tracks precisely. What better way to steward what God has given me in ministry than to invest in deep mentoring relationships?

In a mentoring relationship, it takes both modeling and investing to really help the student. Imagine a young carpenter's apprentice who only has the finished product as his model. The apprentice would not get much "how-to" from simply having a finished piece of furniture as his guide. Neither would he benefit much from a carpenter who simply invests in the right tools. What the apprentice needs is to see the carpenter work toward a finished product. He needs to see a picture of the process of successful carpentry. This mentoring process is held together by a strong relationship of trust and care.

Some may say, "Pastor Johnny, why aren't there more mentors?" The problem is selfishness. We simply do not want to spend our precious time for other people. The question in ministry should be: "What's in it for the kingdom?" not "What's in it for me?" Many pastors focus on what is happening in their own ministry. All they care about is what will help their church this week. We must broaden our vision to include others God has put around us who could use our ear or our heart.

### **The Three "A's" of Mentoring**

There are certain characteristics in any healthy mentoring relationship. I call these the three "A's" of a mentoring relationship.

- The first "A" in mentoring is the *attitude* of the person being mentored. This must be an attitude of openness and hunger to learn. Everybody should be learning and growing in ministry. I often tell my staff, "Stop learning and growing today and you will stop ministering tomorrow." We should never feel we have arrived at our destination as a Christian or as a minister. I must continue to grow first as a Christian, then as a minister. I love it when one of my church members says, "You know, Pastor Johnny, we have really noticed your spiritual growth lately. God has really been giving you depth in your walk." It encourages me that my own people can see my spiritual growth. To some pastors this would be a challenge, because they want their people to think they have arrived.

I can remember the days when I was in school and people used to call me “Ignorance on fire.” Thank God, I have come a long way out of my ignorance, but I am still learning (and He still gives me the fire)! What I learn I want to instill in young pastors. The person desiring to be mentored must have the humble attitude of being a learner who allows another person to pour his life into him.

- The second important characteristic of the mentoring relationship is an *availability* to be with each other. It would be difficult to mentor someone you never see. Jesus’ availability to His disciples is evident in Mark 3:14: “And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach” (KJV). As Jesus did with His disciples so must we do to those preachers whom God has given us to mentor.

I love to be around young preachers, and they know it. It is not unusual for me to fly somewhere to speak and two or three of my young pastor friends just show up unexpectedly. I never know they are coming. They will call the church where I am speaking and ask for direction to my hotel. Oh, they don’t get a room; they just stay in mine! We usually stay up half the night in my room with them asking 10,000 questions. Much of the time I am asking them questions because I am learning, too. These situations allow me to use my spiritual gift of “hanging out.” I want to be available to these younger guys.

- The third “A” of mentoring is accountability. The person being mentored must be held accountable to the mentor for the things being given him. By beginning a mentoring relationship the people involved are actually entering into what Howard Hendricks calls a “learning contract.” This contract must clearly communicate the goals and expectations at the beginning of the mentoring process. There must be a commitment to these goals and values expressed through our time together.

### **Empowering the Church Planter Through Mentoring**

In response to a challenge by the North American Mission Board, our church decided to plant a church in Las Vegas, Nevada. To say that this would be a challenge to the church planter was an understatement. We were told Las Vegas was the fastest-growing city in the country. We were also told 60 percent of the new church starts in that city failed. Whoever God called as the church planter would need to be encouraged and empowered to that calling. We decided the best way to empower the church planter would be to bring him and his family to our church to be mentored before they launched out to Las Vegas. The goal for this six month mentoring process would be to provide an atmosphere of encouragement where the church planter could accomplish four things before he went

out: training, partnering, mobilizing, and strategizing. I won't describe these four elements in detail. The important point is that we provided a mentoring environment where the church planter and his team would be empowered through a strong, close relationship of learning and growing. I believe the time and expense we took to bring the team to our church enabled us to extend our ministry through them when they went out. Instead of sending them "away," we extended ourselves through them. This is the role of mentoring. It should be an empowering extension of yourself and who you are so that you are reproduced.

Years ago in my young ministry, James Draper, president of LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention, sat me down in his office and said, "If Jesus continues to bless your life, promise me you will bring the next generation of preachers with you." His charge to me was a challenge to mentoring. This was our goal for the Las Vegas church planter. We sought to help him, to be available to him, and to bring him along, empowering him to his work. Our example to him was not so much our ministry method as it was our faith. Much of mentoring today is trying to imitate ministry instead of imitating the mentor's faith. However, Hebrews 13:7 says we should follow and imitate another's faith, not necessarily their method or giftedness or personality. To imitate anything else may breed carnality. The student must imitate our faith, yet keep his own personality and develop his own methods.

In an empowering mentoring relationship, there are several things the mentor will want to keep in mind. The first is that mentors normally choose their protégés. God commanded Moses to spend time mentoring Joshua (Deuteronomy 3:28). In our Las Vegas church plant, God impressed upon me the young man whom I was to invite to be the planter and then confirmed it through another brother. Allow God to lead you to the student He wants you to mentor. God gives us the empowering mentoring relationships.

Not only must a mentor choose his students, a mentor observes several qualities in the lives of those he mentors. Moses observed these qualities in the life of Joshua.

- Although Joshua was outvoted by millions of doubters, he stood virtually alone as one of two spies who believed God. There are a lot of doubters out there, but some young men are willing to believe God even if they stand alone. It sure is refreshing to run into guys who have a heart for God and are willing to face all odds to follow Him in obedience and do a great work for Him. These are the men I want to mentor.
- Joshua was available to be mentored by Moses. He knew God's voice in the matter and put his own agenda behind him to follow Moses.

- Joshua also gave evidence of a deep hunger for God. Exodus 33:11 says, “And the Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend. And he turned again into the camp: but his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, departed not out of the tabernacle” (KJV). When God was speaking, Joshua just wanted to hang in there and experience God. Moses saw this in Joshua.
- Moses also saw that Joshua showed discipline while waiting 40 days at the bottom of Mt. Sinai while Moses received the Ten Commandments.

I believe God chose Joshua for Moses to mentor, and Moses agreed with Him based on the qualities he observed in Joshua's life. While only God chooses church planters, He chooses men who demonstrate lives of integrity and godliness that an astute mentor can observe and empower.

### **Key Attitudes to Empowering Through Mentoring**

The greatest act of empowerment ever practiced came when the Son of God committed the kingdom to mere mortals who He personally mentored. Could Jesus have spent His time alone doing the work of the Father? Of course He could! Then why did He spend so much time mentoring His disciples? He was empowering them with kingdom responsibility and participation.

God put something in my heart about empowering through mentoring some years ago while I was on a mission trip in China. I was having trouble sleeping due to jet lag. Early one morning I was praying and sitting before the Lord, journaling and writing down what God was bringing to my mind. God impressed upon me in a very strong manner something He wanted me to do. I felt God wanted me to begin personally mentoring young preachers. For several years I had been doing our Timothy/Barnabas Schools for pastors, but this was something more. It is one thing to teach men in a group setting and mentor them as a counselor, but God wanted me to also mentor young men on a personal, individual level.

To date, I have had six mentors come to be with me for a year. God has blessed it so much that I have young men in my church asking if they can be in the program after they graduate from college. One little boy in our church came up to me and said, “Pastor Johnny, God has put it in my heart that one day I will follow you as a pastor.” He then asked if I were going to announce it in the church service. He is only 11 years old. In a few years he may be my student.

I bring a young college graduate to our church for a year to be my student. I provide his housing, books, and a salary. He travels with me, attends meetings with me, preaches and teaches in our church, prays with me, and attends several

conferences with me. I give him a reading list and require a summary from him on each book. He gets seminary credit for being with me. He shadows me, observing, writing down questions, making notes of anything he sees me do. My goal is to introduce him to practically everything I do. My dream is that God would move upon the hearts of veteran pastors all across America to mentor one young man a year like this. Think of the investment and the empowerment in the future of the church in America this would make.

While I was in China two things happened: God placed on my heart the name of my first student. He then convicted me that He had already provided the funds to do it. I believe we need to find out what God wants us to do in life, and quit trying to figure out what we can afford to do in life. I sensed God was going to provide mightily. When I arrived home I told my finance committee about it and they wanted to fund it through the church budget. They wanted to pay for it because it sounded like such a blessing to the church. I said, “You can put it in the budget, but we won’t need the money. God is going to provide through someone in the church outside the budget.” I shared the vision with the church that Sunday, and a businessman came up after the service and wrote a check for the entire amount for the first year. When God calls you to do something, He will provide for it. All He asks us to do is share the dream with His people.

Our Lord Jesus thought it was important to empower the men God gave Him through mentoring. Like Jesus, we must have several key attitudes to empower the men God gives us.

- *Believe in people.* Jesus believed in Peter. After all, He changed his name to “The Rock.” Jesus saw in Peter what no one had ever seen. He saw Peter for what he could be, and did not hold him back because of what he presently was. Jesus called Peter a “rock” when he was yet a pebble. He mentored Peter and developed his God-given potential. People need someone who can empower them and lift them up by mentoring them.

In Matthew chapter 14, Jesus bid Peter to come to Him on the water, rescued him from drowning, and then walked him back to the boat. He believed in Peter, and we must believe in people we mentor enough to let them take risks. That’s part of the empowerment that comes through mentoring. Unless we believe in people we will never mentor them and empower them.

- *Support people.* In mentoring someone, we must turn our hindsight into foresight. Help the young church planter get past his past. We must encourage them to learn from past mistakes and turn them into future springboards of success. In supporting students, we must focus 80 percent of our attention on what they do right and 20 percent on what they do

wrong. Support them in their strengths while being willing to correct their errors. Don't ask the students to support your strengths. Rather, build up theirs. Many times I will receive a newsletter and see something in the article that will help my young student. I'll circle it, send it to him, and say, "Check this out when you get a chance." I know it will support him in his future ministry, so I want to always support him in his strengths and passions and send things his way that may help him.

In supporting our young men, we should not expect them to be just like us. If we had men around us who looked and acted just like us our churches would be boring. In my early ministry, I thought every staff member I looked for needed to have my personality, my energy, and my vision. Can you imagine a business administrator put together like me? We would be broke after three months. Now I understand that I need men different from me, but blessed by God. We must recognize how different we are and support young preachers in that difference.

- *Invest in people.* Jesus created opportunities to invest in His disciples. He allowed them to baptize, preach, and evangelize. We must create opportunities to invest in our young students. I do this by letting them travel with me, do funerals and weddings, baptize, preach, and so forth. Those things don't sound like a big deal until you have to do it for the first time. My students come back to me and ask the same questions I had.

I remember when I first baptized someone. I was scared. I had seen it done so many times, and now I was doing it. Create these kinds of opportunities for your men to grow.

One way I invested in a church planter I was mentoring was ask him to research other churches' personnel handbooks. We were in the process of renewing ours and needed this research done. His research helped our church, but was also an opportunity to invest in him by exposing him to different church personnel policies.

Successful leaders share their knowledge and experiences by investing in others. Those who develop into an effective person always point to someone—a pastor, teacher, coach—who helped them along life's journey. Nobody gets there on their own. Someone invested in every one of us. Many people write me after hearing my sermon tapes and say, "It's amazing how much you quote Manley Beasley." Or they may refer to something I said in quoting Homer Lindsey. I am constantly pulling something "out of the air" from their teaching that has stuck with me to this day. Evangelist Manley Beasley and Homer Lindsey, author and pastor, helped me be my best by investing in me. You are never more at your best than when you are helping others be at their best.

- *Challenge people.* Jesus challenged Peter to think. In Matthew 16:13,15, He asked Peter, “Whom do men say that I am? . . . But whom say ye that I am” (KJV)?

He was stretching Peter’s thinking. Any man worth his salt wants a good challenge. When mentoring church planters we must challenge them to think beyond their comfort zones. I try to give my students something big that will challenge them, that sort of sets them back and leaves them saying, “Man, I don’t know if I can do that.” If we give them a “piece of cake” project, it may not mean much to them when they are through. I personally believe most of our church members and many of our preachers are under-challenged. If you are under-challenged you will be unfulfilled. That’s why it is so important that we continue to grow personally and in ministry. If we don’t grow, we cannot grow someone else and reproduce who we are. We will inevitably under-challenge those God has given us to mentor.

Have you noticed a pattern? The keys to empowerment are believing in people, supporting people, investing in people, and challenging people. We are in the people business. My ministry is all about people—helping them to climb to their best and not rest when they think they are on the summit.

What are you doing with those young church planters and preachers God is bringing your way? Who will be their model: Hollywood, books, seminars on church planting? They need more. They need healthy mentoring relationships through which you and I pour our lives and our ministries into them; thus, reproducing ourselves and empowering them for use in God’s kingdom.

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### Principles

1. Invest time in young men of God.
2. Take time to develop the relationship of mentor and the one being mentored.
3. Model ministry for the student being mentored.
4. Have a plan for mentoring so they can grow spiritually.
5. Bring the next generation of planters with you.
6. Believe in people and draw out their best.
7. Challenge the one being mentored to think beyond their comfort level.

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#### Note

1. See Howard and William Hendricks, *As Iron Sharpens Iron* (Chicago, Ill.: Moody Press, 1995), p. 192.

## Chapter Four

# Following God's Vision from a Mega Church to a New Plant

By Curt Dodd, Pastor  
Magnolia Avenue Baptist Church  
Merritt Island, Florida

**W**hy would someone who had enjoyed the spiritual victories that produced the growth of a large church even consider leaving security and success to begin again? It does not make sense, but that is my story. For you to understand my pilgrimage of faith, I must take you through a brief history in my pastoral experience.

As I neared completion of my seminary training, I desired to start a church from scratch. I had even located an area around Fort Worth, Texas, that was growing considerably but had no visible witness. Further investigation revealed to my dismay that the association had already established a small church plant in the area. My idea came quickly apart and soon several churches that were looking for a pastor contacted me. The dream of church planting was pushed to the back of my mind, but continued to grow.

During the next several years, I had the privilege of being pastor to some of the greatest people on the face of the earth in two different churches: First Baptist Church, Eden, Texas, and First Baptist Church, Gonzales, Texas. Both churches not only grew quickly but were used by God to develop my leadership and communication skills. I learned that God's people will follow pastors who love and respect them.

In the early 1980s, I received a call from a small church in northwest Houston. What a journey of faith and excitement. The church God led me to pastor soon exploded with great numerical and spiritual growth. People were moving into our area because of the economy boom and the affordability of housing. At this time, Northwest Houston was one of the fastest-growing areas in the country. However, our small church had not seen much growth in the past and had become a small stable ship on the churning seas of a



burgeoning population. Our church was located on a main thoroughfare with less than 15 acres, but with the possibility of great growth. All we needed was a clear vision from God. It soon came. As we focused upon personal evangelism, exciting worship services, practical biblical preaching, and effective, caring Sunday School classes, our church began to grow. Soon we were at 300 in attendance and then 400 within a month. It was at this time that our church changed its name from Fellowship Baptist Church to Metropolitan Baptist Church.

A name change accentuated the change and described our vision. Instead of a small church existing as a safe harbor in a tumultuous sea, we chose to become a lighthouse with lifeboats for Harris County and the world. Even at our small number the people sensed that God had great plans for our church. We were a “will be church” rather than a “has been” family of faith. Our best days were ahead and we needed a building that could accommodate the future.

Putting substance to the vision, and with approximately 400 in attendance, our church voted to build an auditorium that would hold 3,000 to 4,000 people. That was 10 times the size of our present facility, and we were still in one service. We knew that God was all over the dream of reaching people for Christ. Boldly, the church stepped forward and pledged to build the facility. Our situation was build to grow and grow to build. Then financial disaster struck our community! In the middle of our construction, the oil-based economy in Houston came unraveled in quick form. Many of our people lost their jobs and had to relocate while our facility was going up on our property. The dark days of fear were quickly overcome by the presence of God and the vision of His people. So the church marched on with greater faith in the face of uncertainty.

As we utilized radio spots, mass mailings, and later, a television ministry, the presence of our church was made known in Houston. We emphasized change as normal and applauded Sunday School departments that made sacrifices by moving locations and expanded their ministries by creating new units. During those days, God called many of our young businessmen into full-time Christian ministry. They learned church growth by leading their Sunday School departments in evangelism and outreach coupled with wonderful, pastoral care. Metropolitan Baptist Church was the accumulation of many small churches (Sunday School departments) into one celebrating body of believers.

Our worship service was filled with much celebration. A choir and orchestra were developed into a fabulous ministry with over 300 in attendance. Expectation filled the air every time we met, and God's presence was evident in changed lives. It was a wonderful time of creativity and vision casting for our staff. In fact, we were one of the first churches in Houston to experiment with the Saturday night worship

service. Even with our large auditorium, we found it necessary to do three weekend worship services, one on Saturday night and two on Sunday morning.

In the midst of amazing success, I felt a slow burn within myself. It was not burnout but rather a burning of the Spirit of God, allowing me to realize how unfulfilling growth for growth's sake can be. Sure, I was preaching to thousands every weekend and had the opportunity to share our story of success with my peers and others who would seek to learn and emulate our proven principles to numerical growth. To the casual observer I was on the fast track and should be completely fulfilled in what I was leading our church to accomplish, but that wasn't the case. It was not the arrival at any particular number in ministry that provided the enjoyment; rather it was the journey. Leading people first to give their life to Christ and then guiding them to find their place in ministry as they multiplied themselves into the lives of others was the greatest "rush." As I released our staff to draw outside the lines and develop new models of ministry, I found myself even hungrier for God.

As I looked back upon our track record, it appeared to me that our growth was predictable and timely. Reading Scripture, especially the book of Acts, I met frustration face to face. Like many other large churches in the country, we grew like a business, a fine-tuned machine. We set the organization in place, and all we had to do was to keep it well oiled, but God had much more for us than that.

Often, I feel that we have become a generation of professional ministers who applaud and emulate the techniques of proven leaders. Our goals, though often cloaked in the garb of kingdom rhetoric, can be seductively full of fleshly intentions. Success in the testimony of Scripture is not based upon numerical achievement but in the faithfulness of the servant. If God chooses to bless a pastor and church with great numerical success, praise the Lord and may they never see themselves as men and churches that have completely arrived. On the other hand, if a pastor and church remain faithful to the call of God upon their lives and do not experience large numbers, they must remember this principle: Success is always relative to the vineyard in which one works.

The growth of the early church was not machine-like; rather it was a spiritual explosion following the conviction of the Holy Spirit. They grew because God initiated and orchestrated their presence in Jerusalem. They were sustained by their hunger and thirst for God, longing for deep fellowship with the risen Lord and surrounded by the confirming work of His spirit. I longed for that. And soon I found myself crying out, "Oh God, why have You put me in the Bible Belt carrying water in my pail to the already existing ocean?" The inward restlessness that longed for God to do something that could only be explained by God created an openness in my heart to listen as never before to the Spirit's voice.

Months passed and I made peace to live with the growing call within. I chose to wait upon God, trusting that His time is always the best.

I was doing fine until a phone call one December night from an individual in Pueblo, Colorado, reignited the flame. I heard what seemed to be a "Macedonian call" of come and help us. My wife and I, after praying about the situation, traveled to Colorado to see firsthand what the community needed spiritually. Upon first glance, I realized that Pueblo didn't look a thing like northwest Houston and my present situation. The spiritual condition of southern Colorado did not appear to be hot for explosive growth either. During the few days we spent in the city, I fasted and prayed asking God, "Is this the place to begin a new work? Am I the man for this or am I to train and support others to do the work?" We met several people who were searching for leadership to begin a new work. However, I was not moved to pursue any further conversation. I left with the mentality, "Don't call me; I'll call you."

As we flew back to Houston, I looked outside the window of the plane toward the mountains and prayed, "Oh God, I will go anywhere and do anything you want me to do. Just show me." Several months passed and my spirit grew even more restless while our church continued its upward spiral. During the summer months, I continued to seek God and His direction. Then on September 6, 1994, in my quiet time, God spoke. I had been reading Jeremiah for the past several days when I came across a passage that grabbed my heart and shook my world.

"This is what the Lord says: 'Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends upon flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the Lord. He will be like a bush in the wastelands; he will not see prosperity when it comes. He will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives. But blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit' " (Jeremiah 17:5-8, NIV).

The moment I read this passage, I knew that this verse was for me, and that God was calling me to trust Him as I had never trusted Him. It spoke of making Him my security and not resting on the stability of a secure platform. It spoke of faith in Him and not relying on flesh. It reminded me that to rely on one's flesh and all the security that it offers is to turn away from the Lord. But it also spoke of a future and growth and security that comes from staying near Him. That verse had my name all over it, and I sat there and wept. Then the Lord reminded me of my call to ministry years ago when He whispered to my heart, "It will not be easy, but I will take care of you."

I told my wife, Ginger, “I believe we are getting ready to leave Houston.” As we talked she said, “Now it’s okay if I tell you.” I asked, “Tell me what?” She said, “Do you remember when we were in Pueblo? In my quiet time God spoke to me and He gave me the very same verse.” As we embraced, we prayed together, asking that God would show us the next step. Little did I know how difficult it would be to really take the next step.

I contacted my Colorado connections and was met with great excitement. However, as I moved through the process it did not make sense to me. On one hand, I was tremendously excited about the possibility of starting a new work in a place that desperately needed the kind of church we envisioned. On the other hand, I found myself struggling with what I knew were the principles for successful church planting and growth. Pueblo did not have the ingredients that would foster the kind of growth that I had previously envisioned. Still God was very clear.

I continued to move forward but did not make a firm commitment that I personally would become the new pastor of this Colorado plant. Instead, I focused primarily on a plan to saturate the area with the gospel via radio making the church plant the focus. I shared with our Houston church the need to plant a church in Pueblo, Colorado, and received the blessing of our leadership to lay the groundwork. They had no idea that there was a possibility that they would lose their pastor by such a move. Their pastor was not convinced either.

During this time, I rationalized that possibly God was going to utilize my experience and contacts to lay the foundation for the new church. I could lay out the framework, assemble a team, and raise the money to accomplish the task. I justified my ambivalence to orchestrate a plan of action without a full-blown commitment on my part. The cost for me to go was not only a high price to pay financially and professionally, but culturally as well. I was a native Texan, born and raised on the Gulf Coast with mosquito blood in my veins. Besides, a skiing accident years before in Colorado, made it impossible for me to ski without endangering the loss of my left leg. Quite frankly, maybe it was only now that God could trust me in that state!

I began to develop a plan of action that included a massive radio campaign. With underwriting from the Colorado core, we purchased time on three radio stations and began to air my sermons. While the sermons were aired in Colorado, I outlined a church planting organization that would slowly ramp up to an Easter Sunday worship service. Additionally, I prayed that God would assemble a team of ministers who felt called to go and plant this new work in Colorado.

God had laid several men within our church on my heart. These men were

faithful deacons whom I had sensed God was dealing with about ministry. I approached each of them and found them ready to go. Neither one of them had ever served on a church staff, but each had several characteristics that the new church would desperately need.

One man was a trained electrical engineer who had worked with my wife in a ministry targeting students at risk. He had a heart for hurting kids. When I told him of the opportunity to plant a church in Colorado, he promised to pray about it and get back with me. The next day we met for lunch, and he shared that years before he had experienced the call of God upon his life and turned down an opportunity to serve on the staff of another large church in Houston. He had been running from God and was trying to hide out within the ministry of our church, but God found him. He said, "Pastor, I told the Lord that if He ever gave me another chance, I would not hesitate to run boldly toward the battle line. I don't know what this will cost me and my family, but we are ready to go."

The next man I visited was a former chairman of our deacons who had a heart for evangelism. At age 60, he saw his insurance business as an opportunity to win people to Christ. When people weren't coming through his doors, he would go find doors on which to knock. He and his wife, years before, had done mission work in New Mexico. They felt that one day God would open a door for them to serve. After a time of prayer, his answer was, "Yes, Lord, yes!"

God was leading me to invite those He had already invited. However, their leader still wavered. Even knowing that, these men were ready to go into battle for the sake of the kingdom. This was a new opportunity for them to leave the secular world of employment and trust God for His provision and their new vocation. They were ready to go and enjoyed dreaming with me as we organized together. For me, there would be one more stop.

Later in the fall, I was invited to attend the first Prayer and Fasting Conference sponsored by Bill Bright and Campus Crusade in Orlando, Florida. During those three days, God was patient and extremely kind to me. He knew I still was struggling with the call to let go. Releasing my grip from the security of a large church and the geographical nearness of our family was an inner conflict. Who in their right mind would leave such a scenario?

The answer came one morning as I listened to a short devotional on the story in Acts 8 of Philip in Samaria given by a Presbyterian pastor. A great revival had broken out in one of the cities where Philip spoke. Then the angel of the Lord directed him to a lonely road toward Gaza. There he met the Ethiopian eunuch. Leaving a great ministry with fabulous numerical success, Philip was called to share Christ with one man. I was reminded that God's anointing rests upon

obedient men. That was it for me! The issue was resolved because I would rather have God's anointing upon my life and ministry than a temporal sense of security. Without God's hand upon your life, regardless of where you serve, there is no security, much less peace.

Following the holidays in 1994, I planned to announce to our church that I would leave to begin a new church in Pueblo, Colorado. However, before I would make it public I received a letter from evangelist Dr. Bailey Smith. It simply stated that God had laid me on his heart and he had prayed for me that morning. I picked the phone up and called him immediately inquiring why he had felt led to so pray. He said, "I don't know. I just did."

Then I told him of my journey and what I was getting ready to do. He said, "Curt, that is really interesting because when I was in the eighth grade my dad left a great church to go to Colorado and plant a church. It made a big difference in my life." God was good to me during those days and chose many other avenues by which to reconfirm His call upon my life.

My church's response was overwhelming and magnanimous. They gave us a generous love offering and underwrote my salary for several more months before the new church kicked off. Undoubtedly, the greatest response was in the lives of our people. One of my deacons, with tears in his eyes, said to me, "You have restored my faith in ministers. In my life, I have seen most of them just go from one church to the next larger church. They have been no different than the rest of us."

Several of the men who had been praying about going into full-time Christian ministry took the step of faith. The prayer life of our church soared and hundreds began to seek God as never before. The die was cast and a new church was about to be birthed.

I vividly remember packing my books on a Monday morning following my resignation. We still did not have a minister of music on our team. However, I was not alarmed but was confident that we could assemble a praise team and band in Colorado. God had already given us a contact in a music store, a former road technician for the band, Bad English. Since he was the kind of individual we were looking to reach, we knew we were headed in the right direction. But God had a special gift planned.

Appearing in my office while I packed my books was a man who had heard that I was leaving the area. He had worked with me doing several youth camps years previously. He was an excellent musician and played the keyboard with few peers. He and his wife asked to hear my story and I told them I could tell them as long

as they were willing to help me pack. He then said that he had always wanted to go and do something like this. I said, "You know, the job is open but I can't pay you. If you are willing to step out by faith, trust God to underwrite you, and be willing to do whatever it takes to support your family until God provides the resources through our church, you are welcome to come." He told me that he and his wife would pray about it. The next morning they made a commitment to go. God put His team together and I had the privilege of watching Him work.

Arriving in Pueblo in the latter part of February, we hit the ground running. Utilizing our ramp-up plan, we began to meet with people interested in starting a new church. The way we developed our list of prospects was twofold. First, we encouraged the friendship connections that had been developed in Pueblo by the handful of individuals whom we had met almost a year before. Second, through the responses received from the radio broadcasts, we assimilated several interest meetings with those who had ordered cassette tapes during the past several months. Within the first month, our core group grew from 10 to 30 families. Realizing that momentum was getting larger, we could not wait to begin worship services. Our core group began meeting on Sunday mornings one month before our Easter kick-off date. Worshipers numbered almost 300; most had little or no church background.

We found it essential to begin a children's ministry to run concurrent with the worship service. In only a few weeks, our team assimilated enough workers to staff our children's ministry. On Sunday night, we offered membership classes and saw many choose to join our church before we officially voted to become a church. During the week, many of those who attended our church and filled out information cards prayed to receive Christ. God brought workers to help us organize and orchestrate children and youth ministries. As we stepped out in faith, He provided both workers and financial resources. God was faithful!

The week before Easter 1995 was a busy week. A countywide mailing to approximately 120,000 people announced the services and the beginning of a new church, Fellowship of the Rockies. We were fortunate in that the newspaper, curious about our large advertisement announcing the new church, ran a story with our entire staff in the religious section the week before we began. After four weeks of worship services, we were ready to launch in Memorial Hall in Pueblo, Colorado. Nearly 800 people attended that day. Services were held in Memorial Hall for another month before we were denied the right to rent the facility. The City Council had received numerous complaints crying out with the ever-frequent theme, "separation of church and state."

We knew that we could fight the decision and undoubtedly win in court for we were paying the going rate of all who sought to rent the facility. However,



we trusted God. He had birthed the church; He would sustain it. Besides that, we came to Pueblo to love the city in the name of Jesus and not take them to court; we wanted to take them to the cross.

In the days to come, we moved our worship services multiple times. The staff joked that we should run an ad in the paper inviting people to the church: “If they could find us, they could join us.” Interestingly enough, every time we moved locations, we grew. It became an opportunity to reconnect with people and let them know where we were. Soon we found a permanent-temporary location by renting the concert hall on the campus of the University of Southern Colorado. It seated approximately 600 people. Within the year we had added an additional worship service. On our third Easter, our attendance swelled to nearly 2,000. God was moving in our midst.

God placed upon my heart a desire to plant an additional church in Colorado Springs. With the help of North American Mission Board monies and a large gift from Sugar Creek Baptist Church in Sugarland, Texas, we launched again. This time we put together a team composed of both Fellowship of the Rockies, Pueblo staff members, and several new church planters who would live in Colorado Springs. My administrative pastor in Pueblo shared the preaching load in Pueblo with me. He preached the early service; I preached the late. In Colorado Springs, I preached an early service, which was followed by Bible study for all ages. As the worship service ended, I drove nearly 40 miles to preach the late service in Pueblo. Our worship pastor initially directed both worship teams in both cities and developed a praise team and band in both locations. Two churches, two staffs, two locations, and one pastor. . . . It can be done. During our time in Colorado, God allowed our church staff to train other pastors who have subsequently started other churches like Fellowship of the Rockies, Pueblo, Colorado Springs.

There are several key thoughts that I think are important for all church planters. First, make sure God has called you to plant a church. If you can do anything else and still be happy and satisfied, do not sacrifice yourself on the altar of enthusiasm. Second, develop a game plan to start the new work and stick with it. Do not surrender your walking orders from God to the whims and wishes of those who may subsequently join you. Third, trust God to supply. God is able and when we walk by faith—really trust Him—we see Him come through. Church planting is certainly a tangible way to walk by faith. Fourth, prepare yourself spiritually and do not move from your time alone with God. Your greatest strength is the realization of your weakness and your commitment to stay dependent upon God. Fifth, keep dreaming. Remember, what began your journey was a vision from God; what will sustain it is a vision that is either refreshed or enlarged. Sixth, take your hands off your life. Let God orchestrate your journey and trust Him to use your experience to further develop your walk and character as well as your



professional future. Seventh, enjoy the ride. Nothing has more emotional ups and downs than church planting. As you love on the people that God sends your way and trust Him to develop them on His timetable, your pastoral experience will be richly rewarded. Eighth, make time to enjoy the place God plants you. The Rocky Mountains still call to me. I miss the fly-fishing and those with whom God allowed me to wade the streams in search of "other fish."

Two more essential issues that every church planter should consider before going on the field: underwriting and staffing. These two issues can make or break a successful church plant.

The financial underwriting for our churches came initially from three sources. First, the North American Mission Board provided seed money for us to plant the first church. However, I was committed to plant the church with or without the Southern Baptist Convention's resources. We are fortunate to have the depth of resources in our Convention to accomplish the critical task of church planting. On the other hand, a truly effective church planter will not have a singular line of support. Second, resources from our core group provided enough money to purchase critical equipment and advertisement. Remember, a young church without a building must get the word out concerning their existence. We chose advertisement before we tried to pay salaries. Third, gifts from sister churches helped tremendously. Approximately 25 churches sent money directly to us from their mission budgets to start the work.

I will be forever indebted to my fellow pastor friends who believed in me enough to help underwrite what we did. Their churches share in the success of the most effective church plant in Colorado history. All of these avenues of revenue were developed as we went to Colorado. We did not wait for the money to be deposited in the bank but God prompted giving as we were going.

Staffing is an essential issue in planting a church. I believe that the paradigm of Jesus sending at least two on mission at a time is one we need to consider. It is difficult enough to go alone and lonely at best. However, when there is a team of individuals committed to a vision, it makes the journey not only bearable, but also enjoyable. I have never laughed or cried more than with the staff God gave us in planting churches. There are several individuals who must be mentioned: Charlie and Karen Jones, Dale and Bernice Schmidt, Paul and Dawn Raddin, Stewart and Christy McWilliams, and of course, my wife, Ginger, will be forever known as bold pioneers of church planting in Colorado. The influence and sacrifice of their agendas and that of their children to plant churches in southern Colorado have already made an impact on eternity.

How did we pay our staff? Good question. Our staff in both churches initially

underwrote themselves, either from their personal savings and/or the sacrificial gifts from the children of God and their churches who believed in them and their call to ministry. None of the families that went to plant churches were guaranteed any salary. We were blessed enough, because of the quick growth of our church in Pueblo, to put all of our staff on salary within four months of our first service. Supplements to their small base salaries came through ongoing gifts from individuals who prayed and supported them financially. Entrepreneurs of great faith make wonderful church planters. Can you imagine the apostle Paul or Silas telling the early church, “You know, we can’t do this next missionary journey without some serious underwriting.” With that said, all others should stay at home.

Nothing is more exciting than planting a new church. It should be a required experience of all pastors. I thank the Lord that He gave me the opportunity to lead church planting teams in the great state of Colorado. Churchmen like Dr. David Bunch, former executive director of the Baptist General Convention of the State of Colorado and Dr. Charles Aiken, former director of missions of the Pikes Peak Baptist Association, provided personal encouragement and friendship that made the difference in our personal lives and churches. Because they believed in our mission and vision, we soared with boldness. We will always be grateful to them.

I have been invited to write this chapter in this encouraging book because I pastored a large church in Houston and then chose to follow God’s leadership and plant new churches. Why should that be amazing? All pastors, regardless of the size church in which they serve, are humble servants of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. It is not for us to dictate to God where we minister or the conditions of the ministry. We are called to be servants, not hirelings, and must go wherever God directs. If God should call me again to such a journey, I would go. I am witness to the truth that His calling is always met with His provision. He is still Jehovah-Jireh!

I have come full circle. Nearing the fifth anniversary of my call to Colorado, the winds of change began to blow in my heart. Although I was enjoying pastoring two different churches in two different cities at the same time and considering a third, God spoke to my heart and let me know that my time in the mountains was about to come to an end. I asked my associate, Charlie Jones, if he was ready to pastor the church in Pueblo. He said, “A year ago, no. But now, yes.” I told him of my sense of God’s movement in my life and asked him to pray for me. Within two days I was contacted by First Baptist Church, Merritt Island, Florida, and subsequently became their pastor. My two associate pastors in Pueblo and Colorado Springs are now the senior pastors in the churches they helped start. Pulsating with a heart for evangelism and a passion for hurting people, they

continue to grow in the grace of God.

Behind my desk is a watercolor painting given to me by our church in Pueblo. It pictures Pikes Peak overshadowing the southern foothills with aspen trees that are reflected in a nearby body of water. The myriad of colors in the painting remind me of the different people from various walks of life that our churches touched and to whom they are still ministering. The memories of their seeking hearts and hunger for God are creased forever within my heart. Even now, when I hear of snow in Colorado, my heart is not drawn to the slopes, but to the churches that are warm with the love of Jesus.

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### Principles

1. Make sure God has called you to plant a church. If you can do anything else and still be happy and satisfied, do not sacrifice yourself on the altar of enthusiasm.
2. Develop a game plan to start the new work and stick with it. Do not surrender your walking orders from God to the whims and wishes of those who may subsequently join you.
3. Trust God to supply. God is able and when we walk by faith—really trust Him—we see Him come through. Church planting is certainly a tangible way to walk by faith.
4. Prepare yourself spiritually and do not move from your time alone with God.
5. Keep dreaming. Remember, what began your journey was a vision from God; what will sustain it is a vision that is either refreshed or enlarged.
6. Take your hands off your life. Let God orchestrate your journey and trust Him to use your experience to further develop your walk and character as well as your professional future.
7. Enjoy the ride. Nothing has more emotional ups and downs than church planting. As you love on the people that God sends your way and trust Him to develop them on His timetable, your pastoral experience will be richly rewarded.
8. Make time to enjoy the place God plants you.

## Chapter Five

# Using Media and Technology in a Church Start

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I enjoy church planting. I've had opportunities to help get many churches started throughout the country. However, for much of my ministry I worked in the dark. I did know that for a plant to be successful, it had to "get the word out" about the congregation being started. The problem was that "getting the word out" often required the use of media, and money was always short. Furthermore, I didn't know exactly how to use the media that was affordable. I knew enough to know that I needed to know more about using the media effectively. So after a few years in seminary, I enrolled at a state university and spent three years working toward a college degree in communications with a specialty in public relations.

God blessed that move and has allowed me to serve in some of America's great churches. I was able to use some of the things I had studied by putting new ideas into practice. God showed me that using the media and technology could help to grow a large church. Also, I realized that the effective use of media and technology is a vital part of church planting and can sometimes make the difference in the success or failure of a new church start.

In 1999, I arrived in Florida to plant a new congregation. Today we have a healthy congregation thanks to God's blessings, a generous and supportive mother church, and the effective use of media and technology that continues to bring guests to our young congregation.

For some, the idea of using marketing and technology in God's work may seem out of place. For those, I would recommend rereading the Great Commission. The task before us is enormous and the challenge of reaching billions of people without the media and technology seems impossible. Perhaps God has allowed us to live in the information age so that we can use

media and technology to spread His Word throughout the world.

Although using the media effectively is vital in spreading God's word throughout developing nations, it is also essential in spreading God's word in the United States. Overseas we experience barriers, such as government regulation, non-Christian religious traditions, and language barriers. But twenty-first century America offers other challenging barriers that can be nearly impossible to overcome without the effective use of media and technology. For example, church planters in any urban area will quickly realize that they are encountering a society full of gated communities; individuals with a lack of trust for most establishments, including the church; and a society that is generally suffering from information overload. The prospects that will soon make up a new congregation are currently people who are being sought by every organization and business imaginable. Internet companies, entertainment facilities, credit card offers, several well-meaning charities, and other volunteer organizations are trying to position themselves in these people's lives. This is the church planter's competition, not the existing congregation down the road.

We live in an advanced media world. Today's generation expects to be well marketed to and is accustomed to establishing relationships with organizations via the media. Therefore, using the media and technology to plant a new church can be a successful strategy.

Church planters need to have and understand three goals while they attempt to build a new work: awareness, attitude, and action. Before anyone will be a guest of your church, they will first need to know that it exists. The second thing to happen, almost immediately, is the formation of attitude. This attitude usually will be based on past relationships with similar churches. This means you may have to recreate or redevelop the attitude of the prospect. Only after prospects have been exposed to some level of awareness that creates a positive attitude will they consider taking action and being a guest in your congregation. Using the media is one way to accomplish these three goals with a mass audience.

Once the church planter decides to use media, he needs to realize there are numerous avenues available. Some of these avenues are extremely expensive and may be out of reach. There are a few primary mediums to be considered in this chapter along with their cost, their effectiveness, and whether or not they should be used in getting a church plant started.

Before any sophisticated organization spends money on its marketing, it should research its prospects and how to capture their attention. This is the first and possibly least expensive step in getting your message out. Begin your research by

obtaining information that already exists in the public domain.

For example, if I knew I would be planting a church in any metropolitan area I would begin by going on the Internet and looking up information available from the U.S. Census Bureau about the community. This information can give vital insight about what your future congregation may look like. It will have information about the demographics of an area, including median age, median income, and whether or not the population is blue-collar or white-collar.

Another great resource is *American Demographics* magazine. This publication is available in most large libraries and gives detailed information, such as data on the community's hobbies, size of families, and a vast amount of other information about the population in your area. You may have to look through several issues to find your community, but keep looking. This publication will often look at vast areas such as the Southeast and give general information about the whole area before moving to a more specific area such as southwest Florida. This information will give you an edge as you consider what name or theme your congregation will have, what the dress should be like, and what type of musical and worship style will work best.

The area's major newspaper is another great method of research. You can subscribe on the Internet before you get on the field. This will get you up to date quickly on the major events the area is experiencing, who is doing what, and even what local areas are called. For example, in Tampa we have the Tampa Bay Devil Rays who play at Tropicana Stadium. However, locals call the building "The Trop." Calling the building "Tropicana Stadium" would immediately identify me as an outsider. This is one small sample of a communication law called convergence. Convergence simply refers to the informal language that people share within a common group, like the many words that are unique to the people of the church. A newspaper subscription will help master convergence and communicate effectively with the people in your target group.

Finally, when on the field, try to conduct door-to-door surveys. This may be difficult because of restricted communities, but survey what you can. Ask questions like, "What newspaper do you read? What is your favorite radio station? Which grocery store or mall do you shop?" Also ask about their religious history, including their church affiliation, how often they attend, and their level of satisfaction. Finally, ask questions about the area, its greatest need, what ministry they would like to see a new church attempt, and so forth.

The first series of questions will help the church planter determine media placement. For example, if all of the residents indicate that they listen primarily

to one radio station, that station should be considered a primary source for the new ministry.

A second series of questions will help you take the spiritual temperature of the people who may one day visit your worship service. If respondents are willing to share their disappointments, these answers can give you a felt-need with which to start. Often, respondents make statements like they wish that their church would do more for their kids, teens, or families.

The third series of questions will again help the church planter understand what the area's felt-needs are. If respondents say there is a great need for financial help, your first mediated message may talk about your church in general, but also specifically point out there will be evening classes on money management and taking control of debt.

By now, the church planter should have a good idea of what the people of the community are like, what their needs are, and a basic plan of action. The next step is mediating the message. As the process begins, the planter needs to understand that media is all about image and image is what makes up media. Image consists of a name, a look, a feel, and a general theme. Most church planters are not trained in this area and will need help in developing this image. A public relations team could be consulted but they are often too expensive for most church starts. A simpler, more cost-effective method is to find a qualified graphic artist.

A good graphic artist can be found by looking in the phone book. A graphics agency is often more expensive than an individual who is self-employed. Make a few calls and do some interviewing over the phone. Always look for a Christian because it is easier to work with someone who understands ministry motives. Ask them if they've worked with churches. If they have, set up an appointment and ask to look through their portfolio. Always interview two or three artists to ensure hiring the right person. Depending on the market and the qualifications of the artist, the rate will range from \$40-\$100 an hour for most consultants.

Incorporate the artist's help to do some marketing on your new church campus, even if it is rented. Purchase yard banners to invite people, signs to give directions, and so forth. All of these are needed to carry your image. It doesn't have to be expensive, but it should be crisp, easy to understand; and a consistent theme should be evident in each piece. This is done through the development of a logo, using information gathered through your research. Your logo should be used as often as possible. This enables the community to associate it with the church. Everything seen or handed out should carry the church logo to help develop church identity.

The next choice is where to spend whatever advertising budget is available. There are five major choices: television, radio, newspaper, direct mail, and specialty marketing. Any media outlet can work depending on the church size, budget, and ministry goals. Each choice depends on the scope of the new work, the type of region it is in, and the available dollars.

The first medium often thought of is television. After all, television has revolutionized the whole process of marketing. The problems with marketing a church plant on television are numerous. First, there is often a high cost involved in actually making the television commercial. Although a salesman may offer a low cost for making a commercial, remember that it will be preceded and followed by a high-cost commercial made by a major corporate organization. The viewer will almost automatically dismiss your message because of the difference in quality. Don't use television unless money is available to present a professional, quality message.

Another problem with television is the expensive cost of airtime. For a large chain of retail stores this cost is easily absorbed. However, in the nonprofit world, it is hard to imagine being able to place a commercial message at the time when the target audience is the largest, such as during the evening news or prime time. Part of the reason for the high cost is the market size is too big for most church starts. For example, if a church is being planted in the Chicago area and television is used, there may be literally millions of viewers spread over hundreds of square miles. Most viewers won't be prospects because they live too far away. To offset this cost, it is possible to air television commercials on cable stations by ZIP code, but when this is done there is a dramatic loss in local viewers. Cable may offer up to 100 channels from which the viewer may choose. The chance someone will happen upon your commercial is low, given the competitive market. The only way television can work is in a smaller size market and with a large church plant. The plant will need to be well funded and able to grow to several thousand in just a few years.

Another choice is radio. The main advantage that radio has is that there are usually no production costs. Also, the cost per spot is more affordable than prime time television. Yet, the costs can be high when advertising on a high profile radio station during commute time between home and work, usually 6:00 a.m.-9:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m.-6:00 p.m. To advertise at other times is less expensive, but the audience in the prospect area is much less. Furthermore, radio has the problem of mass marketing to an entire region although the potential for response is low because most people will live outside the target area.

Some churches work around this by advertising on Christian radio stations. It is



generally less expensive, and they give church discounts. This may be a good idea to get a congregation off to a good start; however, experience shows that there are two types of people who listen to Christian radio. The first are those who have a church home and wouldn't dream of changing. The second are people who have a long history of being in and out of many churches in the area. They are looking for the perfect church, and your church plant probably won't be perfect. In other words, they don't stick. In the short run, it may be helpful just to have some warm bodies. The turmoil that is caused when they leave for the next new work is not worth the short-run gain.

It may sound surprising, but I feel the best use of radio is to broadcast during local sports events, such as a local high school football game. It is a good choice because it is inexpensive; it is local; and the community respects the church for giving something back to the community. The people listening are usually involved in the community defined as the primary target. Another idea for using radio economically is to consider being an on-air sponsor. For example, in many major markets, radio stations sell sponsorships for things like the weather report, drive-time updates, and so on. Your sponsorship could sound something like this: "Today's weather is brought to you by Grace Community Church in Bloomingtondale where family comes first. Visit them this Sunday for worship. It is currently 65 degrees . . ." Ads like this don't say much, but they will raise the level of awareness of the people in the community. This will help create the right attitude when you follow up with other mediated messages.

Newspaper is another choice. The advantage of newspaper is that it is entirely image. It can be carefully crafted and placed for the best impact. Because the size and scope is predetermined, you don't have to worry about being misplaced or misunderstood. The problem, again, is cost. It can cost upwards of \$20,000 to place a full-page ad in many major markets. A second problem is that it is often difficult to determine how many people will actually read the ad. Newspapers tout the number of their subscribers and make the link that subscribers will read the ad that has been placed. People may read the paper, but not many read all of its content. So will they read the section that carries your ad? Will they read your ad? The numbers drop dramatically when these types of questions are considered. The third problem, which is shared by television and radio, is that the market is much larger than the target population in an urban setting.

There are a few solutions. First, consider advertising with a lower circulation, community newspaper. These papers generally run once or twice a week and serve the local community. Surprisingly, these have higher readership levels because residents are generally interested in local news. For example, in Tampa the major newspaper is *The Tampa Tribune*, but churches in my area get better

results from a free weekly paper called *The Brandon News*. A full-page ad in this paper is only \$500. In other words, it is possible to reach the same number of prospects, people who live in your area who are forming awareness, attitude, and action, for a fraction of the cost. If your area doesn't have a local paper, check with the major paper to see if it has a local edition that is inserted once or twice a week. Again, since the distribution is lower the cost will be lower. Yet, the target area will still be reached.

One caution: Stay away from the church directory page advertising while you are getting started. Placing a church plant ad alongside other major established churches will either group the new work in with the crowd and not make it seem new, or it will demonstrate that the larger churches in your area offer much more ministry than you can offer. Instead, place the ad in a movie section, a cooking section, or anywhere the readers don't expect it. This will set the plant apart and help to both raise awareness and create a positive attitude.

Don't forget to take advantage of the space that is available through a well-written press release. A new church start or a special event for the community is just the type of information a newspaper will cover in an article. Call the paper and ask for the religion or community events reporter or editor. Then mail or fax them a press release. It is advisable to send a press release up to six weeks in advance by mail and then fax a release a week before the event. These work well, especially in local papers. Press releases can be more powerful than ads because readers view them as information instead of as sales pitch. Furthermore, it is a great use of stewardship because the space is free.

Perhaps the medium of choice for most church planters is direct-mail advertising. This has several advantages. First, it is competitive in price. Second, churches are able to market within their prospect area. Third, it can be done rather simply. Fourth, it contains all of the information that someone needs in order to take action and attend the new church plant. The biggest disadvantage is, it is extremely competitive. The mail may be considered another piece of junk mail unless it is expertly done.

Direct mail is affordable because a church is able to send the mail at the low nonprofit rate. This assumes, however, that the church has already obtained a nonprofit mailing permit. This can be a lengthy process and cost about \$300. You can consult a mailing service in your community. They are listed in the phone book. Explain that the church wants to send out a direct-mail piece. Then give them an address as a starting point and tell them how many miles to go out from that address. The mailing service will know how many homes are in the area. Then the mailing service will help the church get a permit, arrange for the one-

time use of a mailing list for the campaign, and process the mail. Depending on the size of distribution, all of this can usually be accomplished, including postage, for less than \$1,000. Get this process underway before beginning the design of the piece to be mailed because its size can greatly influence the cost of postage and the mailing service's input will be vital.

The next step is to decide your audience. Some churches send out a blanket mailing to a geographical region. However, with proper research it is possible to get much more specific and mail to only homes with children, if family is a centerpiece in marketing. This will slightly increase the cost of the list, but cost will be offset by the reduction in postage. The mailing service can offer a variety of lists including a specific language speaking list, income list, and so forth.

Direct mail is simple because it has a specific target. Hopefully, a graphic artist has already put together a logo, a basic color scheme, and a particular theme with a warm feel. From this work, it is possible to begin work on a postcard or brochure. Be sure the images used in design reflect the people of the community. Use a wide variety of warm people pictures that reflect the ethnic and age groups of the target area. If the piece is being prepared before the church has started to meet or if the facilities are less than photogenic, don't worry. The graphic artist will have several pictures available for purchase with which the target group will identify. These pictures can be inserted into your work for a fee. Be prepared to pay for each picture. One way to reduce the cost is to buy a picture CD-ROM through your graphic artist. These CDs contain several pictures and can be purchased for just over \$100. Such CDs are good investments because once they are purchased the pictures can be used over and over without further cost.

The direct-mail piece should be in full color if possible. If color isn't in the budget ask the artist to play with the color of the paper and the ink. However, don't send out anything in black and white. The cover should be warm, inviting, and contain pictures and the church logo. Keep the words on the cover to a few. Inside, or on the opposite side for a postcard, include a quick simple message based on the research obtained. In addition to the carefully chosen words, be sure to include a meeting address, meeting times, a list of felt-need ministries, a phone number, and a map.

Several companies offer ready-to-mail postcards and brochures for churches. These companies have several picturesque postcards with inspiring images already printed. You simply add your information to the back of the card. These cards can save time, but they won't save money. It is possible to get the same printing price by a local printer, if you take the time to get multiple printers to bid on the work. Also, preprinted cards are generic by nature and won't have your logo in color on the front without a significant up-charge. These cards are

best used for seasonal promotions like Easter instead of being used to get a new church started.

If you go on your own, be sure to edit, edit, edit. Remember, the goal is to raise awareness, create attitude, and cause action. Cost will prohibit being able to send out several different pieces so be sure to communicate everything necessary to accomplish the three goals in one piece. First, ask; “Is this understandable?” Write for a fourth-grade reading level to ensure readability. Then ask: “Is this junk mail?” If the answer is yes, then start over again. Consider changing the size, consider a uniquely shaped paper like a home or a heart, and work again with color. People respond to direct mail if it is unique, quick and easy to read, and they can get something new from reading it

Overall, there is a good success rate with direct mail. Usually, it is about 1 percent. That sounds low, but 5,000 homes receiving the mail out could generate between 25-50 prospect homes. For the best response, plan the timing well. In general, don't mail during the summer while many prospects are away. Don't mail during the holidays when the mailbox is full. Be sure the mail is timed so that it arrives close to Sunday. This may increase the response rate. For the very best results, add a response postcard to any brochure so people can write back for more information. This way, you get to set up a prospect list even without the respondent visiting your church.

If this is too much, a church planter could always follow the example set by Rick Warren when he planted Saddleback Valley Community Church. According to Rick, he got a mailing list of the homes in the area and recruited volunteers to hand-address a personal letter from Rick inviting people to the new congregation on Easter Sunday morning. They had a tremendous response from the letter because the envelope was hand-addressed and carried a stamp.<sup>1</sup> All of these factors allowed the mail to be opened before being thrown on the junk mail pile. Realize that this type of marketing takes coordination, time, and money. Also, consumers today are more experienced and may quickly regard the letter as junk mail.

These are the traditional avenues used for marketing. However, today there is a growing number of specialty marketing opportunities on the Internet. In general, specialty marketing is nontraditional advertising that opens a particular market niche. In the church planter's case, the market niche is probably people who live within 10 miles of the church.

All types of cost-effective avenues are open for the planters to mediate their message. For example, many communities distribute newsletters. Most will accept church advertising. The average cost is less than \$100 for a full page. This is a

good buy because it markets only to prospects. Many people are more likely to read a community newsletter than a citywide newspaper because of their perceived need to know about events in the community. Apartment complexes, condominium associations, and new developments also have such letters.

A church planter could simply market to one development or complex per month and within a year have the message completely distributed to all prospects for less than \$1,200 in marketing cost. The beauty of this is that not only has the message been distributed, but it has been systematically distributed. This means that the message can be updated and edited for greater impact. This allows for consistent and fast growth.

One important caution is to make sure the advertisement represents the congregation and looks as sharp as possible. If possible, have a piece professionally laid out and printed. Low distribution should not equate with low quality.

The bottom line is that there isn't a silver bullet for marketing a new church start. However, there are some key ideas:

- Research your target audience before you begin marketing.
- Use warm, inviting, multiethnic images to capture attention.
- Keep marketing local to help manage cost.
- Use a variety of media for the best impact.

Once the marketing is done, the next area for the church planter to become proficient in is the use of technology. Computers and technology have come a long way since their first introduction into the life of the church. In the beginning, computers were viewed as handy devices for maintaining church prospect files, membership roles, and financial records. Today, in many churches, the computer is a centerpiece in helping to facilitate worship because of the computer's ability to effectively mediate a message to a contemporary audience.

Earlier in this chapter, it was shown that people are accustomed to a well-mediated message and how marketing needs to be done on the church campus as well as through outside media. When those two ideas are put together, it is soon realized whatever images used to draw people into the congregation should be used throughout the church campus. For example, if a church logo is used on a postcard, it needs to be vividly displayed on the church campus. This is how the guests know they have found the right place. I suggest the logo be placed both outside and inside the building to make the guests feel more comfortable. They should see the logo on the road sign, at the guest parking area,

on the shirts of those welcoming them into the church, and finally on the video screen. The reason is because, initially, the guests are responding to the mediated image. Having that image clearly visible will relax the guests and help to direct them through the campus.

Although technology can be used in many areas of church worship, including handling complicated lighting and sound, the main use of the computer in the contemporary worship center is creating video images. We live in an age of images and the computer can recreate images appearing to be live and can guide the guest through worship.

Many church planters shy away from using video in worship because they are convinced the price tag is too high. However, in most situations, computer-generated video images are much more affordable than most planters think. A 50" or 60" television run by a Windows®-compatible computer with a television converter is all someone needs to bring technology into a smaller worship setting. Churches unable to afford a large screen could use a few smaller-screen televisions operated by the same system.

Here is what I chose to do in Florida. We were able to get a state-of-the-art video system up and working for less than \$2,500. When you walk into the doors of our worship center, the first thing you'll notice is the huge 60" television on the stage. It has a picture of a family at play with our church logo and the words "Welcome to FishHawk Fellowship" displayed. As the service begins, the words for all of the music are promptly displayed. Then, as the worship transitions from music to preaching, the video system accompanies the preaching by displaying the message outline, quoted material, all Scriptures, and image illustrations.

The program of choice for making this information come to life is PowerPoint®. Of course there are more complicated systems, but PowerPoint meets the needs of our congregation. It is an investment each week of about 10 hours to make the video presentation run parallel to the music and message, but the advantages are worth the investment.

Technology and video prove their worth in many ways. First, because people are image-minded, video offers an image for the people with which to interact. If they pay attention to the video, they don't have to worry about making a wrong move, like standing while everyone else is sitting. This helps to relax the guest. Also, by putting the music on the video screen, we are able to get the congregation to sing out toward the screen instead of down into a songbook or chorus sheet. Finally, the video images bring home the message in the lives of the congregation. People in an audience fade in and out during any message regardless of who is

preaching. Attention span is short. The video image helps to lengthen the attention span and helps the listeners to quickly find their place again by simply looking on screen. For the preacher, the video images help keep the message on track by offering sight in addition to sound.

After the video system is up and running, consider investing in a quality scanner and video camera. Scanners are relatively inexpensive, easy to operate, and make it possible to add full color pictures to serve as background images for announcements and music, to illustrate a point in the message, and to be used to tell a story. For example, scanned pictures could tell the story of what happened during Vacation Bible School week for those who didn't attend.

The bottom line is that people respond well to video and technology. People like lively colorful images that can inspire or inform them. Furthermore, because of the widespread use of television today, it is often easier for many people to understand a video message than it is for them to grasp a word message. By incorporating video messages into worship, the church planter can make the worship service much more understandable for the new guest.

Although many aspects of today's media and technology are rather new, they are becoming essential in the life of the church. It is reminiscent of what happened in the church a few hundred years ago with the invention of the printing press. It must have been difficult for church leaders in that day to realize what a tool the press would be. But one day they did. With the same open mind, may we embrace the advancements of today and use them vigorously to spread the message of Jesus Christ.

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### Principles

1. Learn the informal language—the lingo—of the common group that makes up the community.
2. Secure a graphic artist to assist in the creation of a logo to identify your church in the community.
3. Seek an affordable advertising method to get your church known in your community.

#### Note

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1. See Rick Warren, *The Purpose-Driven™ Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), pp. 41-44.

## Chapter 6

# Networking in a Church Plant: Helping People Get What They Want, So You Get What You Need

By Paul Smith, Pastor  
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**M**oving to a new area to plant a church can be a paralyzing experience. After all, what you know about the area is what you have gleaned from only a few visits, conversations with a strategist within the state, and possibly the demographic and psychographic data known as segments. One of the most frustrating experiences for a church planter, particularly for those in their first plant, is to wake up on the first day, look in the mirror, and say, “Now what do I do?” You have been trained, schooled, and more importantly called to church plant, but now you seem inept in the development of a game plan. You came to start a church, and you understand to do so calls for getting people involved in a certain location to carry out the New Testament concept of a church. However, you are faced with a church in need of people, but it does not know where to find them. In fact, you do not even know the people who can help you find them. In this chapter, we will highlight some of the principles and practices used in the art of networking.

On Wednesday, December 4, 1997, in the prayer room at Bethel Baptist Church in Monticello, Mississippi, I was praying and seeking God for His direction and vision. I usually knew by October the vision and direction for our church during the upcoming year. However, this year I found myself struggling and confused as to why God was not giving me the clarity of vision He had so blessed me with the past seven years. About the tenth day of a fast, I cried out to God: “Why won’t you tell me what you want to do through our ministry next year?” His reply to me went something like this: “Why should I tell you what I am going to do with this church when you are not going to be here to carry it where I want it to go?”



With that response from God, I began to ask other questions like: “WHAT?” “What do you want me to do?” “Where do you want me to do it?” My ministry up until this time had involved transforming, revitalizing, and transitioning churches to have a more purposeful and more contemporary approach to reaching people for Jesus. I came out of the prayer room that day and went immediately to the office of Tim Morrison, worship pastor, and invited him to lunch. He said, “I can’t go to lunch with you; you are supposed to be fasting.” Accountability is tough.

I told Tim that God was through with me at Bethel and I was going to resign. He said, “I know, God had been impressing that upon my heart as well.”

I couldn’t believe it. Due to my wife’s work schedule, I was unable to see her all day. It wasn’t until after worship that Wednesday that we were able to talk. After putting our twin five-year-olds to bed, we went downstairs and began to talk. As I shared with Lara what had happened in the prayer room I looked at her and said, “Lara, God has told me to resign Bethel.” I was expecting something along the lines of, “Are you crazy?” Instead, she responded with, “I know.” She told me that the previous Sunday God had asked her, “What are you going to do when Paul comes home and tells you that your ministry at Bethel is completed?” That night Lara and I began to pray and seek God’s will for our lives and the direction we were to follow. We had always said we would not stay at a church just for a salary.

I resigned from Bethel to begin a new church on the north shore of New Orleans, in the fastest-growing parish in Louisiana. When I traveled to the area to look at the community and to begin establishing relationships, I found that I needed a strategy of how I would meet people, gather names, and find ways to discover people who could become prospects for the new church. Questions bombarded my mind as to where and how would I look for potential members. Professor Will McRaney, of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, had been hosting a Bible study in his home for one year. He had about six people committed to helping with the plant of a new church. With only a few names given to me by Professor McRaney, who had completed the initial research and planning for a church on the north shore, I began to try to discover, meet, and build intentional relationships with people.

One of the first steps in networking in a new church plant is to network with pastors who are currently serving in the area in which you will be planting. While in an ideal world these pastors should be ready to network with you, one should be mindful that sometimes pastors can feel threatened and “turf protective” about a new church beginning in their area. However, this should be no excuse for the planter to not take the initiative in reaching out to the pastors in the area. One

way to begin to network with pastors in the area is to attend pastors' meetings and associational events. Indicating to other pastors your intent to be a team player and not a lone ranger in the community will go well in you being accepted, appreciated, and able to network with them. The planter should show his respect for their labor for God's kingdom in the area. Just because you as a planter are coming to the city with a fresh vision, new direction, and possibly a different approach to ministry, doesn't mean that their ministries are not relevant and needed in the community.

I remember some of the conversations I had early on about the ministry of NorthPoint Church and the fresh way we would do marketing, worship, and evangelism. Some of the "older" pastors in the area sat quietly in the room not saying much. The focus was on the young boy in town and the young passion. I tried to get one-on-one with these pastors at breaks and meetings to inquire what they had tried and had it worked. I asked them to share what they had learned about people in the parish.

Don't discredit the pastors in the community where you will be planting. They contain a wealth of information that can save you time in discovering facts about the area, habits of people, seasonal movements of the people, and where people spend holidays. Networking with existing pastors may reveal information that you can't discover or decipher in demographical, psychographical, or census data. Another way to network with pastors in the area is to have your state strategist, associational director of missions, or church planting strategist host a reception in your honor at a local church for all ministers in the area to get to know you and your family. Be prepared to give a short presentation on your history and what you are in the area to do. Focus on God's call on your life, the vision you have received from God, and your desire to learn from them, share with them, and fellowship with them. Make every attempt possible to get the "turf issues" placed aside and thank God for the ministries and ministers that have paved the way for you to be there. Still another way to network with pastors in your area of planting is to personally call key pastors in the area and offer to take them to lunch to introduce yourself and become acquainted with them. I have found that, in my current situation, networking with pastors outside of my denomination has also has been beneficial to my receptivity within the community.

Numerous benefits come from networking with the pastors in the area where God has commissioned you to plant. First, it provides you with accountability and friendship. Second, it enables you to gain ministry insight and tips from those who have been battle tested in your area. Third, it allows you to be a source of fresh eyes and encouragement to other pastors. Fourth, it might provide the avenue for you to find potential core families, financial resources, and prayer support as you launch this new church for the kingdom of God.

In August of 2001, I met with another church planter who told me about a pastor in his area who was not in favor of him starting a new church in their area. He explained his uneasiness about the situation, especially since some of the “proposed frustrated” pastor’s members were talking about becoming part of the core families of the new church. Some wanted to join the worship team and others just wanted to be a part of something fresh and new.

The first question I asked was, “Have you personally called the pastor, introduced yourself to him, and let him know that you were not there to compete against him but to help him continue to increase the population of heaven?” The answer was no. I advised this planter to call the pastor, as uncomfortable as it seemed, and invite him to lunch. He did. It was painless, and a relationship of mutual respect and professionalism was achieved.

I am sure you can think of many ways that networking with existing pastors can help you in your church plant. I can’t think of one way in which it will hurt you. However, I can think of numerous ways that it will hinder you, discredit you, and cause you much pain (emotionally, mentally, and spiritually) if you do not attempt to network with those who are already networking in your community.

I have known several situations where a new church planter didn’t develop cordial, cooperative, and positive relationships with existing pastors and how it hindered their start and potentially damaged the successful beginning of their new church plant. I have also known of a church planter who had to overcome bad relationships that developed while he conducted preliminary work in an area. His bulldog, hard-nosed, know-it-all approach to church planting alienated the pastors from him and my association with him caused them to, in turn, alienate me. It took me months to rebuild and reestablish relationships that should have been the easiest to have obtained and maintained.

The second step in networking in a church plant is to network with *people*. You might ask why I distinguish pastors as non-people. It’s the way I grew up. I was taught there were three sexes: male, female, and preachers. Yes, I concede most preachers are people. However, if you are one, you must admit that most have a different lingo, language, look, and laughter. Who are the people you need to network with and where do you find them? Good question!

The first group of people we need to network with is *people who know people*. There are several ways to find people who know people. If you live in an metropolitan area try the following: Attend rotary club or Kiwanis meetings, business luncheons, community functions, community growth and community focus group meetings, go to health clubs, volunteer as a hospice or hospital chaplain. If you live in a more rural area, hang out at the local café (you need to arrive before

5:30 a.m.), city hall, start a book reading club, a running club, or join the local sportsman club in your area. In other words, go to places where people who know people hang out.

In Mandeville, we identified two places where people had a tendency to hang out. The first was a weekend hangout. Every Saturday morning, hundreds of children, with parents in tow, could be found at the local parks playing soccer, baseball, football, and so forth. Coaches know people. The second place was a prestigious and state-of-the-art workout gym. I had been told that the owner was a Christian and was also a kingdom-minded guy. I made an appointment with him to talk about the movements, habits, lifestyle, and any other information he could give me about the people we would soon be trying to reach for Christ. It proved to be one of the best and most productive two hours I spent in the initial days of our start up. During this conversation, I discovered that most of the businessmen hit the gym at 4:45 a.m., so they could be through with their workout and headed into New Orleans for work by 6:00 a.m. With this information, I knew the best time for me to work out at the gym if I wanted to meet and have an opportunity to build relationships with people who I would want to reach for Christ. I joined the gym and began going at 4:45 every morning to work out. This proved to be the beginning of many positive relationships. The health club owner also talked about the community and the trends he was seeing in relationship to spending habits, money management, family time, and spirituality. He said that he considered himself to be an active church member, but only attended about twice a month due to his children's swim meets, soccer games, and other team involvements. This information, had I understood the significance of it, could have saved me many frustrating Sundays when I could not get anyone to complete my one-hour, four-week new-members class. It took me a few months before I changed my approach to accommodate a community of people who, at their best, were only willing at first to give you two weeks a month for God.

The second group of people we need to network with are those *people who know God*. While talking to people who know people, I noted the names of people they discussed in conversation. I soon found that in Christian circles there were a few names mentioned in conversations over and over. One such name was Barry Haindel. Barry, a former teacher who accepted Christ as Savior, was called into the ministry. He is a brilliant and highly motivated man who has a ministry of training, developing, and reaching businessmen for Jesus Christ. Almost every person I spoke with in Christian circles mentioned Barry and his influence in the non-Christian arena. They said: "Barry knew where to find people who needed to be found by Christ."

I discovered that Barry was hosting a Christian Business Men's Club luncheon on the north shore at the Beau Chene Country Club and that Christians were invit-

ed to bring their non-Christian friends to hear a dynamic businessman share about his success and his relationship with Christ. I made a reservation to attend that meeting, no lost person in tow, but I felt as lost as I could be. I knew how to grow a church with people already there, but what do you do to get the first ones coming?

As soon as I arrived, I began to look for Barry Haindel. I waited for an appropriate time and then introduced myself. I asked if I could talk with him when the luncheon meeting was over. He inquired who I was and what I wanted to talk about, and then politely and very gentlemanly indicated that he probably wouldn't have time. It was there I learned a valuable lesson: *People who know people aren't willing to share their people with people who have agendas.*

It was obvious to this mover and shaker that I was only interested in him for what I thought he could do for me. I didn't even listen to the man speaking that day. I asked God how I could recover from the first impression I had obviously blown. Remember the commercial, "You don't get a second chance to make a first impression." Well, thank God for mercy and grace. I remembered a leadership principle that I had learned years before: "Never ask for a hand until you first touch a heart." I spent the next hour thinking of a way I could let Barry know that I wanted to invest in his life and ministry and not just get to know him for what he could do for me. After the meeting, I waited and waited to see if Barry would have a moment to talk with me. It was apparent he wasn't making plans to do so any time soon. So, I walked up to him and said, "Barry, good meeting today. Thanks for letting me come, I know it's late and you probably have to run." He nodded affirmative with relief. Continuing I said, "Barry, it is my understanding that you build relationships with businessmen through motivational speaking and Bible studies. I have something in my car that you might be interested in listening to. It might give you some great ideas on how you can further influence the men you are currently influencing. May I give it to you?"

He replied, "Yes." We walked to my car where I gave him a stack of "Maximum Impact Leadership" audiocassette tapes geared to businessmen. I told him if he enjoyed the tapes, I had more.

Three days later he called and asked to meet with me. He had listened to every one of the tapes and felt that they were the best things he had ever come across. We set a meeting time for the next day. During our meeting, he asked me if I would come and speak to one of his "bottom line" business luncheons and talk on leadership and the Bible. Of course I could! After my first visit, I was invited back again, and again, and again. To this day, Barry and I are linked in ministry in trying to invest in business leaders on the north shore and the south shore of New Orleans. In fact, I met one of the key leaders in my church today at the first

luncheon at which I spoke in New Orleans. Two years later, he moved across the lake, down the street from me, and we ran into each other. Was this a coincidence or divine appointment? You make the call. What I learned through this process was the best way to find people is to find a person who knows where people are and begin to influence them. They will let you influence the people they are influencing.

The third group we need to network with are those *people who need to know people*. As I met people and discovered that they were Christians but weren't plugged into a group, I tried to link them with people I knew who had ministries that could equip them. For example, I met a Christian who was a former member of the Assembly of God denomination. As we talked, he decided that it was time for him to go back to church and give God another chance. Individuals such as this often asked me if I knew of a church. I would first of course say, "Yes, I'm starting a new church, and I could use a person like you to help or I would invite them to my H.O.M.E. TEAM<sup>1</sup> or to attend our Sunday worship. If they desired something like what they grew up with, I referred them to a pastor friend of their preferred denomination. If I met a businessman and he didn't think he was ready to attend a worship service or my H.O.M.E. TEAM, I referred him to Barry Haindel<sup>2</sup> and made sure he attended one of his Bible studies. If I met a lady who didn't want to try NorthPoint or she didn't want to go to a H.O.M.E. TEAM, I introduced her to a Christian lady I knew who was teaching a Bible study in a local bookstore.

I certainly don't want to sound like the only people you need to network with are other Christians. Some of the greatest relationships I have developed on the north shore have been with people who do not attend my church or, for that matter, any church. They are happy where they currently attend or they have not come to the place where they see the need to search for God, much less attend a church. Your ability to network with these people may provide the opportunity for you to introduce them to Jesus. When in a gathering of business people, introduce those you know to those they don't know. I am constantly introducing realtors in our church to contractors and builders. That may be why we have five realtors and three contractors/builders in our church.

People in business are constantly looking for ways to get to know people who need their services or can meet their needs. Many times an introduction by you or an inclusion into your conversation may be the link that gets them the business they desire. I can assure you that when you link two people together in business and it is beneficial to both, they won't forget the person who made that connection for them. In fact, they may become an evangelist for your church even though they do not attend. Often, a businessman comes and says, "Paul, let me introduce you to Jeff. He is looking for a church. Jeff, you need to go to Paul's church. He is starting a new church in the area."

The fourth group of people we need to network with are those *who need to know God*. As a church planter, I am sure that you are where you are, doing what you are doing, because you want to see people come to know God in a relevant, authentic, and positive way. I trust that you have already identified several places that you can go to meet people who need to know God.

When I was a young boy, I listened to the albums of Bob Herrington, known as the Chaplain of Bourbon Street. I listened over and over to his creative ways of finding people with whom he could share Jesus. One of the most delightful was his suggestion that you only buy gas from Shell. He described how he would drive into a Shell gas station, always full service. When the attendant came to the car, Herrington would ask, “Sir, are you saved?” To which the man would reply, “Am I what?” Herrington would then ask again if the gentleman was saved. The gentleman would then say, “I don’t know.” Herrington would then say, “Sir, take the “S” off that sign (Shell) and that’s where you are going if you die.”

You may not be that forward or zealous in your evangelistic methods. Be yourself, not Bob Herrington. But be a person who gets out of the office and out from behind the computer screen and into the “roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that God’s house will be full” (see Luke 14:22-24).

Perhaps it was the many hours of listening to the Chaplain of Bourbon Street that sparked my own creative ways of finding people to whom I can be a witness. I am sure that as a church planter you have already discovered many creative ways to discover people to whom you can be a witness. However, in case you are at a lull, let me suggest a few places to visit: grocery stores, gas stations, health clubs, ball games, soccer practice, baseball practice, karate practice, volleyball practice, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, sailing (my favorite place to meet people who need to know God), coffee shops, parent-teacher fellowships, and numerous other places. You get the idea. Almost anywhere we go we can meet people who need to know God. The issue is not finding them; it is recognizing and having a mindset that every person we meet is a potential follower of Jesus Christ.

Caution! Don’t look at people as potential members for your church. As a church planter this should be the easiest group of people with whom you network. I encourage you to hang out in places where people who need to know God hang out. In my church, everyone knows I have two offices. The one I spend the least amount of my time in is located at 67159 Industry Lane. My second office and the one I spend the most of my time in is at Starbucks. I share it with other business people, college students, and teenagers. It is nicely decorated. It has chairs, couches, tables, and the wonderful aroma of coffee and my personal favorite, refresh tea. It doesn’t cost me anything for utilities. I pay no air conditioning or heating bills. I get to log onto the Internet free and surf as long as I want. While



there I answer e-mails, send first-, second-, and third-time guest letters, review prayer requests, decisions, and write encouraging e-mails. You may not be a Starbucks person. Perhaps you are a book reader. Why not try a popular book store in your area? You may be a ballplayer. Why not join some adult leagues in basketball, baseball, softball, or flag football? If none exist in your area, get community-minded and start them. The point is to utilize places others are already being attracted to and go there to meet them intentionally for Jesus.

Since I like sailing, I use sailing as a method of finding people with whom to share Jesus. I haven't always been a sailor. In fact, I had never sailed until I moved to Mandeville to start NorthPoint Church. When I moved there, I began to pray for God to give me a boat so my family could enjoy beautiful Lake Pontchartrain that separates New Orleans' south shore with our north shore. Not only could I imagine relaxing weekends with Lara, Jared, and Ryan, but all of the boating community that I would be able to network with due to the area where we live.

You may think it to be a selfish prayer, but nonetheless, I prayed for God to give me a boat. I am an avid believer that God will give you the desires of your heart. Several months into my church planting experience, I attended and volunteered to be a counselor and prayer partner for a Peter Lowe Success Conference in New Orleans. At that conference, hundreds of men responded to wanting someone to follow up with them about the gospel message presented that day. I was given all the names of people who attended from the north shore. Those names didn't cost me a penny. I only had to spend a day at a dynamic conference to which I took four of my key leaders. One of the men who asked for counseling agreed to meet with me to hear more about Jesus. While witnessing to this man over lunch at a local restaurant, I noticed an attractive African-American lady who seemed to be listening to our conversation. She stayed at her table until the gentlemen and I were through with our conversation and lunch. As I was walking out of the restaurant, this lady came out right behind me. I paused at the front door, waited on her, opened the door for her, and said, "God bless you and have a great day." She said thanks and left.

The next Sunday, she and her husband walked into our worship service at the Holiday Inn. On their way out of church, she introduced me to her husband, "Honey, this is the man who I told you was so polite and opened the door for me in the restaurant."

Chris and Angela had been receiving our church brochures in the mail for about a year. That Sunday they decided to give it a try. Who would have ever thought that the lady I opened the door for would have received a brochure in the mail and decided to visit NorthPoint Church. Chris and Angela became committed to the ministry of NorthPoint. But the story doesn't end there.



One day Chris, a surgeon in a major hospital in New Orleans, called and asked if we could have lunch. I agreed, and over lunch, Chris shared many things about his relationship with God. He was seeking to discern some things that God was saying to him. As we prepared to leave Chris asked, “Pastor, how can I help you?”

I gave the typical response we preacher types tend to give. “Nothing Chris, I am just thankful you and Angela are committed to NorthPoint.”

Chris said, “Don’t blow smoke at me, Paul. Seriously, what can I do for you?”

“If you ever hear of someone who has a sailboat, I want to learn how to sail, and I want my family to learn how to sail,” I answered.

“Let me see what I can do,” he said, “and I will call you.”

About two weeks later, I received a phone call from Chris asking me to meet him down at Mandeville Harbor and to plan on being with him about four hours. I arrived only to discover that Chris was the proud owner of a 19-foot Hunter sailboat. He spent the next year teaching me to sail.

I received a phone call from Chris one day about two weeks before he and Angela were to move to Hawaii. He asked if I could get Lara, Jared, and Ryan and meet him and Angela down at the yacht club. As we arrived at the harbor, Chris asked Jared and Ryan to stand in front of his sailboat. He proceeded to commission them as co-captains of the boat and gave them the key saying it was theirs. Answered prayers! Don’t you just love them! Don’t get wrapped up in the gift and say you’re lucky. Luck had nothing to do with it. It all started with me praying about a witnessing encounter with a man in the restaurant from a volunteer gig I had given for a conference.

The story doesn’t end with the obtaining of a boat. While sailing one day with my children, we were attempting to get out of the harbor in some rough seas. On our way out, a 55-foot sailboat was coming into the harbor. The young couple took one look at my crew, both nine years of age, and yelled down to me that I should not attempt sailing out into the rough seas. I chose to listen to these obviously seasoned salty dogs and brought my boat about and returned to the harbor. After tying up my boat, Jared, Ryan, and I walked down to the boat of the couple that had been so concerned about my sailing abilities with such a young crew. After being granted permission to come aboard, we introduced ourselves to people I know only as Chip and Eve. I discovered that Chip and Eve lived on their boat in the harbor in Slidell, Louisiana. Our church is well worth the 45-minute drive from where Chip and Eve live in Oak Harbor. However, I knew that we were about to help launch a new church in the Oak Harbor area. I immediately called

Larry McEwen, the church planter who had only been on the field four weeks and gave him their names.

About two months after giving Larry their names, I talked with him about how the preparations for his pre-launch services were progressing. I asked about Chip and Eve. I had been praying that God would use Larry and his new church plant to reach them for Christ. Larry told me that a couple helping to launch the new church in Oak Harbor lived on a boat just a few slips down from Chip and Eve. This couple knew Chip and Eve. Larry and his friends were hosting a cookout at the harbor the following weekend. They personally invited Chip and Eve. Larry was able to build a rapport with the couple, and he discovered that Eve had been a professional singer. He called to tell me just a few weeks after their cookout that Eve was going to join the praise team as a singer and that both Eve and Chip were joining in the birthing of the church plant in Slidell, Louisiana.

Another way that I meet people who need to know God is by teaching Bible studies for businessmen. Because of my new and growing relationship with Barry, I felt like I at least had an opportunity to meet people. The unfortunate aspect of this was that most of Barry's meetings and ministry were located on the other side of the lake. I found myself traveling to the south shore to speak and wasn't really able to meet many people on the north shore. I called Barry one day frustrated and dejected. I said, "Barry I am dying over here. I am used to speaking to leaders on a monthly basis in my last church, and I am really missing the interaction with people who are difference makers." I asked Barry if he had ever thought of starting a Bible study on the north shore for VIPs. I explained that I would like to see a place where VIPs could come and learn about the Bible in a setting conducive to them.

He agreed to set up a meeting for us to talk about this with the mayor of Mandeville, who is a Christian. During our meeting, we discussed whether or not some of the VIPs might want their priest or preacher to have an opportunity to lead the Bible study. The "turf" deal again. I suggested that Barry lead the study. I offered my help in any way. The mayor agreed to write a letter inviting judges, high-powered lawyers, business owners, and the likes to attend a preliminary breakfast meeting. It went well. I took a backseat and watched Barry assemble some very influential people to meet every Thursday at 7:00 a.m. for a Bible study. It wasn't long before Barry needed to miss the study. He phoned me and asked if I could fill in for him. I now lead the study every Thursday morning at the executive conference room of one of the largest employers on the north shore. I have seen several prominent men come to Christ. The key principle through this process is "don't be afraid to give others your idea." If it is a good idea, you will still benefit from it sooner or later.

One last key networking practice for me was *prayer*. As I gathered names of people from conversations and met people at the health club, I returned home and typed them into my Church Planting Management System. This software was designed by the North American Mission Board by church planters for church planters. One of the modules in this database is on prayer. As I typed people's names into my database I scheduled a time of prayer for them and asked God to allow me to meet them, influence them for Him, and if they were not Christian, to be able to lead them to faith in Christ. As I shared my vision with more and more people on the north shore, they encouraged me to arrange a meeting with Anthony Campo. He was a business entrepreneur who had taken over his father's business and turned it into a publicly traded company. I typed his name into my database and began to pray for Anthony and me to meet.

I received a call one day from Dennis R. Watson, senior pastor, of our sponsoring church, Celebration Church in Metairie, Louisiana. He invited me to speak at a men's conference in his church. Celebration was teaming up with White Dove Fellowship in the metroplex area of New Orleans to have a Lovers and Leaders Men's Conference. I was to talk on leadership. I'm not quite sure how Dennis decided why I would be best suited to talk about leadership versus loving. Nonetheless, the conference had been advertised all over Christian radio in New Orleans. On the Friday that the conference was to start, I arrived not even thinking that people from the north shore would attend a meeting on the south shore. When I walked down to where the speakers were to gather, I saw a man standing by himself at the entrance to the worship center. I walked over and introduced myself to him. "Hi, I'm Paul Smith." "Hello, I'm Anthony Campo."

After I caught my breath I said, "Anthony, we have some mutual friends, and I have heard a lot of wonderful things about you."

I discovered that he too was by himself that night so I asked him to sit with me. After the conference, we decided that we would ride back together the next morning. During our commute, we discovered that we had several things in common. We not only belonged to the same gym, but we both loved racquetball. We decided to start playing every morning. Over the next months, Anthony and I developed a great relationship and became the best of friends.

One Sunday morning Anthony, his lovely wife, and beautiful daughter walked into the Holiday Inn to worship at NorthPoint. They have not missed many Sundays since then. Anthony and his family have since started a very upscale and successful Christian bookstore called Simple Goodness. They provide Christian resources for our church and he serves on our leadership team. Through prayer, we are networking with the One who knows how to network in the ultimate way.

As church planters we must learn this awesome art of networking with people. It is why we are where we are and why we are doing what we are doing. Business people for years have used the art of networking to grow their business, companies, and financial resources. They spend millions of dollars in training their sales force to know the fine art of networking. I suggest that we church planters begin to attend some of these business conferences and learn the art of networking. Begin to look for ways that you can network with the people groups I have discussed in this chapter. I have not attempted to give you a one-, two-, or three-step procedure in networking with people. Many of these four people groups and the networking groups I have discussed will be done simultaneously. There is no way that you can determine in any given day that you will only meet pastors, or people who know people, or people who need to know people, or people who need to know Jesus. You must be prepared to meet, look to meet, and ready to respond appropriately to everyone that you should encounter. The way to help bring all this together is to network with God through prayer. After all, He is the one who led you to the place where you are, to do what you are trying to do.

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### Principles

1. Meet the pastors in the area and seek wisdom and understanding of the community where you plan to start the new church.
2. Find the community gathering places where people are available.
3. Meet influential people who know people.
4. Keep a prayer list of influential people and pray regularly for God to open a door of opportunity where you might meet them.

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### Notes

1. H.O.M.E. Team is the name we call our cell ministry. H.O.M.E represents Helping Others through Ministry and Encouragement.
2. Barry's ministry is called L.I.F.E. Resources.



## Chapter Seven

# Casting a Vision for Reproduction of Your Church

By Jim Henry, Pastor  
First Baptist Church  
Orlando, Florida

Yesterday's experiences forge today's choices. Such thoughts raced through my mind as I began writing this chapter. The reality of what our church is experiencing had its roots in my encounters in the church I was a member of during my student days. It was an established church that was planting a new church. The new church was in a growing suburban area and meeting in an elementary school, with worship services in the school cafeteria, Bible study in classrooms with chairs too small, and artwork of future Michelangelos pinned to the wall. The choir sang from the stage, a piano was the major musical instrument, and the strange sound of chairs responding to burdens being lifted when everyone stood to sing or pray still are gentle on my mind. I can still see the happy faces in the parking lot as we came and went, the positive spirit of my teachers and leaders, and the anticipation when we moved into the first phase of the building on our new property. The sense of having our own place and space, the smell of fresh paint, and the excitement of being in our new church created a spirit of well-being in me that I did not fully appreciate at the time. But I was captured by the sense of adventure, of the unseen, of newness, and of ownership.

God's call on my life some years later found me as a pastor. My first two churches were rural, but this city boy learned a lot. From there I moved to Nashville to become the pastor of Two Rivers, a church barely three years old, a church start from a neighboring body of Christ. I dug in for what I thought may be a lifetime pastorate. We grew steadily, and I found myself immersed in the building of a growing church with very little available in the steps of church growth that is abundant today. From planning menus for the youth retreat to committee meetings to discussing the color of floor tile, I received a real hands-on learning experience. During the 12-1/2 years I was pastor of Two Rivers, I thought little of reproducing our church. There were several reasons.

First, we were on the learning curve ourselves. Second, we were moving so fast we didn't have time to think beyond ourselves. Third, we felt we needed all the resources we could get to survive financially. Fourth, it did not seem to be a priority to our people or me. We felt like we were laying the track on a fast-moving freight train that would engulf us if we slacked off or were diverted in any way. This is not to say the church did not have a heart to reach our world. Our people engaged in mission trips, and we had strong missions organizations. Strong giving to special mission offerings, the Cooperative Program, missionaries, mission events, and representatives—nationally and internationally—were staples around the throbbing heart of our dynamic church.

When the Lord sent me from Nashville, Tennessee, to Orlando, Florida, I became pastor of a downtown church that had a long history in church planting. We were not the oldest church in Orlando. Our mother church, First Baptist of Oviedo, a dynamic church, loves to remind us that we are its daughter. First Baptist had started 11 churches when I arrived in 1977. The Lord favored us, and we saw spiraling growth. Soon we were studying the possibility of having to relocate to accommodate what we felt God wanted to do through His people at First Baptist. We bought property and moved in 1985. Prior to our leaving the downtown area, we had been instrumental in mothering the South Orlando Baptist Church, strongly supported one church plant in New Jersey and one in Pennsylvania with people and money, and salvaged an earlier church mission, Parkway, which was about to go under because of dwindling numbers. I was ready to sell the property and invest in another work, or in our own, when our associate pastor, Bill Curl, now an international missionary in Wales, prevailed upon me to give them one more chance. We made a deal. Let us pick their next pastor and we'll give it a chance. The remaining members took us up on it, and called Danny Strickland to be pastor. On his first Sunday, 19 were present. If ever a church was on life-support and needed not only resuscitation but resurrection, this one did. Today, they are approaching 2,000 in worship, have relocated once, and are getting ready to purchase more than 100 acres and do it again.

The next years found us in the same cycle as I had experienced at Two Rivers. Building, growing, adapting to a changing culture, and a booming metro area, thoughts of reproducing our church rarely gripped my mind. First Baptist continued its strong global and national outreach in other ways. Hundreds of our people went on mission trips; we had a missionary home for furloughing missionaries. We led our state and nation in Cooperative Program giving. We saw the Lord call many of our people to ministry and missions. With all of these good things happening, why reproduce ourselves when we had all we could say grace over? That's what I thought until I was in attendance at a gathering of pastors from large churches. During the course of the meeting, a representative of the North

American Mission Board enlightened us of some of the new things going on in Atlanta. During the course of his remarks, the speaker mentioned the new initiative of planting churches in major metropolitan areas across America. The apostle Paul saw the strategic nature of cities in church planting and so must we. I had held this theory for years and had occasionally voiced it to sympathetic ears, but no fundamental philosophical changes took place. When I heard the speaker spell out this new direction, he reiterated what I had been thinking. We need to go in with resources, commitment, and Spirit-gifted people, and make an impact. He then asked if we were willing to partner with them in this endeavor. The moment of truth came. I had to put my money where my mouth was. I signed up.

Shortly after that, I spent some time praying and thinking through my own journey of faith. No spring chicken, I had to appraise what I would be doing and where I wanted to lead our church in the next years. It was no time to coast. I didn't want my church thinking I was going to go gently into the night, and I knew my own spiritual and emotional makeup was not geared in that direction. As I filtered my thoughts and prayers, I began to get a better reading on the compass for me and our fellowship.

Subsequently, I returned to the church, and on a Sunday evening laid out a vision for the future that included reproducing ourselves in a major city. We chose Philadelphia and called pastor John Cope, who assembled a leadership team, and began reaching 80 to 100 in Bible fellowships. The church officially launched in September 2001. We chose another church start in the metropolitan Orlando area. It was a fascinating night. When I shared with the people the things the Lord seemed to be leading me in, I saw a fresh and invigorating spirit move among our people. I believe all of us saw beyond ourselves again, and God's Spirit moved among us in the ensuing months in a forceful way.

We formed strategy teams in several areas, including one to look at our church plant in the Orlando area. The team consisted of a group of people with a determined solidarity of purpose. Their assignment included finding the best place to start a church with the potential for strong growth and spiritual impact in an area. After months of study, they narrowed the field to two locations. At this point, we thought it necessary to bring in the pastor for the new church and let him have a say in the final choice. We began to pray for God's man, and Rodney Gage's name surfaced. Rodney is the son of evangelist Freddie Gage. Rodney had been widely used in evangelism, but in recent years had begun to think about pastoring and pioneering a church plant. He had put himself under the mentoring of a pastor in Dallas experienced in this area. The Lord was preparing Rodney as he was preparing us, and we called Rodney to be the founding pastor.

Rodney, his expectant wife, Michelle, and two daughters came to our church and



began to work toward launching the new church in an area called Lake Nona. The area is near the Orlando International Airport and is expected to mushroom to a population of 50,000 in the next 25 years.<sup>1</sup> Rodney met our people, came under the supervision of our associate pastor, Jimmy Knott, and began laying the groundwork to have his first service on Easter of 2001.

We worked with Rodney toward this exciting new venture for about seven months. On Easter Sunday, April 15, 2001, The Fellowship of Orlando was launched; 264 people showed up. Five made professions of faith. An offering of \$5,000+ was received. Our “new baby” was off to a fabulous start. As of this writing, the church, now five weeks old, has had a high of 316 in attendance, 16 professions of faith, and nearly \$60,000 in receipts.

What are some things we learned, and are learning, in reproducing our church? Let me share some principles that I believe would be true in most situations. These principles are not necessarily in order of importance, but all are important to a successful launch and birth of a daughter church.

*It must be understood as a divine mandate.* Jesus commanded the witness. “You will be able to be my witnesses, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:8, NASB). The early church and Paul, the superlative church planter, implemented this command. The rest is a continuing story. If we do not perceive this as an authoritative command, stamped with the hand of eternity on it, I seriously doubt any church will reproduce itself. I considered the church plants in Orlando and Philadelphia as divine directives. Maybe the years have sharpened my perception. I think my earlier efforts were responsible, but lacked urgency.

*The pastor must articulate and cast the vision.* Many of our faithful people are more than ready to move into reproducing their church; but let’s face it, they can only go as far as the pastor’s passion and support for the project will allow. By God’s grace, He has given us the “bully pulpit.” For heaven’s sake, we must use it. 1 Chronicles 12:32, NIV states “the men of Issachar, who understood the times and knew what Israel should do . . .” Those ancient men had two things going for them—discernment and vision. With the spiritual need so great around us, only one with closed eyes and heart could miss the season of harvest. Pastor, go for it. That’s what leadership does. Steve Farrar, author and speaker, was with us recently. He said he had found 165 definitions of a leader, but the best one was: “A leader is someone who leads.” When the people saw my heart, they jumped on board more enthusiastically than I had expected.

*The search for location must be thorough.* We placed some of our best people on

this strategy team. They worked many hours to bring us to the point of a recommended area. Since our Philadelphia church is a distance away, we worked with associational, state, and North American Mission Board personnel who were on site. We sent one of our pastors on regular visits and had a secretary move to the area to become a liaison for our people, the new pastoral team, and denominational staff.

The Orlando strategy team talked to local leaders, realtors, politicians, government personnel, and members of the chamber of commerce. They accumulated maps and demographics. They walked the land. They went to potential sites. When the work was finished, they had a thick notebook of data to support their recommendations.

*Get your founding pastor on board as soon as possible.* This accomplishes several things. He gets input into the vision. He gets to know the area, its people, and its potential. He has opportunity to know the people of the mother church. Some of them will catch the vision and dream the dream with him. He begins the process of assimilating a leadership team. His family can make the adjustments of a move before the demands of energy and time increase. He can initiate the training of a core lay team.

*Assign someone on your pastoral team to be coordinator and mentor.* More than likely, it cannot be the senior pastor. The senior pastor certainly must give attention to what's going on, but there is an enormous amount of detail and he may need help in dealing with it. I asked my associate, Jimmy Knott, to be our point man and work with Rodney. Some of the things they talk about are:

- Protecting his time.
- Preparing to preach.
- Developing his staff.
- Personal involvement with the worship planning team.
- Integrity and accountability to his people in his personal walk with the Lord, his family, and his finances. It is easy to become isolated and that can lead to a world of trouble.

They meet on a regular basis every week, and probably three to five times a week on an impromptu basis.

*Before launch day, establish a clear and systematic discipling process.* This is critical for those who join. The spiritual formation process should have a demonstrable capability for spiritual growth and involvement in ministry.

## Casting a Vision for Reproduction of Your Church

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The sponsor church and the church plant need to agree, in writing, on financial procedures. Nothing can get people on edge quicker and lead to distrust than how money is being handled. The process for collecting, counting, and distributions must be definable. In our process, we set aside money in three categories:

- (1) operations, which include rent fees, publicity, teaching material, and so forth,
- (2) missions, which I will detail later, and
- (3) land purchase.

Having resources in hand serves as a motivator for the people and provides ready cash when a down payment is needed for a piece of property.

*Promote the new church plant vigorously in your church.* We did this in several ways. We introduced the Gage and Cope families to our church family when they came in view of our call and again on their first Sunday. We had them speak to our deacons. We wrote about it in our church publications. We placed posters around the church announcing the first meeting of those interested in being a part of the new church. We prayed. I encouraged our people from the pulpit to pray about going to the church to serve as teachers and leaders. We had people willing to seek a job transfer and move to Philadelphia. Once the church is under way, establish weekly reporting and accountability concerning attendance, finances, and special blessings. This lets the home team see its return on its investment.

*Promote the new church plant vigorously in the general public.* We did a ZIP code direct mailing to 30,000 homes. The Sunday before the church launched, the outside sleeve of the Sunday edition of our major newspaper, *The Orlando Sentinel*, carried a multicolored ad about the church and the initial series of messages, which would deal with stress. It paid off handsomely.

*Be ready to spend some major dollars.* Our two church plants are going to cost us about \$2,450,000 over a three-year period. Some of this will be reimbursable and our church will contribute about \$750,000 on the two churches. Our plant in Philadelphia is being assisted by the North American Mission Board to the tune of \$250,000. First Baptist, Lakeland, Florida, and First Baptist, Springdale, Arkansas, where John Cope had previously served, are putting in significant dollars. We're carrying most of the load for the Orlando church. An amazing thing is taking place. In the midst of the outflow of resources, we've seen the touch of God in our giving. We gave over half million dollars over budget on our largest budget. We sent over 8,000 shoe boxes through Operation Christmas Child through the ministry of Samaritan's Purse, and our people gave over \$3 million in three months to buy a piece of property we had been praying about for 15 years. We're seeing the words of Jesus literally being fulfilled. "Give away your life; you'll

find life given back, but not merely given back—given back with bonus and blessing. Giving, not getting, is the way. Generosity begets generosity” (Luke 6:38, The Message).

*Be willing to release some of your people.* This may have been one of the most difficult things for us. I think, by nature and call, we as God’s under-shepherds like to keep the sheep gathered. Now we were deliberately scattering. Some of these folks, we had seen come to Christ, baptized, and maturing. Others we had officiated at their weddings and dedicated their homes. That put an emotional tug on me because of those personal relationships. We released, with our blessing, friends, teachers, leaders, and financial resources. But an amazing thing is happening. On the Easter Sunday the new church launched in Orlando, we had nearly 2,000 more for worship than on any previous Easter. Our finances and attendance continued to be strong.

*Make a celebration of the church plant launch.* On the Sunday before our Orlando church had its first service, we had a commissioning service for those who were going from us. When we launch the Philadelphia church, we will do a phone hookup with them during our worship services, so both congregations can share the excitement of seeing their prayers, money, and involvement become a moment of triumph to treasure.

*Be intentional by including total church ministries as a part of the planting.* We had encouraged people to make Philadelphia and Orlando a part of their lives, not only by giving and praying, but by going. As a result, we’re sending numbers of our people to do prayerwalks, Vacation Bible School, door-to-door visitation and census, Backyard Bible Clubs, and sports clinics. Our students will be doing summer trips. Families are working mission trips to the churches into their vacations. I’ve been amazed at the response of the people who want to become involved with what God is doing.

*Implant mission giving on the heart of the new churches.* In nature, we see the reality of imprint. The first encounter of some animals and birds, especially if it’s a human touch, leaves a lifetime impression on the fledgling. I believe this to be true in churches. We are asking that the daughter church set aside 10 percent of undesignated receipts for missions. I’ve sought to practice this in the churches I’ve pastored and found that just as we expect our people to be tithers, we corporately should do the same. We need to think beyond ourselves. We need to think big. We need to think globally. We need to cut the cords of selfishness, which is so engrained in our culture. Coerced giving isn’t the best way to respond, but planned giving and participation will give a church the fragrance of a giving heart, and it will reflect the image, the imprint of its founder, Jesus Christ.

## Casting a Vision for Reproduction of Your Church

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Above all, prayer must be the cornerstone. Our abilities and resources are limited, but God's are not. "Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know" (Jeremiah 33:3, NIV).

In my prayers, I envisioned a ring of great, strong, gospel-preaching and caring lighthouses around our metropolitan area. As I looked at the city, it was evident that some were in place already, but we needed more for the spiritual health of our international city.

Our metro area is predicted to grow by 900,000 in the next 20 years. If our church reached just one percent, we would add 9,000 members. I pray we can do that, but it is for sure we cannot but make a small dent in this tide of newcomers. As we shared our vision for the future, we kicked our prayer ministry into gear. We have three prayer venues in our church.

The first venue offers both a prayer letter and a prayer line. The prayer letter goes monthly to a group of prayer warriors, and the phone line is available 24 hours a day for call-ins. The second venue is a prayer room. It has a small number of consistent intercessors who go to the Lord with requests. The third is the Pastor's Prayer Partners. I initiated this about three years ago and over 900 people fast and pray at least one day a week during the year. Some days we'll have 150 to 160 people praying. Every day is covered. A monthly prayer letter is mailed from my office that highlights our concerns. Through intercessory prayer, we've seen the Holy Spirit guide our strategy team, the calling of the pastor, the calling out of a core group of 50-plus adults from our church, a leadership team, and the successful launch of the church. The doors that have opened and are opening, I attribute primarily to prayer. Jack Taylor sums it up with these words: "Shuck the weights which limit our 'going,' being, and 'doings' and break through the barrier of our finite limitations and be more than we are, do more than we can do, know more than we know—through the adventure of prayer!"<sup>2</sup>

Is it worth it? Excerpts from a letter written to pastor Rodney Gage put us on shouting ground and affirm joyfully the investment we're making to reproduce ourselves.

The fact that my soon-to-be ex-husband was saving my junk mail to give to me seemed absurd and I was irritated. But your flyer caught my eye and that flyer was God-sent. Like it was sent specifically to me, and it could not have arrived at a more perfect time. I have (had) reached the bottom. (Although I am slowly making my way back up thanks to you and your church). Totally lost in every way, shape and form. Spiritually, mentally, physically – every aspect of my life seemed to be falling apart. I

have never felt so alone, so out of touch, even though I have family and friends that love and care about me—something was definitely missing. After attending my first service at your church, I realized that something was a relationship with God. I was raised Catholic but never felt a spiritual connection and never had an understanding of the Lord's Word, as my family was not religious. I have learned more the past three weeks than I have my entire life. I had created a life with heavy burdens, with overbearing loads and with absolutely no margin. I was lost and confused, out of touch with my self, my family, and God. Your services feel like they were tailored for me and, from the first service, I came away with incredible insight and, most importantly, a little peace within myself, and I can't tell you the last time I felt peaceful. During the past year, I have shed more tears than I thought possible, but tonight as I wrote this letter and cried, I had to laugh, because instead of tears of pain, sorrow, and self-pity, they were tears of joy from feeling so blessed. You are reaching people with your message in a very profound way. The church, staff, and volunteers should all carry a great sense of pride for the roles they play. It's truly a wonderful thing you've created and success is inevitable thanks to all involved. My deepest thanks to you and your church.

**That says it all! Go for it!**

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### Principles

1. Articulate a God-given vision to the church staff, the congregation, and the general public.
2. Communicate early in the process the importance of fulfilling the vision of a place, a founding pastor, and a plan that includes financing and discipling of new members.
3. Place in writing a partnership covenant that includes all interested parties.
4. Lead the congregation to become involved in the new church. Start by supporting the vision with prayer and on-site ministries.

### Notes

1. Christine Shenot, "Our Newest Suburbs," *Orlando Sentinel* (September 21, 2000), A1, A10.
2. Jack Taylor, *Prayer: Life's Limitless Reach* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman Publishing, 1997), p. 19.



## Chapter Eight

# Reaching Your City Through Church Planting

By Rick E. Ferguson, Former Pastor  
Riverside Baptist Church  
Denver, Colorado

**A** movement is under way on nearly every continent of the world, with the exception of North America. The movement is undeniably a “God movement.” It is New Testament in nature. It is a return to first-century-style Christianity. The movement of which I speak is a church planting movement.

While America is yet to witness a rushing avalanche of new church plants, I believe we are seeing the leading edge of a church planting movement on the near horizon. Church planting efforts seem to be growing in volume from a trickle to a steady flow. We should pray that God would soon move us into a rushing stream and quite possibly a torrential flood of church planting strategies and energies. This is a “God phenomenon” and it is imperative that denominational and church leaders recognize this great movement of God and plunge recklessly into the current of His activity. It is exhausting and counter-productive to try to swim against the current of great movements of God. Let us not be guilty of standing idly on the shores of our own convenience and timidity as a rushing movement of God sweeps others into the deep waters of Great Commission power and effectiveness.

This is the story of how God pulled me, kicking and screaming, into the white water of church planting and the great adventure Riverside Baptist has had with Him in this fast-moving stream. It is a testimony of how our church has moved along quickly, being carried by the tremendous force of God’s power beneath us. We have not had to paddle furiously to get the boat moving. The boat moves fast, with little effort from us. Our greater challenge has been staying in the boat and hanging on for the ride. Sometimes the ride is a little bumpy, but it is never short of excitement. Church life has become anything but mundane or boring since church planting has been elevated to “mission-critical” status in our passion to penetrate the city of Denver, even the entire front range of the Rocky Mountains, with the gospel of Jesus Christ.



This is also an urgent appeal for other pastors to get into the fast-moving water of church planting. This much is guaranteed: You will be in for the adventure of a lifetime when you throw yourself and your church into the raging waters of church planting.

### **Am I Building My Kingdom or God's Kingdom?**

An unexpected thing happened to me one Sunday morning during our worship; I had a life-changing, ministry-changing, vision-changing encounter with God. Maybe this encounter will make a little more sense to you, if you know something of the background leading up to it.

The decade of the 1980s had been a decade of decline for Riverside Baptist Church. Tensions in the church escalated and in 1990 the church essentially split. Her highly visible location on Interstate 25, just two blocks north of Mile High Stadium, served to be both an asset and a liability. Because Riverside had been a prominent church in Denver, when it went through a period of decline and infighting the story was splashed on the front page of the morning paper. Things were not good. By the last quarter of 1990, church attendance had plummeted to just several hundred people. About 2,500 people had been lost from the membership rolls.

God called our family to Riverside in January of 1991. The early days of ministry there were frightening. The worship center of Riverside seats approximately 3,000 people. You can imagine how empty it felt with only a few hundred people attending on Sunday mornings.

I believe God used two things to capture my heart and call me to this church. One was the faithfulness and passion of the people who had survived the storm and were ready to move forward. The second was the potential ministry opportunities. Riverside's location gave it the real possibility of impacting an entire city. The "Mile High" city of Denver is a beautiful, fast-growing city of over 2 million people. It is a city that is more than 80 percent unchurched. Riverside sits on the primary interstate running north and south, dividing the city east and west. The church overlooks downtown. It is difficult to pass through Denver and not see the 100 foot tower of Riverside Baptist Church. So God captured my attention with the people and the potential of this church.

Three years into the ministry at Riverside, we were well on our way. Applying the principles and strategies of church growth, we were intent on rebuilding a mega-church in the heart of Denver. One Sunday morning, during our praise and

worship, I was looking out over the worship center and dreaming of the day it would be filled with 3,000 people. Then I thought of adding a second worship service and having the potential of running 6,000 people. We could easily add a third service to the schedule and run 9,000. Frankly, I was beginning to be filled with pride as I thought of the incredible accomplishment it would be to draw 9,000 people to our campus each weekend.

It was at that point that God interrupted my thought process and reminded me that our church was located in the heart of a city with a population of over 2 million people, and growing. He clearly told me that even if we were successful in drawing 9,000 people to our campus each Sunday, we still would have impacted less than .5 percent of the population of our city. I believe it was the Holy Spirit who whispered, “If you are serious about penetrating this city with the gospel of Christ, it is going to take more than just one large church. It is going to take many churches—many, many, many new churches.”

I can still remember the debate that ensued. I resisted these thoughts, though I knew immediately they were from the Lord. “Our resources are limited. We are just getting this church moving again. I’ve never led a church to be a ‘church-planting’ church. Starting new churches will siphon off vital resources needed to rebuild our mega-church.” The list of arguments continued, but then the Lord interrupted again. And here is the question He posed: “Rick, are you interested in building your kingdom or My kingdom?” That question stung. I began to weep. The people in the congregation did not know what was happening in that encounter I had with God, but I knew God was about to take us someplace we had never been before.

I began to share the things that I sensed God was saying to me with our leadership. We prayed and fasted together and a new vision began to take shape. God began to reveal to us the strategy of becoming something of a hub church with many satellite churches extending every direction in our city. These satellite churches were like spokes extending out from the hub of the wheel. We actually drew a wheel with a hub and spokes. This became the visual tool used to communicate the new vision to our church. The church body embraced the vision as the Holy Spirit confirmed it in their hearts. Church planting was elevated to mission-critical status. The mission statement of the church was rewritten to reflect the new thing God was doing:

Riverside Baptist Church is a family of born-again people from many different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, united under the Lordship of Jesus Christ for the purpose of glorifying God by developing Spirit-born disciples of Christ and planting reproducing churches.

We were committed to going in a direction none of us had ever gone. It felt like an “Abraham kind of adventure” to me. Hebrews 11:8 states, “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going” (NKJV). And it all started because God had the audacity to ask the question, “Whose kingdom are you really interested in building—your kingdom or My kingdom?”

### **A Fresh Perspective on the Great Commission**

This traumatic encounter with God forced me to review the Great Commission. I began to gain a fresh, new perspective on the mission given to the church by the Lord Jesus. Three truths in particular helped to shape our vision regarding church planting.

First of all, it is important to remember the direction of the Great Commission. Every time the Great Commission is recorded in the Gospels and the book of Acts, the direction is the same. The direction of the Great Commission is to go, not come:

#### **Matthew 28:19**

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (NKJV).

#### **Mark 16:15**

“And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature’ ” (NKJV).

#### **Luke 24:46-47**

“Then He said to them, ‘Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem’ ” (NKJV).

#### **John 20:21**

So Jesus said to them again, “Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you” (NKJV).

#### **Acts 1:8**

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (NKJV).

The direction is clear and consistent in every passage. The church is to be going to the world, not expecting the world to come to it. The best way to penetrate neighborhoods, boroughs, cultures, and ethnic groups is to plant indigenous, dynamic churches where they are.

Surely this means taking the church to the people. It became glaringly clear that we had had a “y’all come” mentality of doing church rather than a “we’ll go” mentality. Marketing had taken priority over ministry. We had to change. And the change meant taking the church to unreached people in their location, their language, and their lifestyle. This meant starting new, homogeneous churches.

Secondly, we were reminded that the design of the Great Commission is to make disciples, not merely get decisions. Jesus said, “Go . . . make disciples of all the nations” (Matthew 28:18, NKJV). When we made an honest evaluation of most of our evangelism strategies, we discovered they were focused more on securing decisions than making disciples. Our evangelism was pretty myopic. We had to find a more holistic approach that gave attention to birthing and growing new believers.

Disciples are made only in the context of thriving, Spirit-filled, New Testament churches. If we wanted more disciples, we needed more churches. Discipleship happens best when a person can connect with a church indigenous to his/her own culture. So not only did we realize we needed more churches, but we also needed different kinds of churches. The days of the homogenized, “one-shoe-fits-all” style of churches are over. The urban centers of America are too culturally diverse to suppose we can seriously penetrate them with a single, standardized, franchise approach to doing church.

A third thing to remember is that the demand of the Great Commission is universal, not parochial. Jesus said, “make disciples of all nations” (ethne). Every church should have a passion to see every person from every “tribe, tongue, and people and nation” come to be a devoted disciple and worshiper of Jesus Christ (see Revelation 5:9, NKJV). Acts 1:8 records Jesus instructing His disciples to be witnesses of Him “in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (NKJV).

Most churches are best suited to reach a primary target group of people who they should pursue with vigor and passion. However, this does not absolve any church from Great Commission responsibilities to other people groups. We came to understand that Riverside church was strong at reaching young, white-collar professionals, but it also had a Great Commission obligation to reach other groups of people, including non-professionals and non-English speaking people in our

city. Plus, it was obvious to us that Denver was a big city spread out over a huge geographic region. It would be naïve to think we could effectively evangelize every community and suburb of the Denver metropolitan region. We came to the conviction that the only way to fulfill our broader Great Commission responsibility to “all people” was by planting churches that reached across regional, cultural, and language boundaries.

### **A Paradigm Shift of Tectonic Dimensions**

Tectonic plates are geological structures beneath the surface of the earth. When they shift, the entire landscape changes. This describes the kind of paradigm shift that took place at Riverside and, in my opinion, needs to take place in many of our nation's large urban and suburban churches. Our thinking must change in at least three ways.

At Riverside, we had to begin thinking “meta-church,” not mega-church. The term meta-church was first coined by missionary anthropologist Paul Heibert. Carl George explains Heibert's concept in his book *Prepare Your Church for the Future*. This book has greatly influenced my thinking.

The word mega means large. The word meta means change. A familiar word in our New Testaments that uses this prefix is *metanoia*. It is translated “repentance.”

A meta-church is one that changes the way it thinks about doing ministry. It refuses to limit its size to one campus or a single location. It refuses to be limited by one particular style of ministry or to a single language.

A meta-church consists of many campuses and congregations, multiple locations, diverse styles, and even multiple languages. A meta-church chooses to expand through multiplication rather than addition. It chooses to reproduce through church planting.

The new church plants can meet in properly maintained church buildings complete with steeples, or they can assemble in schools, warehouses, apartments, basements, community centers, or living rooms. Some churches have assembled in catacombs and caves (remember our first-generation forefathers).

These churches can use fully robed choirs in their worship or blue-jeaned, tattooed, body-pierced praise bands. They can sing from hymnals or from image magnification screens. They can use standard bulletins or PowerPoint®. They can sing reformation hymns or heavy-metal songs about Jesus. These churches can be liturgical or loose. They can be casual or formal. Their pastors can have Ph.Ds or they can have street-smarts, wear business suits or biker leathers. These

churches can do church in English, Spanish, Indonesian, Romanian, Japanese, Korean, or, well, you get the point.

The point is, a mega-church says to the city, “Ya’ll come to us.” A meta-church says to the city, “We will come to you. We will bring a church to you in your location, your lifestyle, and your language.” A meta-church is one church choosing to become diversified and unleashed on a city of diversified communities, cultures, and ethnic groups. It is a church committed to church planting. It is one church reproducing itself in different languages and cultures. The meta-church is the right way, and maybe the only way, to impact a diverse metropolitan region with the gospel of Christ.

This brings us to a second catastrophic shift in paradigm and philosophy. We must also begin to think kingdom growth and not just church growth. One might argue that growing the church is synonymous with growing the kingdom. It is not my purpose here to debate the technicalities of ecclesiology or kingdom theology. Yet, a subtle but significant point is to be made that often the kingdoms we are building in our efforts at growing our own churches are our own kingdoms and not God’s kingdom. In fact, sometimes we are willing to grow our own churches, even at the expense of other churches. Maybe this is nothing more than painful self-reflection and self-disclosure on my part. In my early years of ministry, I was concerned about building my church. I knew that my success as a pastor would be measured largely by the size of my church. Is this not a worldly measure of success: buildings, bodies, and budgets? Church planting felt like a threat to my false image of success. I was focused on “bringing in people,” not sending them out.

We must challenge ourselves to begin making decisions based on what is best for the kingdom of God, rather than what is best for our own little kingdoms. A kingdom-minded church is willing to give itself away and share its resources. A kingdom-minded church sees itself as a “launching pad” for new ministries and new ministers, as well as a “landing strip” for new believers and new members. (Imagine the congestion and chaos of an airport that only allowed planes to land and never take off!) A kingdom-minded church is willing to partner with other like-minded ministries and churches. A kingdom-minded church says, “It doesn’t matter who gets the people or who gets the recognition. We are about building God’s kingdom, not our own kingdom.”

Frankly, this has been our greatest challenge at Riverside. It seems we (myself included) are forever drifting back into territorialism and protectionism. It happens every time a solid, committed family senses the call to go out and help one of our church starts. It happens every time a talented musician leaves our music ministry to help the music ministry of a satellite church. It happens every

time we lose a good Bible study leader to a church plant. It happens every time we have a logistical conflict between one of our ministries and one of the three satellite churches that share our facilities. It happens every year at budget time, when we have to balance a budget between the ministry demands of our church, our television and radio ministries, and our church planting ministries.

God has to constantly remind me “this is not about me, it is all about Him.” And I have to constantly remind the church of the same. It has been interesting to discover that the more we give ourselves away, the more we receive. Jesus mentioned something about this. “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain” (John 12:24, NKJV). So, let’s begin to think kingdom growth, not just church growth.

A third tectonic shift in our thinking was this: We had to begin thinking contextually and not traditionally. Something we constantly say around Riverside is “contextualize the ministry without compromising the ministry.”

This means capitalizing on the principle of homogeneity. It is the very thing Paul was talking about in reflection on his own philosophy of ministry as he wrote, “. . . to the Jews I became a Jew, that I might win the Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law. To those who are without the law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under the law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things, to all men, that I might by all means save some” (1 Corinthians 9:20-22, NKJV).

In my simple way of understanding things, I think Paul was trying to communicate this basic principle—it takes different kinds of ministries, methods, styles, and churches to reach different kinds of people. We recognize this as the well-established, missiological principle of homogeneity. While every church should be open and affirming of every person, regardless of race, creed, or culture, the fact remains that most churches find themselves to be most effective in reaching a certain profile of people. This necessitates many different kinds of churches. Remember Paul taught us, “the body is one and has many members . . .” (1 Corinthians 12:12, NKJV).

The growing diversity of America’s urban centers calls for a wave of diversified church planting. Post-modern America is no longer a melting pot of cultures. America is increasingly reflecting the philosophy long embraced by our Canadian neighbors of being a “mosaic” of cultures. Multiculturalism is here to stay, at least for a while. We must recognize this cultural, sociological phenomenon and work

with it, not against it. This means planting churches that are culturally focused with laser accuracy.

Consider that by the year 2050, Anglos will no longer be the majority population in the United States. Anglo population growth is flat-lined, while Hispanic, Asian, and African-American population growth is happening at double-digit rates. Already, some 30 million Americans do not speak English. Can we not hear the Macedonian call of these growing diverse people groups? The foreign mission field is no longer across the Atlantic or Pacific. It is right here in the metropolitan centers of America. It is across the street from our largest and most resourceful churches.

Riverside has had the joy of participating in 25 church starts. Each church is different.

All churches share the same biblical, evangelical, theological commitment, but each one is unique in its style of ministry and in its population target. We have started two Hispanic congregations, an Indonesian congregation, a Vietnamese congregation, a Native American congregation, a Korean congregation, and a Japanese fellowship. We have started contemporary churches targeting Gen-Xers as well as traditional churches. We have started suburban churches for the suburbanites and urban churches for the urbanites. We have even started a biker church. Church In the Wind is a church for hard-core Harley riders. (I often tell people they can join Church In the Wind if they ride a Honda, but they will have to be re-baptized!) Many of our church plants have reproduced and planted other churches. Riverside now has several grandchildren. One of our church plants has reproduced itself by starting a “cowboy congregation.”

Many of these churches have constituted and become self-sustaining. It is our goal to help the new churches become independent as quickly as possible. However, even after becoming entirely independent from Riverside governance or support, these congregations choose to stay in a network relationship with Riverside for the purpose of working together to continue starting new churches. Some of the congregations remain as extensions of Riverside indefinitely, maintaining high accountability to us, and receiving high levels of support from us. These churches are viable ministries, and they are vital to our Great Commission enterprise.

Our goal is to put a “church-planting gene” in the DNA of every congregation we start. We want to do more than simply start churches. We want to plant churches that will be “church planting” churches. Every church planter who connects with Riverside must share this same philosophy and passion for



planting new churches. Every church begins with the goal of reproducing itself through church planting. We are trying to initiate a church planting movement.

Riverside hosts an annual joint worship service with all the satellite congregations, including both the constituted, independent churches and the true satellite extensions that are not yet constituted or self-supporting. This is an incredible event each year. We often sing in the various languages of the congregations. We have a joint baptism service and joint Lord's Supper service. We share testimonies and recast the vision. Every year I think this must be a microcosm of heaven as the redeemed "out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Revelation 5:9, NKJV) sing of the worth of our Great God and King, Jesus Christ.

### **We Must Have a Church Planting Movement**

We absolutely must do something different than we've been doing. Population growth in America is outpacing church growth at an exponential rate. We are literally witnessing the death of the church culture as we have known it in America. Many analysts estimate that more than 80 percent of all existing evangelical churches in America are either on a plateau or in a decline. Some estimate between 3,500 and 4,000 churches are closing each year.

If we are going to reverse the avalanche of secularism in our nation, we will have to plant a whole new generation of dynamic churches that are indigenous to this culture. I have come to the firm belief that it is usually more efficient and effective to start new churches than it is to attempt to revitalize stagnant churches. Many stagnated churches are not willing to make the changes necessary for becoming evangelistically effective. Yet, while the vast majority of evangelical churches sit on plateau or slowly decline, the lost population of American continues to rise. Only four nations in the world have a greater total population than the lost population of America. They are China, Indonesia, India, and Brazil. The only strategy that has any hope of impacting the growing population of non-Christians in America is that of a church planting movement.

### **The Only Thing More Costly Than Obedience**

One question I am asked most often with regards to church planting is, "Doesn't church planting slow the growth and progress of the mother church?" The answer is "Absolutely not." For our church it has enhanced the growth trajectory. Our emphasis on planting new churches has given our people a sense of mission. It communicates to our people that we are not simply trying to grow

a big church for the sake of growing a big church. We are serious about kingdom growth. The new congregations and the victories they experience infuse life and excitement into our church. I believe church planting has not impeded Riverside's growth, but accelerated it. In the 1990s, the church gained more than 2,500 members. God gave this kind of increase, while allowing us to simultaneously give birth to 25 churches. We are currently starting three new churches. The churches that have been started by Riverside average more than 2,000 people in weekly attendance.

Another question I am frequently asked is, "Isn't it costly starting all those churches?" The answer is, "Sure, it is costly. It costs a lot in financial capital and in people capital. But it is what God has called us to do. The fulfillment of the Great Commission always comes at a price." Maybe we need to remember, the only thing more costly than obeying God is disobeying Him.

The cities of North America are "white for harvest" (John 4:35, NKJV). The need is urgent. This is no time to be self-focused. Full attention must be given to the waiting harvest. Every ounce of energy and strength must be devoted immediately to gathering the harvest. When the plains of Colorado turn golden with wheat harvest, it is not uncommon to see many combines in a single field gathering the harvest. Many combines are necessary to gather the harvest before it is lost.

So it is with the harvest of souls. Many churches are needed to gather the harvest before it is lost. The urgent appeal is to throw everything we have into planting new churches. If we hesitate, the harvest may be lost forever.

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### Principles

1. Establish whose kingdom you wish to build, yours or God's.
2. Gain a fresh perspective: Test your ministry against the Great Commission. Does your ministry support the Great Commission, and does the Great Commission support your ministry?
3. Acknowledge that the foreign mission fields have come to the great cities of America.



## Chapter Nine

# Team Church Planting

By Paul Kim, Pastor  
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**B**y the grace of God, during my pastoral ministry at Berkland Baptist Church (BBC) we have planted 21 new churches—some in the United States and several in countries of Asia. Ministry teams comprised of members from existing BBC congregations started most of these churches. These team members relocated to the region where the church was to be planted and supplied the needed spiritual, human, and financial resources to launch the new work.

Space and scope limitations preclude extended discussion of many important and pertinent topics related to church planting. From my personal experience, I can make three observations regarding the use of team church planting. One is that a team that already knows how to function as a church community is the most effective church planter. Two is that the sending body experiences growth when it sends a team. Three is that team church planting makes global-local church missions possible. Below is an abbreviated account of how God led us to utilize teams in establishing churches.

### **Berkeley, the First Seed—Developing the Team Approach**

At its inception in March 1981 in Berkeley, California, BBC had little to offer the University of California, Berkeley community, other than a vision to bring the life-changing good news of Jesus Christ to spiritually hungry students. We did not have much of a strategic plan and hardly any resources, financial or otherwise. There were five founding members: my wife, Becky, my infant daughter, my mother-in-law, a restless nephew, myself. Although Becky and I had prior experience ministering and teaching students, we lacked any real practical experience starting and growing a local church. We tried to be like the seed in John 12:24 that falls to the ground and dies, thereby producing many seeds.

Through the past 20 years, God has mercifully allowed BBC to survive and to grow. God's faithfulness in leading us to plant numerous churches, both in the United States, East Asia, Central Asia, and in Russia, is humbling. Undoubtedly, the journey has been laborious and marked by many mistakes, failures, and sorrows. There were times when we were not sure what we were doing or what was going to happen. But God graciously took our meager five loaves and two fish and provided for the community of faith that He brought together at BBC.

The team church planting approach was not something we carefully constructed and implemented. Although it was always my desire to start new churches, the idea of planting churches via teams came about through the collective experience and lessons God taught us in Berkeley and thereafter. As we tried to build a church that would please God, we initiated team ministry, which I believe is the most effective way to start new churches and new missions

During the first few years in Berkeley, we focused on Discipleship Training. As the students came, we did not know what God's plan was for each one, but we taught the Word of God and poured out our souls and lives to show His love, trusting Him to do the work. Many students passed through, but others stayed and joined our commitment to build a spiritual family. With every passing day, our love for one another grew stronger, and our foundation as a church dug deeper and stretched wider. I will never forget the hours with the first group of students who sat around our kitchen table or huddled together in the living room, as we studied the Gospel of Matthew or grappled with the challenge of the *MasterLife Discipleship*. We shared our hopes and dreams, our struggles and defeats, our laughter and tears. Many lives were changed and many commitments made. Through it all, often unbeknownst to us, God was forming inseparable bonds of love in His Spirit.

We made every effort to raise, train, and equip our members to be leaders for the pending twenty-first century wherever they might go. As they matured spiritually, they began to serve in the ministry as lay leaders.

It was always our ministry philosophy to take seriously the priesthood of all believers by empowering the laity to participate in ministry. The response of these emerging lay leaders was exhilarating. A high percentage of members became engaged in the ministry, serving the body of Christ in numerous capacities. A shared common vision formed in their hearts to evangelize, nurture, and train the ever-increasing pool of students and others who started attending our church. It was rewarding to witness them giving their time and resources back to the ministry out of gratitude and faith.

As we grew together in Christ, God allowed us to experience a wonderful community life. Close-knit relationships developed; lifetime friendships were fostered. It became apparent that for many of us, serving God together through BBC was our mutual passion. People began to commit themselves to this body of Christ, through which God had redeemed them. It turned out that many of these first trained students became lay leaders of the church. Having been “home-grown,” they were ideal in continuing and expanding the shared vision God had granted us. Not only were they committed to God, but also to each other, sacrificing and caring for each other in many heart-stirring ways.

### **Boston—An Unexpected Call**

From the beginning, starting new churches and missions was an important goal for our church. We tried to impress upon our developing leaders a mission-minded perspective. Many short-term mission trips have taken place through the years. As they were trained, many BBC members committed themselves to envision being sent out to the mission field. It was a lofty goal they strove to prepare themselves for, when God’s timing would be made evident.

It was in this setting that God began to burden us with planting a church in the greater Boston, Massachusetts area. Becky and myself again did the first attempts at church planting in neighboring cities of the San Francisco Bay area. We lacked the trained corps to make a concerted team effort. However, by 1990, a solid level of lay leaders had been built up. Although we had prayed for a Boston church plant for many years, it was not until 1990 that the coalescence of a series of events, conversations, and personal conviction caused me to sense that God was calling our church to begin a new work in the vast college community of Boston.

After much prayer with the pastoral staff, it was agreed that we would launch a church in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in January 1991. A team was assembled to pioneer this new work to reproduce what God had done in our midst. I distinctly remember thinking that this was beautiful: My wife and I would stay in Berkeley, while we sent out our disciples to continue the work wherever God would lead.

Two months before the planned inaugural service, my wife and I went to Boston to lay the groundwork: to secure a church building, find housing for the team, and meet with area pastors. Most importantly, we went to pray and grasp a clearer vision of God’s calling and plan for the work in Boston. On our last day in Boston, after we had made all the plans for the team to arrive in January, God confronted us with an unexpected, yet undeniable call. “Why not you?” This was

the question we both heard. We were speechless. Everything was already set. Why was God doing this to us now? We had already endured a pioneering experience 10 years prior. The Berkeley church seemed to be where we naturally belonged. We were then reminded of the example of Paul and Barnabas in Acts 13. They were the leaders of the church at Antioch, but God called the church to set them apart as missionaries. We knew the conviction was real, and we surrendered our plans and ideas to God.

When we returned to Berkeley and shared the news, our staff was devastated and even oppositional. How could we leave the thriving church and all the relationships in Berkeley for an unknown future in Boston? We shared more about our convictions and prayed together as a church family. Members began to confirm our call of God and grew excited not only for us to answer the call to Boston, but to answer it with us. Soon many were volunteering to join us, and a new problem surfaced: not who would go, but who would stay.

I must admit that at times, building a family of God with tight-knit, eternal relationships appears to be at odds with the idea of separating from one another to start new churches. Leaving the congregation in Berkeley was one of the most heart-wrenching experiences in my life. But the mission of God is always greater. Our relationships in Christ are a part of that mission, and we take comfort in the promise that these relationships are eternally sealed in heaven. I was so grateful to God to have relationships with people who would shed tears at my departure and in my absence. I was overwhelmed to have a group of staff and sheep who were willing to overturn their lives and move 2,500 miles across the country in response to God's call. This is the body of Christ. It was possible for me to leave Berkeley because of the strength of that community and the leaders who would shepherd the flock in my stead. Our departure also marked the occasion of our first ordination. One of our earliest members, from the days of the Bible studies in my living room, was ordained into the ministry and assumed the pastorate at our Berkeley church. It was only possible for me to go to Boston because of those who were willing to join me step-for-step and the family in Berkeley who would support us in prayer and resources. In all, 14 of us began the work in Boston on January 6, 1991.

### **A Team That's Already a Church**

This was to be the first church plant to be attempted through a team. We had come to realize that a team approach would be vital, nigh essential for the church plant to be successful. Having experienced firsthand the difficulty of starting a church by ourselves, we appreciated the support of those who would accompany

us. Team members would add immediate manpower and financial resources. A team would also augment our outreach capacity and multiple gifts would enhance our worship services.

It was not only the practical benefits that a team could offer that convinced us that teams were significant. A church, by definition, required a community of people. A lone person could not be a church. In the church, God called us together to strive for a higher purpose, namely the spreading of the gospel. What God allowed us to experience in the Berkeley church was interdependency and cooperation through love, trust, and mutual submission. God called every believer out of self-directed, independent lives to one of covenantal relationships, first with Him, and then with other brothers and sisters. God called us out of a life of self (sin) into a life of sharing (the church).

In essence, a church's vitality is represented by its covenantal relationships. A church plant should start with individuals who can demonstrate these very covenantal relational values. Only those who have experienced true church community would qualify to initiate a similar endeavor. We felt that the best method to plant a church was to transplant a true team of committed believers who would already be functioning as a church, in microcosm. What we could not demonstrate individually, God could manifest through community.

As we prepared for Boston, we realized that we did not need to start a church. The planting team was itself already the church. They had been experiencing community for quite some time. They had ministered together with us and had been trained for years. Mutual trust relationships had been firmly established. Understanding and commitment to the core values of BBC had long been made. There was a shared body of knowledge of teaching and resources from which to draw.

This understanding of shared community affected our criteria for team selection as well. In most typical teams, the criteria for selection are based on skill or giftedness. Specialists and generalists combine to accomplish the team's objective. Likewise, teams should be comprised of those who possess the complementary spiritual giftedness and experience that would most help pioneer and grow a new church. However, qualifications and expertise alone should not be determinative.

For us, the goal of planting churches was not the sole task for which complementary members were assembled, each supplying a needed function to enhance the total competence of the team. Team members' main bond with each other is in providing a needed function toward achieving the team's aims. The team will lose strength if its task is not being ably achieved. A church plant is more like



birthing a baby than engineering a project. There is no certainty of results. Trying times, frustrations, setbacks, and times of discouragement visit pioneers of any new Christian work. The devil will make sure of that. A function or a task-oriented team will find that it lacks the relational resources to face such difficulties.

As much as we wanted to plant a church, we wanted to be together, to continue the sweet fellowship God enabled us to enjoy. When we assembled our team for the Boston church plant, our desire was to take people who had personally experienced being a church together. Acts 2:42-47, the primitive church, was our model for emulation. This community of believers in Acts 2 (Jerusalem) and also in Acts 11 and 13 (Antioch) was the DNA replicated in the churches initiated through evangelistic and missionary undertakings. Only those who had experienced the kind of devotion to God and love for each other could reproduce a similar kind of experience elsewhere.

During our first years in Boston, we had fun just being the church. It was a sweet time. At times, when no one responded to our outreach efforts, we simply had a wonderful time enjoying Christ-centered fellowship among ourselves. We relocated to Boston together, were able to find housing close to one another, and met together to start out each day with morning quiet time and prayer together. We ended the day in each other's homes, sharing meals, child rearing, and even our finances. We also worked hard, faced our share of difficulties, and pursued many lost souls for Christ. One constant source of renewal was the Holy Spirit working through the fellowship among the believers who comprised the team.

It was in this crucible that God molded and shaped us into a community ready to receive the people who needed Him so desperately. Boston was the intellectual Mecca of the country, and only a church that blazed brightly like those of the first century would draw searchers of the truth. As we submitted to the hand of God, we began to experience Him working through us. The first year we began ministering at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Boston University, and Harvard University. Miraculously, God brought students and changed lives. Through the Word of God, they heard the ideal that God wanted us to reach. Through fellowship and us sharing our lives together, they saw that ideal put into practice. One after another, students testified that they were challenged by our commitment to God and our living commitment to one another.

It has been 10 years since we started the mission in Boston. We have raised a new generation of God's people once again. God's ministry here spans across eight different campuses, a young adult department, a youth department, a children's department, and a Korean-speaking congregation. Each has its own staff that works to build a community, a church, on each campus or in each ministry area.

We have witnessed countless lives being transformed by the Word of God, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the living, tangible love in the body of Christ.

We have continued to send out workers to plant new churches. At each departure, the pain reminds me of when we left Berkeley. When I lift up my eyes and see the faces in this congregation, I know that it has all been worthwhile. Where would these people be if we had not painfully obeyed the call of God? As each couple left to start a new work, new leaders came to fill their shoes and continue the work here.

### **If the Teeth Fall Out, the Gums Must Do the Chewing**

When a church planting team is sent out, the sending body receives a challenge and a blessing. As was the case in the very first church plant in Boston, it is often the leaders and the most active lay ministers who respond to the challenge of planting a church. This means that the sending body experiences a short-term loss of many of its leaders. However, this also provides a wonderful opportunity for the rest of the congregation to rise up to take the place of those who have been sent. There is a Korean saying that can be loosely translated as: “If the teeth fall out, the gums must do the chewing.” In the case of BBC, the gums consistently ended up developing into a new set of teeth.

One of the greatest challenges of pastoral leadership is the development of leaders. The difficulty lies, partially, in that leadership development requires more than cognitive learning. Leaders are trained only in the context of real challenges, in actual settings in which they are entrusted with much, and allowed to fail or succeed. In other words, only having them actually lead can develop leaders. Often, there is an overemphasis on a long period of training and apprenticeship in which the one being trained does not receive the kind of real challenges that will demand his full devotion, and accelerate his growth, partially because of the dearth of leadership opportunities within the ministry of the local church. However, when existing leaders leave to plant churches, this provides many opportunities for members of the congregation to take ownership and develop into leaders. There is no option but for the congregation to rise up.

Another blessing the congregation receives through the draining of its leaders to the new church plant is a heightened sense of prayer and devotion. There is a general recognition that it is not an easy thing for people to relocate to a new city for the purpose of planting a church, and that pioneering a new work is always difficult. Thus, the members of the sending body understand that they must pray fervently and support the new work sacrificially. In this way, the sending body

experiences added fervor in prayer and a general attitude that those who are staying back must increase their level of devotion and sacrifice back at home to match the sacrifice of those who are battling to plant and nurture a new work.

### **United for Global Missions**

At first, we called our church in Boston, BBC-East and the church in Berkeley BBC-West. We thought two churches, one on each coast of the country, was all we could ever manage. However, after experiencing the team church plant of Boston, members of our church became excited and others were emboldened to duplicate the same work.

Based on the example forged in Boston, we have started new churches across the United States, East Asia, and Central Asia. Each time, a team was sent comprised not only of members from one church, but sometimes from multiple congregations. Numerous times, the church in Boston sent staff to join a new mission. In fact, of the four lay leader couples who came with me to Boston, all are now full-time ministers. Three have been sent to pastor new or existing churches in our family across the world.

Each time, a church is begun it has been my practice to assist in the groundwork preparation. When our church was praying about a new congregation in New York City, I prepared for the team's arrival and the inaugural worship service at least one year prior to the event. I made a couple of trips to New York City to visit the director of missions and his staff to rent a church facility at the association office building. Once the church meeting facility was secured, our churches kept praying for the inaugural worship service. On the day of the inaugural service, over 200 people were in attendance to celebrate the joyful event.

Team church planting is a work that builds upon itself. The planting of each new church in our family has empowered us to be increasingly ready and able to answer the ever-widening call of God. Both on the individual and the churchwide level, we have worked together as a team to present the gospel everywhere God has called us. Each church is another part of the body, eager to provide people, prayers, and resources, knowing that such work is the beginning of its own life. Moreover, the mission to continue planting churches has given us a clear vision, a point of unity, and a channel for the love and grace of God to flow through us.

One exciting fruit of our team church planting has been international missions. Beginning and sustaining a church overseas is a daunting charge for even a mega-church and is often relegated to the denominational level. After planting

churches in Boston, Los Angeles, and New York, God unveiled a plan for our church that stretched beyond the borders of this country and into the region of the former Soviet Union now known as Central Asia.

In 1991, through what appeared to be a series of administrative mishaps, one of our church members was rerouted from China to Tashkent, Uzbekistan, to serve a two-year term as a journeyman for the International Mission Board. At the time, not one of us had even heard of Uzbekistan, but God changed that very quickly. One year later, we had three missionaries from our church working together to serve a spiritual community numbering over 70, and new brothers and sisters were being added every day. Three young converts in that congregation were already convicted to devote themselves to full-time ministry and enrolled in seminary studies. We thought our job was done; we had preached the gospel and even raised leaders who could take over the ministry. I had called our missionaries back home, when the undeniable call of God came once again.

Little did we know, but God had prepared our church to begin work overseas by laying a solid foundation in the four churches in the United States. We now have a team of eight missionaries committed to serve in Tashkent for the rest of their lives. For the past five years, we have supplied a steady stream of short-term missionaries, prayers, and financial resources. Since 1996, more than 50 members from our churches in the United States have gone to Tashkent to serve one-year terms as Bible teachers, English teachers, carpenters, doctors, cooks, Teakwood instructors, and more.

During the summer, we send mission teams of students and young adults to get a taste of God's work in Tashkent and to explore the call of God in their lives for missions. Every Thanksgiving and periodically throughout the year, we take an offering to support all of our overseas churches. We are most powerfully united as one church through prayer for God's work of salvation and making disciples through our body. The church in Tashkent continues to see new converts and the raising of leaders. Recently, four native Russian-speaking members of our Tashkent church were commissioned as missionaries to help our newest work there.

God has also duplicated a similar pattern of work on the mission field in Kazakstan, Japan, Korea, and in Russia. At present, we have almost 100 long-term and short-term missionaries on the mission field. The team church planting spirit is passed from church to church, generation to generation, as we continue to expand His kingdom to the ends of the earth. This summer a group of college students from our church in Berkeley have spearheaded an exploratory mission trip to their home country of Taiwan. We do not know whether the Lord is calling us there, but we are open and listening once again for His call.

BBC has been able to plant churches on the foreign mission field, solely supported by our churches in the states. Not only have manpower resources been pooled together, but financial needs are met collectively. It is my conviction that multiplication of churches through team church planting is the best way to fulfill the Great Commission.

### **Conclusion**

From that very first church plant in Berkeley, God has led us these past 20 years to continue to plant churches, Christ's visible representation on earth. It has been God-led. We never followed any preset formulas, nor had a strategic plan. We have no methodology to tout. God simply infused a little church with enough life to keep reproducing itself, and I have been honored to be along for the wonderful ride.

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### **Principles**

1. A team furnishes an excellent core group for the new church.
2. A team from the sending church has a rich experience of working together which accelerates unity.
3. A team will have a prayer base in the sending church.

## Feeling the Tension: Planting Churches in Our Postmodern Reality

By Ed Stetzer

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**H**ave you experienced the tension? Something is different, fundamentally different. The tension that now exists in our society and culture also exists in ministry. It can be a very uncomfortable and undesirable reality as the culture struggles between modernism and emerging postmodernism. Most of us do not define this cultural tension in those terms, but we are often confronted with its existence. It is something that can be felt, seen, and heard.

In society and politics, we have heard much about the idea that our country is divided, and this is often expressed in terms of “red” states and “blue” states. Some of this division exists because of the effects of modernism versus postmodernism. In ministry, the cultural tension reveals itself daily in the lives of the people who seem to “know” the truth but choose to live in a disconnected way from that belief system. For example, the divorce rate is higher among the churched than the unchurched.<sup>1</sup> This reveals a disconnected belief system about the true nature of marriage and has created a lot of turmoil among the broken families in the church and society. While the country may always be divided over political differences, the church cannot afford to continue in a disconnected, stagnant state.

Everyone feels the impact of this cultural shift almost on a daily basis. How can this tension be defined in terms of modernism and postmodernism? What impact should this tension have upon the church and church planting? How can we be more effective in relating to the emerging postmodern culture?

### Understanding Modernism and Postmodernism<sup>2</sup>

Millard Erickson summarizes the tenets of modernism:

- Naturalism (reality is restricted to what can be observed or proved)
- Humanism (humanity is the pinnacle of the universe)
- The scientific method (knowledge is inherently good and is attainable)
- Reductionism (humans are highly developed animals)
- Progress (because knowledge is good, its acquisition will lead to progress)
- Nature (evolution—not a creator—is responsible for life and its development)
- Certainty (because knowledge is objective, we can know things for certain)
- Determinism (the belief that things happened because of fixed causes)
- Individualism (the supremacy of each individual and their ability to discern truth)
- Anti-authoritarianism (each person is the final arbiter of truth)<sup>3</sup>

There are many suggested dates for the beginning of modernity—from the invention of the printing press to the writings of Descartes. Oden defines this era as the time from the Bastille (1789) to the Berlin Wall (1989).<sup>4</sup> In addition, it is the Enlightenment and its worldview of “empirical verifiability” that defines the modern era.<sup>5</sup> The Enlightenment proclaimed the value of continuous progress. Because of the inherent goodness of man and his rational processes, scientific progress would be continuous and “good.” Just as the Enlightenment had overcome the “dark ages” of the medieval period, human reason would help overcome each obstacle in its path.

Some believe that evangelicalism itself was born out of reaction and in response to the Enlightenment.<sup>6</sup> Evangelicalism honed its teeth by defending the faith against evolution and secularity, but it did so by appealing to science and the rationality of Christianity. In the process, evangelicals were influenced by modernity more than we might realize.<sup>7</sup> We developed a working, effective apologetic for the modern era by using the tools of modernity.

The system of modernity worked well and served the Western world for 200 years. In the last few decades, the cracks in the wall of modernity have begun to show. The promises of modernity simply did not materialize. In other words, at the end of the inevitable progress of the Enlightenment came mustard gas in World War I, Hitler in World War II, Mai Lai, Tuskegee, Oklahoma City, and the World Trade Center. It is the very failure of the Enlightenment ideal that has led to the new postmodern mood.

Postmodernism simply means “that which comes after modernism.” Understandably, much of what defines postmodernism is a reaction to modernism. Erickson again provides some helpful categories. Postmodernism is based on:

- The denial of personal objectivity
- The uncertainty of knowledge
- The death of any all-inclusive explanation
- The denial of the inherent goodness of knowledge
- The rejection of progress
- The supremacy of community-based knowledge
- The disbelief in objective inquiry<sup>8</sup>

These philosophical values have been transferred into the common culture. Of course, the average person does not talk about “the denial of personal objectivity.” Instead, he or she knows that “everybody has their own point of view and all are equally valid.” Using Erickson’s categories, we can then see how these values play out every day in postmodern culture. While it is important to categorize and attempt to understand postmodernism, there are differing opinions on to what extent these values reach. These generalizations only serve as a guide, not the rule.



### **Erickson's Description**

Denial of personal objectivity

Uncertainty of knowledge

Death of any all-inclusive explanation

Denial of knowledge's inherent goodness

Rejection of progress

Supremacy of community-based knowledge

Disbelief in objective inquiry

### **Cultural Expression**

I do believe in God but that is really the influence of my parents. Nobody can know for sure.

The government says that the Atkins diet does not work, but who really knows if it is true?

You know, things just don't fit into a nice neat explanation.

The more knowledge that is out there, the more dangerous the world is becoming.

I have all this technology but am still not happy.

It is arrogant to think I, alone, have figured out spiritual truth.

Here is what I think that verse means, but I could be wrong—what is your interpretation?

While modernity and postmodernity hold some things in common, as a whole postmodernity tends to be more cynical. Maybe that is the point—modernism and its hopeful notions of progress seem quaint in a post-rational era.

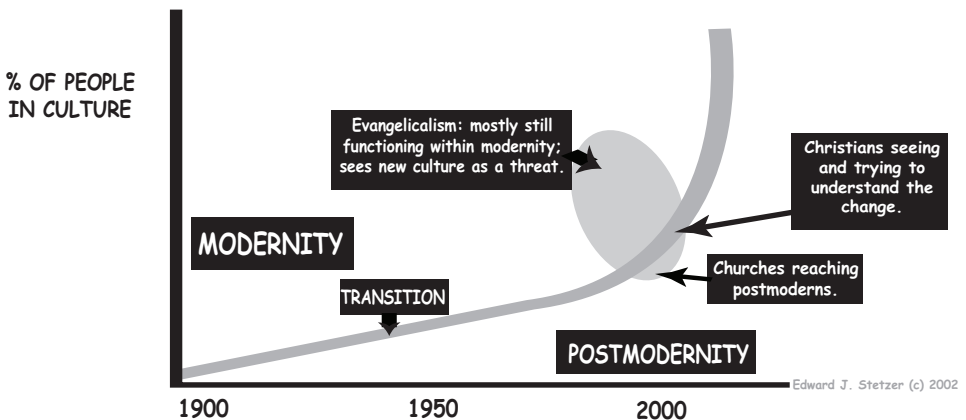
### Why Is This Relevant?

Churches need to reach postmoderns because postmoderns are just people. Starting a new Korean church is an obvious response to an influx of Koreans. The church would reach people who “swim” in the water of Korean culture. The same must be done for postmodern people swimming in the new North American culture.

Evangelicals have struggled with responding to these new realities, finding reasons not to respond. **It is important to note that the shift to postmodernism has not happened everywhere. The shifts have not yet impacted many in the church culture** because the church culture acts as a protective shield, unmolested by a secular culture’s music, literature, values, and other influences.

There are still large pockets of North America where people live out their lives in much the same manner as their parents before them. These people have more toys, but they still go to church (or at least feel guilty if they do not go), still have relatively stable family lives, and still espouse the “old values” of America. Most evangelicals live in these pockets and have been somewhat insulated from the societal changes. Still, television can’t be avoided, and in our retrograde world, something seems to be very wrong. These people see the shifts coming, and while the societal shifts may not yet have impacted them, they see the changes reflected in their children’s eyes.

The chart below illustrates this point:



The evangelical subculture is still predominantly entrenched in the worldview of modernity. That is ironic in a way, since the church of the past 200 years has struggled so adamantly against the advances of modernistic science. But the church needed to reach moderns and modernism, in turn, has shaped our worldview. Meanwhile, a smaller number of evangelicals are struggling to understand the worldview of postmoderns and the philosophical backdrop of postmodernity. An even smaller number are actually living and ministering within that worldview—engaging and reaching postmoderns.

The chart might also help to explain that being a postmodernist is not an age issue alone. The worldview that we identify today as “cultural postmodernity” is not new in academia, the art world, or even in many major cities. A 60-year-old artist from San Francisco might be thoroughly entrenched in postmodernity while a 24-year-old banker in Memphis might hold more modernist values.

Perhaps most importantly, **many evangelicals have not engaged postmoderns because they do not want to have contact with the value systems of the postmodern world.** It is much easier to deny its power than to acknowledge its influence. A recent evangelical journal focused on “Confronting Postmodernism” rather than engaging postmoderns. It is a common practice for the church to oppose cultural change rather than to change its methods to reach a new culture. It happened in the first century with “the Judaizers” and it has happened in every age since.

**So, what’s going to happen?** Many evangelicals will choose to sit out the changing culture and remain isolated. Many non-evangelical churches will adopt postmodern values and try to hitch their fading star to the post modern value system. (Yes, that will be as embarrassing as it was when they tried to adopt the values of the 60s, then the 70s, and so on.) Thankfully, some churches will choose to engage the culture in radically biblical ways—becoming missionaries to a culture they have not traveled to, but which has instead traveled to them. How will the church respond to postmodernity?

### Relevant Churches in a Postmodern World?

It wasn’t the traditional time (5 p.m., not 11 a.m.). People were not only dressed casually, there were many with T-shirts, shorts, and some different hair styles. The language used in the service was not “churchy.” People openly displayed Christian affection. The music was intense and fresh; there was no organ or piano. There were people genuinely seeking to worship God. Communion was not passed out; it was offered to all who sought to participate. Could this really be church?

A fascinating movement has been born. “Postmodern” churches have begun to spring up across North America. They are predominantly (though not exclusively) young, and their services are geared toward persons looking for different experiences.

This is tricky; in a culture that thrives on diversity and disdains uniformity, there is no *right* way to plant a postmodern church. There is no single answer to reaching postmoderns because there is no one, stereotypical, North American postmodern.

Despite the obvious difficulty of defining postmoderns, there are some similar patterns in their thinking and feeling. Helping to plant an indigenous church is an art more than a science, but missionaries around the world do it every day. One thing is very clear; postmoderns are different from the people churches have reached successfully in the past. If we write them off as “beyond help”—as some churches seem inclined to do—we ignore the Great Commission.

New congregations are effectively reaching postmoderns.<sup>9</sup> These may be new worship services within existing churches intended to meet postmoderns’ needs or entirely new congregations. “Styles” of expression change between eras,<sup>10</sup> and new churches should reflect the change of style without any change of substance. As described below, patterns are emerging that fit this changing yet unchanging paradigm.

### **Planting Effective Churches in the Emerging Postmodern World**

How we plant churches is in many ways determined by the location and focus group (“where” and “among whom” we plant churches). Moreover, within a rapidly changing world, not all church plants are going to look the same. As a result, different models are emerging to reach the needs of this new culture. The models of the 1950s were focused on the Builder generation. The models of the 1980s and 1990s were focused on the Baby Boomers. Emerging generations will most likely be reached by new and yet-to-be discovered models. Some interesting patterns become evident when examining existing models. Interestingly enough, the culture in America has changed dramatically in the past 50 years; but many churches have only changed the names on their payrolls. Planting new churches is one of the quickest ways we will see a change implemented. Based on my observations, there are 10 values that effective postmodern churches need to practice.

### 1. Be Unashamedly Spiritual.<sup>11</sup>

People have grown tired of the modern belief that everything can be answered by science and reason. Postmodern pop culture is unashamedly proud to throw spirituality at us. On your next trip to the video store, note the array of spirituality on the shelves. Recently, movies such as *The Passion of the Christ*, the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, and *The Matrix* trilogy are a few of the box office hits that illustrate this point.

Television is unashamedly spiritual in its content. *Joan of Arcadia* and *Medium* are just two dramas that are centered on the spiritual. Oprah Winfrey has included a daily segment in her talk show on remembering your spirit. After the 11 o'clock news on most channels, we are blasted with commercials for “psychic friends” and tarot readings. For three dollars a minute you can be told that wealth and love will be a part of your near future.

Music has been greatly influenced by postmodern pop culture. Postmodern music has confessed to the world that it is also unashamedly spiritual. Gregorian Chants and other recordings of spiritual music are best-sellers in music stores around the country.

There are some basic tenets that can describe the secular spirituality of postmodernity. First, it is widespread. Len Sweet states in *Soul Tsunami* that in the class of 2001, nine out of 10 believe in God. Second, postmoderns want a spirituality that is applicable to all areas of life. A spirituality that does not work (bring peace, make for better relationships, and so on) does not matter. Thus, Christians without joy are an anti-evangelism strategy! Thirdly, most postmoderns want a spirituality that is authentic above all else. The authenticity of the faith, and that it is sincerely held, is more important than the rational basis of the faith. Postmoderns aren't looking to conquer the Bible or doctrines; they embrace the mysteries that lie therein.

### 2. Promote Incarnational Ministry.<sup>12</sup>

Postmoderns are looking for persons who are genuine and transparent. They are not interested in “Is it true?” They are interested in “Is it real?”<sup>13</sup> Such observations can only come when relationships are real and present. Postmoderns distrust authority and authority structures. They want to see Christ through persons who have earned their respect and trust.<sup>14</sup>

Know that the fruit of this type of ministry comes only from considerable time spent listening and learning from postmoderns. Go to their hangouts and listen. Listen and learn, and be willing to wait.<sup>15</sup>

Many postmoderns feel as if they are entering an “alien culture” when encountering evangelical Christianity.<sup>16</sup> It is not the job of the unchurched postmodern to enter our culture. It is our job to invade theirs. Mission work is the same in every place—the missionary must radically engage the culture.

Postmoderns are not responding to “sit and let them come to us” evangelism. Reaching postmoderns takes more than just a weekend outreach or a new program. Evangelism to postmoderns is a day-to-day effort. Postmoderns do not want to “hear” about Christianity, they want to see Christianity in action. We need a new evangelism paradigm. Contextualization is a major key to reaching any people group, why should this be any different?

Evangelism must adopt the “Jesus-type” methods. We must go to postmoderns in order to reach them. We must live in their neighborhoods, eat at their restaurants, drink coffee at their coffee shops, and shop at their stores. Living “in Christ” must be seen as a daily reality. Being a Christian is not a label or a banner that is flown only on Sundays; it is a way of life.

### **3. Engage in Service.<sup>17</sup>**

Volunteerism is at an all-time high as people have the desire to make a difference in their community and their world. Organizations such as Habitat for Humanity and the Peace Corps serve as outlets for postmoderns to make their mark on society. Postmoderns are looking for “hands-on” opportunities to get involved and be active. The key to engaging the postmodern passion is service.<sup>18</sup> This relates not just to postmodern Christians engaging in service. It also involves churches engaging in service as *part of* evangelism.

Churches can connect with postmodern Americans by offering them an outlet for their passion to serve. Genuine faith always expresses itself in ministry. As postmoderns see that faith produces service, the validity of the faith is proved. For example, New Horizons Fellowship<sup>19</sup> in Apex, N.C., uses Habitat for Humanity house-building projects as an evangelistic outreach. The church members invite their friends to serve the poor by building a house. In the process, they can see the Christ-centered service of believers and see the gospel in action. The church family is trained to share their faith as part of this mission work. Many of our churches fear placing unbelievers in places of service, they would prefer them attend and listen. But often, serving is where they experience the most life change.

### **4. Enjoy Experiential Worship.<sup>20</sup>**

Worship is essential in every generation. The large-group gathering will still function in the church reaching postmoderns. Being sensitive to the postmodern

seeker may involve allowing him or her to be involved in the learning process. Postmoderns do not want to be spectators; they want to be contributors in the learning process.<sup>21</sup> Long explains:

Boomers, who are more self-assured and autonomous, want to be left alone to observe and then decide for themselves when to get involved. Xers, as part of the emerging postmodern generation, need to be invited in because they are not as self-assured. Once they are inside the door, they want to become part of the community, not remain aloof.<sup>22</sup>

Many attempt to define postmodern worship by their musical style; but music plays only a small part of their understanding of worship. While it is common to hear ancient songs as well as brand new releases, postmodern worship stems out of a lifestyle. It incorporates many more senses and even many more traditions, but it lends itself to be applied to daily living—not just a weekly or monthly thing.

### **5. Preach Narrative Expository Messages.**

Early church preaching was often story-focused. A return to narrative preaching is a good thing—as long as the focal narrative is the narrative of Scripture. Jesus frequently used narratives in His preaching. Often the story was the point. However, we are told to preach the Word and not just tell meaningful stories. Preaching must be both narrative and biblical. To some, narrative preaching is telling a contemporary story with biblical texts sprinkled in. This is not enough... although narrative, New Testament churches still need to be biblical and present Scripture as their text and focus.

Postmoderns are accustomed to stacked narratives—narratives that move in and out of varying stories in books or on television. As emerging new churches present the Word of God, they can build an effective message around a biblical narrative surrounding it with contemporary illustrations and applications—weaving a series of narratives together around the central narrative of the Word of God.

Unfortunately, there are few churches that do this well. In many traditional contexts, pastors will read a text and then spend the rest of the time speaking on a tangential subject. When some pastors do actually preach a text, it is often so dry and methodical that we leave with no practical application or passion. In some “seeker-sensitive” churches, they spend much of their time avoiding biblical concepts to focus on communication or relevant cultural truths (such as marriage seminars, etc.). Biblical preaching that truly engages the text is rare but worthwhile and a narrative expression of such often engages postmoderns.<sup>23</sup>

## 6. Appreciate and Participate in Ancient Patterns.<sup>24</sup>

In many ways, the postmodern desire is to mimic the action, but not the essence of the Reformation. A recovery of the experiential faith of the past with its sacred symbols and shared doxology unite individuals in a way that is unfamiliar to this individualistic society. In the midst of a transition to contemporary worship and seeker-sensitive services, there is a backlash among postmoderns to reach toward the stability of the past. “There are many among the Baby Boomers, and especially among the Gen Xers, who are attracted to liturgical worship, represented by Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Episcopal churches.”<sup>25</sup>

Most postmodern thought is a reaction to the failures of modernism and its materialistic perspective, yet postmoderns revert to this same past as a place of stability. The church of the modern era failed to answer many of the questions postmoderns were asking, but the ancient traditions still hold the mystery of the transcendent and the experience of spirituality. The churches that are reaching the postmodern culture have reached them at these two major intersections where the worldview of Christianity and the worldview of postmodernism collide. This is a generation of “doubting Thomases.” They will not believe Christ until they experience Him in their lives. The candles, hymns, and other ancient forms of worship are a safe place for the postmodern seeker to enter into the meta-narratives that run so contrary to the subjectivity of the day. When the biblical text is central, some ancient practices can help illuminate the eternal text of Scripture.

## 7. See Visual Worship.

In the postmodern age, truth can also be expressed in images.<sup>26</sup> The church that began in a preliterate culture must rediscover the value of the visual in a postliterate culture.<sup>27</sup> Postmoderns may best be reached by returning to pre-modern approaches.

Postmoderns are not looking to be entertained; they are seeking to be engaged.<sup>28</sup> A worship service held in a sterile auditorium, led by professional worship leaders without blemish, does not appeal to the typical postmodern.<sup>29</sup>

This is an experience economy. The primary cultural currency out there is basically images and experiences. When you have those two put together, the primary arena for accessing reality and truth is the arts. . . In this way, the postmodern world is much more medieval. The church was a major patron of the arts. We forget this—there was a time up until the 19th century that some of your major art dealers and traders were clergy. Then, something happened. Right now is a major renaissance for the arts in the church as we make worship multi-sensory and experiential.<sup>30</sup>



This has been most obviously expressed through the introduction of video screens and PowerPoint in new churches. However, it is much more than that. Many emerging postmodern churches are discovering the value of banners, liturgies, and art that connect them with biblical truth.

### 8. Connect with Technology.

Technology is no longer an option in this postmodern culture. It is part of the culture.<sup>31</sup> Technology may have assisted the rapid spread of postmodernism more than anything else.<sup>32</sup> It makes sense that new churches would also use technology to reach postmodern generations. Technology tends to be used in three settings: the worship service, evangelism, and community.

- **Worship Services.** Since technology has been a great influence on postmodern culture, it makes sense that any mission strategy to reach them must consider technology. New churches reaching emerging postmodern generations are using technology in many ways. Cornerstone Church<sup>33</sup> in San Francisco uses light gels to transform their worship into a liturgical church—projecting stained glass where there is none to help create a multi-sensory worship experience.
- **Evangelism.** Cyberspace has had a leveling effect among postmoderns, presenting a myriad of religious options at the fingertips of the average postmodern.<sup>34</sup> Most postmoderns who are interested in spiritual things will do some research first—and most of that will be online. The church must be more widely represented in the cyber world. Churches taking this new frontier seriously will likely thrive in the postmodern reality.
- **Community.** Some churches are exploring the use of technology to foster community. A word of caution—most churches using the Internet for community are not doing so in place of personal interaction, they are doing it to enhance interpersonal interaction. Internet “churches” without meaningful community beyond chat rooms are just occasional anomalies (and I would steer clear of them).

### 9. Live Community.<sup>35</sup>

Community is a central value in most effective churches reaching postmoderns. Community will be a central value in all postmodern communities, whether secular or sacred. This is good news for the church because community is central to its mission. With a culture anxious for genuine community, the church of Christ can offer community with man and with God. In the new church of the postmoderns, spiritual growth does not take place outside of community.<sup>36</sup>

Postmodern generations are searching for the security provided by relationships.<sup>37</sup> Groups seeking to build relationships among postmoderns will not be short-term study groups. These groups will sometimes meet for two or more years before becoming true communities.<sup>38</sup> This is not a limitation on new participants. On the contrary, true communities will welcome new people because they are communities.<sup>39</sup> In such small group communities, there is no time constraint on the journey.<sup>40</sup>

The key to evangelizing postmoderns is the presence of Christian community.<sup>41</sup> In a world where Christianity is not the establishment religion, it must provide the strength of community to reinforce its message.<sup>42</sup> Notice the connection between community and proclamation:

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all (Acts 4:32–33, NIV).<sup>43</sup> Evangelism among a relational people group needs to be relationship-oriented.

We can't stress enough that connecting to others in relationships and building a sense of community are driving forces for (the postmodern generations). It's a we-centered spiritual approach, not a me-centered approach. This is a generation that longs to belong.<sup>44</sup>

Emerging postmodern churches are reaching out by inviting people into their community. They are allowing the spiritual journey to begin before conversion. Spiritual seekers are invited to participate in the faith community before they share the faith. Allowing someone to belong does not mean that he or she is incorporated into the body of Christ.<sup>45</sup> It means they are seeking in a safe place.

Members of the next generation are often unimpressed by our verbal presentation of the gospel. What they want to see is people who live out the gospel in wholesome, authentic, and healing relationships.<sup>46</sup>

Community is the love of God manifesting itself in and through the people of God. That is the advantage the church has in this postmodern society. You can't fake community; it is the reality of the relationships that makes Christ believable to an unbelieving society. Community is the lightning rod that attracts postmoderns to participate in the meta-narrative. Community is the living breathing answer to the question of "Is this real?" In this safe community, the seeker may remain long enough to receive the answers. To many postmoderns, community is Christ.

## 10. Lead by Transparency and Team.<sup>47</sup>

**Transparency.** Leadership in the postmodern context tends to be dramatically different. In the modern context, the leader was penalized for transparency. Leaders who shared their struggles frequently regretted it later as it became an example in future arguments. In the postmodern era, struggle has more value. Thus, the “wounded healer” is a well-accepted leadership approach.<sup>48</sup> The Scripture text clearly calls for such transparency—bear one another’s burdens.

**Team.** Leaders in the postmodern context prefer a team-oriented approach to leadership. Many postmodern leaders will struggle when they are asked to take solitary leadership.<sup>49</sup> It is not their way. Instead, they are seeking a community of leadership.

The process is often more important than the product. Postmoderns tend to ask of the decision-making process: “Was it fair? Was it just? Did it make sense? Was I valued?”<sup>50</sup> These process-oriented questions must be considered in depth in the postmodern leadership paradigm. Today, 70 percent of pastors say they do not have a single friend.<sup>51</sup> In such a day, we must grasp the value of transparency and team.

## Conclusion

Now are you feeling the tension? Things are different and changing within the postmodern context in which we live, but we have a great opportunity before us to reach postmoderns—the people who are being influenced by the philosophy of postmodernism. There is one thing that has not changed, nor will it change until Jesus returns—the Great Commission. We have the opportunity and responsibility to join Him and engage the culture as we find it. Then we will have the joy of watching as God transforms another people group and culture and sends them out to reach others. What an exciting future of change we have before us in reaching postmoderns.

- <sup>1</sup>[http://www.marriagesavers.org/public/born\\_agains\\_have\\_high\\_divorce\\_ra.htm](http://www.marriagesavers.org/public/born_agains_have_high_divorce_ra.htm)
- <sup>2</sup> *Planting New Churches in a Postmodern Age* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2003)
- <sup>3</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Postmodernizing the Faith: Evangelical Responses to the Challenge of Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 17.
- <sup>4</sup> Oden in David S. Dockery, ed., *The Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 45.
- <sup>5</sup> Jimmy Long, *Generating Hope: A Strategy for Reaching the Postmodern Generation* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1997), 61.
- <sup>6</sup> Stanley E. Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the 21st Century* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1993), 65-66.
- <sup>7</sup> Eddie Gibbs, *ChurchNext: Quantum Changes in How We Do Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000) 22.
- <sup>8</sup> Erickson, *Postmodernizing the Faith*, 19.
- <sup>9</sup> <http://www.theooze.com/articles/read.cfm?ID=70&CATID=4>
- <sup>10</sup> Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 13.
- <sup>11</sup> Mark Swan contributed to the research and writing of this section as part of a study group, "Church Planting in a Postmodern Age."
- <sup>12</sup> Ralph Greenwell contributed to the research and writing of this section as part of a study group, "Church Planting in a Postmodern Age."
- <sup>13</sup> Leonard Sweet, *Soul Tsunami: Sink or Swim in New Millennium Culture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999), 215.
- <sup>14</sup> Gibbs, *ChurchNext*, 69.
- <sup>15</sup> Survey Response from Freeway Church in Baton Rouge.
- <sup>16</sup> Celek and Zander, *Inside the Soul of the New Generation* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 99.
- <sup>17</sup> Debbie Dornfeld contributed to the research and writing of this section as part of a study group, "Church Planting in a Postmodern Age."
- <sup>18</sup> Sweet, *Soul Tsunami*, 342.
- <sup>19</sup> [www.newhorizonsfellowship.com](http://www.newhorizonsfellowship.com).
- <sup>20</sup> Mark Swan contributed to the research and writing of this section as part of a study group, "Church Planting in a Postmodern Age."
- <sup>21</sup> Jimmy Long, *Generating Hope*, 147.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>23</sup> Pat Gillen, personal correspondence, July 4, 2005.
- <sup>24</sup> Eric Sisk contributed to the research and writing of this section as part of a study group, "Church Planting in a Postmodern Age."
- <sup>25</sup> Gibbs, *ChurchNext*, 161.
- <sup>26</sup> Darrell L. Guder, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 37.

<sup>27</sup>Gibbs, *ChurchNext*, 124.

<sup>28</sup>Celek and Zander, *Inside the Soul of the New Generation*, 67.

<sup>29</sup>Gibbs, *ChurchNext*, 123.

<sup>30</sup>Sweet in an interview with David Trotter and Spencer Burke in “The Ooze.”  
<http://www.theooze.com/articles/read.cfm?ID=142&CATID=4>.

<sup>31</sup>Sweet, *Soul Tsunami*, 31.

<sup>32</sup>Stanley E. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 17.

<sup>33</sup>[www.cornerstone-sf.org](http://www.cornerstone-sf.org).

<sup>34</sup>Tom Beaudoin, *Virtual Faith: The Irreverent Spiritual Quest of Generation X* (Jossey-Bass, 2000), 57.

<sup>35</sup>Eric Sisk contributed to the research and writing of this section as part of a study group, “Church Planting in a Postmodern Age.”

<sup>36</sup>Long, *Generation Hope*, 133-134.

<sup>37</sup>Celek and Zander, *Inside the Soul of a New Generation*, 58.

<sup>38</sup>Long, *Generation Hope*, 145.

<sup>39</sup>Long, *Generation Hope*, 146.

<sup>40</sup>Gibbs, *ChurchNext*, 202.

<sup>41</sup>Ford, 172.

<sup>42</sup>Gibbs, *ChurchNext*, 196.

<sup>43</sup>Scripture quotation (s) marked NIV is taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version. Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission.

<sup>44</sup>Celek and Zander, *Inside the Soul of a New Generation*, 59.

<sup>45</sup>Gibbs, *ChurchNext*, 198.

<sup>46</sup>Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 169.

<sup>47</sup>Debbie Dornfeld and Ralph Greenwell contributed to the research and writing of this section as part of a study group, “Church Planting in a Postmodern Age.”

<sup>48</sup>Long, *Generation Hope*, 153.

<sup>49</sup>Long, *Generation Hope*, 154.

<sup>50</sup>Celek and Zander, *Inside the Soul of a New Generation*, 33.

<sup>51</sup>Sweet, *Soul Tsunami*, 220.

# 11

## Chapter Eleven

# Reaching Canada Through Church Starting

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The year was 1867; the setting, a meeting room in Charlottetown, a small city in the tiny maritime province of Prince Edward Island. The leading politicians of the day had gathered. Their mission: to determine the nature of the fledgling nation they were about to establish. They sought to agree on a name that would appropriately describe the essence of a brand new country—Canada.

Sir John A. MacDonald, Canada's first prime minister, vigorously advocated the term "Kingdom of Canada." The word "kingdom," he reasoned, would closely identify Canada with the English monarchy. Some of his colleagues opposed the name, fearing the term would needlessly offend the republican Americans to the south. Tradition says it was Sir Leonard Tilley, premier of the province of New Brunswick, who suggested replacing "kingdom" with "dominion." Apparently, Tilley, a devout Christian, had been reading in the Psalms and one verse seemed especially appropriate to describe Canada. "He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth" (Psalm 72:8, KJV). The others agreed, and the official name, "The Dominion of Canada" was initiated with the hope that God's sovereignty would be evident across the massive expanse of Canada, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific.

### The Need

One hundred and thirty four years later, Canada is one of the most prosperous nations on the globe. From 1992 through 2000, the United

Nations Human Development Report named Canada the best place in the world for people to live. No doubt this would delight Canada's founding fathers, but what of their dream for God's rule to be evident across the nation?

Sadly, Canada's spiritual condition has not kept pace with its standard of living. The nation's spiritual status is dismal. Roughly 20 percent of Canadians regularly attend a church of any kind, versus 40 percent of Americans. Only 7 percent of Canadians are affiliated with an evangelical church, compared to 30 percent in the United States. Forty-seven percent of Canadians are affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church, but even this statistic is misleading. The term "affiliated" often refers to one who was baptized into the church as an infant and, therefore, claims to be Catholic, though he or she is in no way involved in the Catholic faith.

The largest Protestant church in Canada is the United Church of Canada. In recent years, this denomination's membership has declined so dramatically that there is some speculation as to its survival. The disarray of the United Church made national headlines in the 1990s when its moderator, Bill Phipps, issued provocative statements to the press. He questioned whether Christ is divine, whether He rose from the dead, whether there is a literal heaven or hell, and whether the Bible is a reliable guide for life. In addition, Phipps expressed support for controversial lifestyles, such as common-law living and homosexuality, as well as for abortions in some circumstances.

There is a significant shortage of evangelical churches in Canada. Three percent of Canadians claim to be Baptist, compared to 10 percent in the United States. In Quebec, Canada's second-largest province, less than .5 percent claim to be born-again. This province has one evangelical church for every 13,059 people. The city of Beauport, with a population of 72,920, has only one evangelical church for every 36,460 people. Where 13 percent of Canadians read their horoscope daily, only four percent read their Bible daily. In 1990, 26 percent of Canadians believed they would be reincarnated when they die; only 20 percent believed they would go to heaven. Unlike the United States, Canada has never had a nationwide revival.

In 1998, an extensive report on the spiritual condition of Canada entitled *Transforming Our Nation: Empowering the Canadian Church for a Greater Harvest* was published. Its authors reported that 82 percent or 24.6 million out of 30 million Canadians were unchurched. They projected that if there were to be one church for every 2,000 Canadians, 10,000 new churches would have to be planted immediately.

## The Command

Jesus' command is clear and unmistakable: "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations . . ." (Matthew 28:18-19, NASB). Mark 16:15 records Jesus' compelling instructions, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. . ." (KJV). People, churches, and leaders who take this command seriously will act on it immediately. The early church in Jerusalem understood that this was a command, not a suggestion. The following passages illustrate their church planting efforts:

### Acts 9:31

"Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied" (NKJV).

### Acts 8:1,4-5

"They were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word. Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them" (KJV).

### Acts 11:19-21

"Now those who were scattered . . . traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word . . . And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord" (NKJV).

This advance in birthing churches all over the known world continued as it is demonstrated in Acts 15:41 and Acts 16:5. The early church was obedient to the Lord's command. God has laid the same burden on the hearts of Canadian Southern Baptists.

The faithfulness of first-century Christians to spread the gospel, and the subsequent development of thousands of congregations is a clear, biblical pattern for us today. Believers in the early church understood that, wherever they went, they were to preach the gospel. As a result of their obedience, they saw God orchestrate new churches wherever people were converted. The apostles stayed in Jerusalem and taught the new Christians. In turn, these new disciples went out and did the same thing. Jesus had specified that His followers spread the good news to "Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). This is exactly what happened (Acts 9:31; 11:19-23). It was the laypeople God used to do church planting as they were taught and then scattered across the known world. God has continued this method throughout the centuries through to the present day. God's plan to evangelize a lost world has not



changed since Jesus issued the Great Commission. Each new generation receives the fresh command to proclaim Christ to the ends of the earth. The key to reaching a lost world lies in the response of each generation of believers.

### **The Implementation**

The first Canadian church to affiliate with Southern Baptists was Kingcrest Southern Baptist Church in Vancouver. It joined the Baptist General Convention of Oregon-Washington in 1953. Within two months, Kingcrest sponsored its first church plant in North Vancouver. The following year it sponsored a second mission in Kamloops in the interior of British Columbia. From the beginning, Southern Baptists in Canada were committed to planting churches.

I experienced church planting in Canada firsthand in 1970 when I arrived at Faith Baptist Church in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. I left a thriving church in greater Los Angeles. Well-meaning friends asked why God would call me from the needy, teeming masses of Southern California to invest my life in reaching people scattered across the vast expanse of Canada. God's answer came, in part, the day I arrived at my new post. Four men drove 90 miles from Prince Albert to talk with me the very day I arrived in Canada from my six-day journey. They asked me to be their pastor, too. Thus, began two years of traveling twice a week to plant a church. In the years to come, that mission church, our other mission churches, and the missions of those missions would see a total of 38 works come into being.

The process of starting various churches across western Canada taught us many things about God and about church planting. Rather than choosing feasible sites for new churches and then asking God to bless our efforts, we asked God to show us where He was at work so we could join Him. Often, the towns to which He directed us were places we would never have chosen on our own. We taught every mission church that Christ's command to spread the gospel applied to them, too. We helped them seek God's direction as to where they should begin new works. Every church plant understood that God had commanded them to take the gospel to every person; as they did, new churches resulted.

We came to understand that our greatest task was not to strategize, but to pray. We beseeched the Lord of the harvest to thrust forth His laborers (see Matthew 9:37-38). God put a burden on our hearts for university students who could be the next generation of spiritual leaders. We shared the gospel on the university campus at every opportunity. When God saved university students, we disciplined them and taught them Christ's command to take the gospel into all the world. Many students yielded their lives to God's call and entered full-time Christian service.

The first president of our Baptist Student Union was Paul Johnson, who today directs the church planting efforts of the Canadian Convention of Southern Baptists (CCSB). Many students immediately became involved in our church plants. Students would set out in all directions across the province on Sunday mornings to teach Sunday School, to preach, to work with youth, to play the piano, and to lead worship. Out of these experiences, numerous students felt God leading them into full-time ministry and our churches were strengthened. Many of the current leaders among Canadian Southern Baptists were involved in student ministries and church planting while they were in college.

As more and more young Canadians responded to God's call, we recognized the need to train them so they could be fully equipped to minister in Canada. We began the Canadian Baptist Theological College in Saskatoon that gave many Canadian young people their first formal training for ministry. The current national ministry leader of the CCSB, Gerry Taillon, was a student at that school. Later that school was disbanded. In its place, the Canadian Southern Baptist Seminary was established in Cochrane, Alberta, to train Canadians to reach Canada for Christ. My oldest son, Richard, has served as its president since 1993.

We also learned that when God invited us to join Him in a work He was initiating, He would provide the needed leadership and resources. Until 1977, the Home Mission Board (now the North American Mission Board) did not work in Canada. The Lord was the only source of funding Canadian Southern Baptists had. That was always enough. God always provided resources, as long as we were willing to trust Him for them. However, it was only as we obeyed what God told us to do that He provided all we needed for the new church plants. During that time, we called many pastors to serve in our church plants. Each of them received all the financial support they needed. Their funding, however, rarely came into place until after they had committed to come and join the work. By the time they arrived, God had put everything in place.

In 1982, I moved to Vancouver to serve as a director of missions. We found God directing us to begin new works in British Columbia just as He had guided us in Saskatchewan. We followed the same pattern there, asking God to reveal His activity and then joining Him in the places He was at work. In six years, the number of our churches and missions grew from 11 to 23.

Because 63 percent of British Columbia's population did not have English as its mother tongue, many of the new churches started were ethnic in makeup. We taught each new church that the command of our Lord was to take the gospel to every person. The churches responded and God began to use them, not only to start new congregations across the city, but across Canada, and even back into

their homeland. Today, the CCSB may well be one of the most ethnically diverse conventions in the world.

The Lord's command to spread the Good News has been our motivation to start churches. Our church planting manual was the Bible. The method was obedience. Resources were not a problem—God provided for every step of faith and obedience. Canada has many perceived obstacles to church planting, but to God, there are no obstacles!

### Geography

Canada is the second-largest landmass in the world. Bitterly cold winters and vast distances discourage some church planters. Many communities in the north are isolated and inaccessible except by plane during parts of the year. However, no one is inaccessible to God! God has proven Himself a very present help to those who have turned to Him. Much of what I learned in order to write *Experiencing God* came from the experience of Marilynn, my wife, and I having no one but God to turn to for guidance in our ministry.

### Laborers

God has all the laborers needed for every church plant. He will send them when we pray. Our job is to ask and to accept those He sends in His way and in His time. Canada faces a critical shortage of laborers. We believe it is not that God is not calling laborers to His harvest, but that some are unwilling to go with Him into the difficult places of service. Gerry Taillon noted that our greatest need is not finances nor is it programs or strategies. The greatest need of the CCSB is leaders. We desperately need God-called and God-equipped men and women to respond to God's call and to plant churches across Canada.

It always broke my heart when Americans told me they knew God was calling them to serve in Canada but that they could not face the Canadian winters or could not live so far away from their extended family. Only a great moving of God's Spirit in people's hearts will see an adequate number of laborers entering the harvest fields in Canada. Paul Johnson notes: "God's Spirit transcends borders. I am asking God to send His finest leaders from all over the world to reach Canada for Himself."<sup>1</sup> So far God has been truly sending some of His finest into the ripe mission fields of Canada.

### Finances

Most Southern Baptist churches in Canada are small. Few have resources to fund a church plant. While the North American Mission Board (NAMB) has been extremely generous in its support of the work in Canada, even NAMB does not have the necessary financial resources to reach Canada for Christ. The cost to

evangelize Canada is staggering to comprehend. Yet, God, in His riches, is more than able to supply every need (Philippians 4:19). The CCSB leadership believes God has placed much of His resources in the harvest. As Canadians are won to Christ, the resources for church planting will be made available.

### **Multiculturalism**

Canada is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world. For the past 12 years an average of 227,000 people have immigrated to Canada each year. Most of these are Muslim, Sikh, Buddhist, or Confucian. The world's harvest field has come to Canada. While this poses logistical challenges for church planters, it also gives Canadian church planters the opportunity to impact a world through church plants in Canada.

### **The Vision**

In July 1998, the CCSB elected Gerry Taillon as national ministry leader. Taillon immediately began putting together a national staff that would trust God to do things the magnitude of which Canada had never seen. Canadian Southern Baptists recognized that, while God had been at work over the course of their brief history, Canadian Christians were failing to reach their nation for Christ. With the urgent need for over 10,000 new church plants facing the nation, Taillon called a gathering of CCSB leaders in August 1998. Avery Willis (of the International Mission Board) and I led them in seeking God's heart and mind for Canada. From that process, Canadian Southern Baptists became convinced God was promising to accomplish great things through their small convention. They believe God is seeking to use them to plant 1,000 new churches across Canada by 2020. Their vision statement, "a church for every person" encapsulates this conviction. They believe God wants them to have 100,000 baptisms in their churches by 2020. They believe God wants 100 foreign missionaries sent from their churches by 2020. This vision came at a time when there were only 138 churches and missions in the entire CCSB! These are God-sized goals, but the CCSB leadership believes God has initiated them. Only through God's leading and empowering will this vision be realized.

Under Taillon's leadership, the national staff positioned itself to respond to what God is commanding them to do. The convention had already reorganized by eliminating the director of missions positions and creating church planting consultant positions. They reasoned that a director of missions was a luxury the convention could not afford at its developmental stage of growth. If the CCSB was to impact Canada, it would have to concentrate on planting churches.

Second, the national staff recognized that its job was to help churches accomplish God's will. The churches did not exist to make the convention's programs successful. A new mission statement was developed for the convention staff: "Helping Churches Build the Kingdom of God." The means of measuring the convention staff's success was by evaluating how helpful they had been to their churches.

Third, the convention leadership realized that church planting begins in the heart of God, and God reveals His heart to those who draw close to Him. This means that churches can start churches, but so can individuals who have been compelled by God. While the Canadian convention wants to develop as many Canadian church planters through its seminary as possible, it also recognizes that God will send Americans, as well as ethnic missionaries, from around the world to plant churches in Canada. When God is obviously at work in the lives of church planters, all possible assistance is given to them.

The CCSB also realized that God is not limited to one method of church planting. Some church plants make use of church buildings. Others rent community centers. Some church plants are started by a pastoral couple, others use church planting teams. Some church plants begin with a nucleus of people sent from the sponsoring church. Other church plants consist of the church planters and any converts that are added to the church as it begins. Church plants might be house churches or cell-based. Lay pastors might lead churches. Every biblically sound approach to planting churches is encouraged as Canadian Southern Baptists seek to plant 1,000 new churches. The key is that they are healthy, growing, and reproducing churches, whatever form they might take.

The Canadian Southern Baptist Seminary, located in Cochrane, Alberta, has embraced the challenge God gave Canadian Southern Baptists. They began by asking, "How many leaders must be called out and trained if we are to plant 1,000 churches over the next 20 years?" The school administration and faculty then plotted the types of facilities and training delivery systems needed if they were to effectively train leaders from across Canada. When the theological accrediting agency (the Association of Theological Schools) evaluated them in 2000, they concluded that the greatest strength of the school was its obvious commitment to achieving the goals and purposes of its convention.

The Canadian Convention of Southern Baptists has an unprecedented opportunity to do what no other denomination has ever achieved in Canada.

They believe God has extended an extraordinary invitation. They are responding in faith to God's invitation. Their prayer is to experience God working in and through their churches in such a manner that Canadians will marvel at and seek out the mighty God who is evangelizing their nation through church planting.

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### Principles

1. Do not be afraid of small work.
2. Cultivate the willingness to sponsor everyone.
3. Expect to start simultaneous churches in multiple fields.
4. Invest in the young for much greater dividends later.

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#### Note

1. Paul Johnson, a personal interview, 11/2001.



## Chapter Twelve

# Southern Baptists Reaching African-Americans

By Sid Smith, Director  
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When Norris Fulfer cast the tie-breaking vote—after death threats—to admit predominantly African-American Community Baptist Church in Santa Rosa, California, into the Redwood Empire Southern Baptist Association, the courageous moderator had no idea he was unlocking a major door of progress for Southern Baptists. Since Washington Boyce led that church into the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) in 1951, the number of black churches in the Convention has grown to more than 3,000.<sup>1</sup> When the annals of Southern Baptist history are completed a significant chapter will be the story of the proliferation of African-American churches in America's largest non-Catholic denomination during the second half of the twentieth century.

### **The Proliferation of American Southern Baptist Churches**

Why the proliferation of black Southern Baptist churches? Seven realities have contributed to this dynamic increase.

First, during the past 50 years, the image of Southern Baptists has changed in the African-American community. As a result of its surprising record of inclusiveness, the SBC is now viewed as a viable denominational option for many African-American pastors. Therefore, they lead their churches to apply for membership in an association.

Second, the changing mores in society due to the impact of the civil rights movement have contributed a different mind-set on the concept of integration. During the past half century, there has been a value shift toward



inclusiveness relative to denominational membership. Consequently, many black churches desire to participate in an inclusive denomination like the contemporary SBC.

Third, a desire to participate in the benefits of Southern Baptist membership motivates many pastors to lead their congregation to apply. It is widely believed in the black community that benefits offered by Southern Baptists are unsurpassed by other denominational options. So to many pastors it makes sense to take advantage of benefits available to Southern Baptist churches.

Fourth, the practicality of dual affiliation enables many African-American churches to enjoy “the best of two worlds.” Without abandoning their traditional black Baptist roots they can take advantage of the programs and resources offered by the SBC. Affiliation with their traditional black Baptist convention is often viewed as providing fellowship; affiliation with the SBC is often viewed as providing help.

Fifth, there has been a generational shift in leadership in the SBC, which has resulted in a greater openness to the inclusion of minorities in all areas of denominational life. The greening of the denomination has resulted in a maturational growth factor not present to the same extent with earlier generations of leaders. Today’s generation of Southern Baptist leaders seems to be more comfortable in the race relations arena, reflected by their openness to more minorities in mainstream leadership positions. The new openness unwittingly encourages African-American pastors to consider membership in the SBC.

Sixth, the positive testimonies of African-American pastors relative to their experiences in the SBC have contributed to a “satisfied customer effect,” which makes membership in the Convention attractive. Black pastors considering applying for SBC membership are encouraged to join by their peers who share their positive testimony about the African-American Southern Baptist experience.

Seventh, the impact of the Southern Baptist church planting movement in the black community has accelerated the increase in predominantly African-American churches. Since 1989, Southern Baptists intentionally have been starting churches in African-American communities. These new churches are often singly aligned and tend to reflect a Southern Baptist programmatic approach. Combined with the black churches that joined the SBC and also maintained a National Baptist affiliation, the genetic Southern Baptist new starts have jump-started the proliferation of congregational expansion in the African-American community.

## **The Inclusion of African-Americans in Leadership**

An amazing reality is the positive trend relative to the inclusion of African-Americans in leadership positions among Southern Baptists. An increasing number of Southern Baptist associations are electing African-Americans to top positions. In recent years, not only have many state Baptist conventions elected African-Americans to the office of president, but national SBC entities and seminaries have recognized and employed the talent of leadership among African-Americans as well as ethnics.

## **Penetrating the African-American People**

Southern Baptists have made tremendous strides in proliferating churches among African-Americans during the past half century. This is most evident by the significant increase in the number of black Southern Baptist congregations in America today. The increase from two churches in 1951 to more than 3,000 in 2001 is an amazing phenomenon in church history. It is obvious that a new movement has begun.

How have Southern Baptists managed to penetrate the African-American community? Two trends have been operative.

The first trend is the dual affiliation movement. This was characterized by a National Baptist pastor leading his established church to join a Southern Baptist association while retaining membership in his National Baptist convention. Becoming dually aligned allowed the church to benefit from both conventions. It also placed the African-American community on the agenda of Southern Baptists as many associations responded to the needs of black churches. Informal comity agreements were no longer needed with black Baptist denominations because Southern Baptists were in the black community through their own predominantly African-American churches. This trend was often the result of benign attraction and not Southern Baptist intentionality. It did enable the denomination to enter the African-American community.

A second trend that enabled Southern Baptists to begin penetrating the African-American community is the denomination's church planting movement. In 1989, the Home Mission Board (now the North American Mission Board) accelerated its emphasis on church starting in the African-American community. Intentionality characterized the church starting efforts of the denomination. Southern Baptist churches, associations, and state conventions were challenged to include the black community in their church starting efforts. African-American

church starting strategists were employed to promote and implement planting churches in predominantly black communities. Since 1989 it is estimated that more than 2,000 churches have been started in African-American communities in America.

### **Prototypic Models of African-American Southern Baptist Church Growth**

Growing African-American Southern Baptist churches vary in their approach, from the classical Southern Baptist Sunday School emphasis to growth through music ministry. Variety characterizes black Southern Baptist growth strategies. There is no monolithic approach. Classical assumptions about church growth often succumb to the success of the growing African-American Southern Baptist church.

#### **Religious Education Model**

A religious education model of African-American Southern Baptist church growth employs the traditional Southern Baptist approach to church growth. With this model, a church has the classical religious educational organizations such as Sunday School and a Discipleship Training ministry. It utilizes the Sunday School as the major outreach arm of the church. It places heavy emphasis on training and uses the latest in denominational resources with great effectiveness in its situation. It uses the proven Southern Baptist Sunday School growth programs such as Action, Growth Spiral, F.A.I.T.H. and Flakes' Formula for Sunday School growth. These ministries work well in their situation.

A basic implication from the Southern Baptist religious education model is that the traditional Southern Baptist religious education approach to church growth, so effective in white churches, also works in African-American churches. African-American churches that use this approach should grow.

#### **Social Service Model**

Some African-American Southern Baptist churches grow because of a strong emphasis on social services for the black community. Led by a pastor with a commitment to Christian social ministries, this type of church creatively ministers to the needs of the people in the community. It becomes known as a church that cares about the people.

Some social service model African-American Southern Baptist churches sponsor homes for senior citizens, credit unions, nutrition programs, recreation programs, civil rights activities, tutorial programs, prison ministries, political action ministries, and many other kinds of social service ministries. These churches may or may not have a strong pulpiteer, eloquent as pastor. However, the pastor is committed to holistic ministry and leads the church to serve the total needs of people. Sometimes little emphasis is placed on Sunday School, training, or evangelism, but, because the church meets certain kinds of needs, people join. The major implication of the social service model of African-American Southern Baptist church growth is that significant numbers of African-Americans respond to a Christian social ministries approach and are willing to unite with the church that attempts to meet their needs. Churches that minister in the black community need to care about the people and reflect the caring through programs designed to meet the needs of people. When people are convinced that the church cares, some will join.

### **Urban Planning Model**

This type church is on the cutting-edge of community involvement. It is a leader, and the pastor is a strong community leader as well as an outstanding pastor. The well-educated pastor utilizes demographic trends and urban planning projections to plan how best to reach and serve people. Not only is he well-informed about what is happening in the community, he also knows what will happen according to projections by government and business.

The pastor leads the congregation to plan for church growth according to projected trends. If a new subdivision is planned for completion in five years, the church will develop plans to impact the area with the gospel. If a freeway is planned, resulting in adversity for the church, it may relocate its building plant. This church strategizes for effectiveness, using all available information. It plans for church growth based on information.

The major implication from the urban planning model is that churches can profit from being abreast with the community's long-range plans. This knowledge can be incorporated into church growth strategies with great effectiveness. Planning for church growth should not happen in a vacuum or by accident but should be based upon the best available research about what is going to be happening to the people in the community as well as in the church. By understanding Caesar, churches can sometimes render to Christ more effectively.

### **Preaching Model**

This model focuses on the pulpit ability of the pastor as the main attraction in the growth of the church. The pastor is an outstanding communicator in the black preaching tradition and the people come to hear him preach. Often, he has a reputation as a “whooper”—one who uses rhythmic sustained tone with great effectiveness—and can excite an audience with his oratory. Pastors blessed with the gift of oratory are usually popular and in demand as evangelists in black churches.

There are occasions when little else goes on in some churches that are famous for the preaching model approach. For example, in one large congregation less than five percent of the congregation is involved in religious education programs. Such a church is tempted to define the thrust of its approach as hyper-individualistic pulpiterism. It is believed the church will forgive the pastor for almost everything except not being a good preacher.

The success of the preaching model implies that many African-American Southern Baptists need a strong articulate pulpiter as their religious leader. Pastors should work at developing strong black oratorical skills in order to excite an audience. Preaching is an effective way of reaching many people.

### **Church Music Model**

It is possible to grow some churches in the African-American community largely through a black church music thrust. Music is an important part of the black style worship service. Churches with little more than an emphasis on music have been known to attract thousands of members. The pastor of this model church is often musically inclined and sometimes develops the music program himself. In other cases, talented musicians are employed to direct the music. The music of African-American Southern Baptist churches is filled with “soul” and has the potential to electrify an appreciative audience.

With little formal training in music required outstanding music programs are developed in African-American churches. The influence of black gospel music extends beyond the church to the secular society. Musicologists acknowledge the debt to the church for most black music.

High priority is placed on the development of an outstanding music program by many African-American churches. Many people still join a church because they enjoy the music ministry. Some churches place such emphasis on church music

that they have more people enrolled in their choirs than in Sunday School. An implication from the church music model is that soul-stirring music can be a powerful vehicle for reaching many people. Churches need to accept the challenge to provide effective music ministry on the people's level.

### **Multiracial Merger Model**

African-American Southern Baptist churches sometimes evolve from the merger of two congregations. Usually a white Southern Baptist church in a transitional community concludes that it cannot survive as a congregation any longer. Reluctant to sell its property to relocate, the congregation finds an African-American Baptist church with which to merge. Integrated arrangements are made for services and programs. Sometimes this merger is transitional to bridge a gap until the community experiences most of the change projected. The original congregation may leave by attrition or decision, thereby bequeathing an African-American Southern Baptist church to the community.

Advantages of this model are: (1) A church is maintained in the community during transition; (2) the need for a building debt may be eliminated; (3) both racial groups can grow as they learn from each other.

A major implication from the multiracial merger model is that creative approaches to dealing with the dynamics of transition can prove to be effective in ultimately reaching many people for the Lord. Churches should explore creative alternatives to leaving a racially changing community without a Southern Baptist witness. For some a merger may be an answer.

### **Mission Model**

Some African-American Southern Baptist churches have been started as a mission. This classical Southern Baptist approach has proved to be effective in the African-American community. An established church determines the need for a new congregation and sends some people to start one. The sponsoring church provides assistance and often some sort of financial aid until the mission becomes self-supporting or is constituted into a church.

The advantages of planning, supervision, and assistance make the mission model attractive. An implication from the mission model is that there are black people available who are ready to start congregations through the mission approach in the inner city.

### **African-American-Sponsored Mission Model**

This model involves an African-American Southern Baptist church sponsoring a mission to reach blacks and/or other ethnics with the gospel. This model is practical for African-American churches committed to multiethnic ministry when language barriers prevent a unitary approach to congregationalizing. A leader or pastor is secured to develop the mission. In order to minimize ministry by proxy and to avoid isolationist tendencies, the sponsoring church may periodically have joint worship services with a translator who will translate the service from English or into English. The mission may eventually become a church or, in some cases, it remains a department in the predominately black multiethnic church.

A major implication from the African-American-sponsored mission model is that black churches are challenged to seriously consider what their responsibility to non-blacks should be regarding evangelizing and congregationalizing. Do African-American Southern Baptist churches have the mandate to minister to the total community?

### **Transitional Model**

The transitional model occurs when the racial composition of a congregation changes due to a turnover of ethnic/racial groups in the church community. Usually this change is from white to black. It is distinguished by a gradual change in the complexion of the membership. It starts as a white Southern Baptist church and usually is transformed into a predominately African-American Southern Baptist church. It starts with a white pastor but later calls an African-American pastor. Usually it experiences a period of serious decline before being turned around under the leadership of the African-American pastor.

The transitional model church usually is housed in adequate facilities, due to planning during the white era. It is often well-located in a strategic place in the community and not burdened with a huge mortgage. The church is likely to be programmatically Southern Baptist. It may seek affiliation with a National Baptist convention in addition to its historic Southern Baptist ties.

An implication for leadership development is that Southern Baptist colleges, seminaries, and other institutions should be prepared to train pastors and other leaders for multiracial effectiveness in ministry. It should be assumed that churches will increasingly become more inclusive in their outreach.

## **The Predominantly African-American Multiethnic Church Model**

This model is typified by a totally inclusive evangelizing and congregationalizing approach, which happens to be predominantly African-American. The racial/ethnic composition of the church may vary with a predominance of various groups at different times. The church may or may not be a traditionally African-American-culture church. It may be a creative syncretism of the various cultures represented in the membership. The pastor may or may not be African-American. This church reflects the ethnic representation of the community in its membership, although it is predominantly African-American. This type church is usually found in socially liberal areas and those heavily populated with integrationist mindset institutions, like the military. It is usually singly aligned with the Southern Baptist Convention and is programmatically Southern Baptist.

An implication from the predominantly African-American multiethnic church model is that Southern Baptist churches should not hesitate to attempt to minister to the total community. Some non-blacks will respond.

## **Old Black First Church Model**

The “Old Black First Church” model is a church established during the nineteenth century as the first Baptist church in the community. It is usually a church of considerable pride in its heritage and tradition. The pastor is usually among the best educated in the community. The worship style may not be emotional and the church probably appreciates a non-whooping sermonic delivery style. African-American professionals and sometimes a few whites are attracted to the membership.

This church tends to be a leading institution in the African-American community. It probably hosted meetings for the Civil Rights Movement in town. Some prominent African-American civic leaders may be found in its membership. Old Black First Church often has the most involved Christian social ministries program in the association. It is usually involved in social action as well as social services. The pastor is one of the most influential men in the city and may be the first African-American elected to the city council. He is sought after by the media as a spokesman on African-American issues. He is likely to be politically well-connected with a major party.

Old Black First Church is likely to have been the first African-American congregation to join the Southern Baptist association. The pastor and a few members are likely to be invited to serve in denominational offices.



The dominant characteristic of this type church is ability. This church model is equipped for effective service as well as any other Southern Baptist church. What this means is that there are African-American Southern Baptist churches ready to attempt the most progressive programs for the church. They can transcend monoculturality and provide leadership in the mainstream of Southern Baptist life. They should be given the opportunity to do so.

### **Conclusions About African-American Southern Baptist Church Growth Models**

What are some of the lessons to be learned from African-American Southern Baptist church growth experiences?

First, there are many effective ways for growing a church. There is no sacred approach. Churches should be open to a variety of effective church growth strategies.

Second, the cultural context of racial/ethnic groups should be understood and utilized as a vehicle for reaching people with the gospel.

Third, there is an informal body of knowledge about African-American church growth in its community that should be studied and shared with great profit to the church as a whole.

Fourth, the dedication and commitment of African-American Southern Baptist churchmen are worthy of emulation as it relates to church growth. Armed with nothing but a commission from God, they build growing churches.

### **Seven Major Challenges for Southern Baptists**

If Southern Baptists are to be faithful stewards of the opportunity to reach African-American communities, seven challenges must receive adequate response. Yesteryear's mindsets, motives, and methods will not suffice. The SBC must cross the threshold with an effective strategy for the twenty-first century.

The first challenge for Southern Baptists is inclusive planning relative to the African-American community. Reaching the African-American community effectively must be governed by intentionality manifested in a plan. Penetrating this people group with the gospel must become a priority for Southern Baptist entities. Benign neglect must be replaced by a determined commitment to include African-Americans as a target of ministry. Apathy must be replaced by zeal to

reach all people groups. Southern Baptist churches, associations, state conventions, and agencies are challenged to ask: What plans do we have to reach African-Americans effectively? Not having a plan can easily lead to the slippery slope of not planning to reach.

A second challenge for Southern Baptists relative to reaching the African-American community is inclusive organizing. If the denomination is to be effective in reaching African-Americans, it must be organized for effective reaching. The question of what kind of organizational structure is needed must be answered. Churches may need to employ professional staff to lead the congregation's strategy to reach the African-American community. Associations may need to employ African-American ministry specialists to provide leadership for the association's strategy to reach this people group effectively. State conventions may need to have African-American program entities to provide leadership for reaching people of all races effectively. SBC entities may need to have program components that specialize in reaching the different people groups, such as African-Americans. All of this needs to be accomplished while attracting African-Americans into total involvement in every area of denominational life. If Southern Baptists are not sufficiently organized to reach African-Americans, minimalism will result and the denomination will operate at a small percentage of its potential.

A third challenge for the denomination in its quest to reach African-Americans is inclusive staffing. The effective denomination today understands that God does not discriminate in the allocation of gifts, talents, and abilities based on race. The nation's largest Protestant denomination needs to be open to the possibility of persons from any racial/ethnic group being called and equipped by God to serve in any position in churches, associations, and the Convention. Monoracial staffing policies are dinosaurs when trying to reach people groups in multiracial society. At a particular time in history, the denomination may be blessed by having a gifted minority person in leadership. Denominational entities make a mistake if they unwittingly adopt the core value of monoracial leadership. The challenge is to be Christian in the personnel selection process.

A fourth challenge for Southern Baptists endeavoring to reach African-Americans effectively is inclusive budgeting. Financial resources must be allocated to reach the African-American community. Funding should be adequate lest the denomination be guilty of the token too-little-too-late syndrome. Allocations should be targeted for African-American work to minimize the possibility of programmatic dilution as other line items compete for funding in a zero-based budgeting contest. Since priorities are usually reflected by budget allocations, the

denominational entity should reflect its commitment to reach African-Americans in the budget. To fail to do so may inadvertently send the negative signals of tokenism, minimalism, and optionality. A truism says: Commitment is shown by the budget.

A fifth challenge for Southern Baptists committed to reaching African-Americans effectively is inclusive research. A dearth of research exists on the black community. Nowhere is this more evident than with African-American Southern Baptist churches. Research projects are extremely rare. Even a book on African-American Southern Baptist history is nonexistent. Paucity of research must be replaced by prioritizing at least the African-American Southern Baptist church community for research projects. This will help denominational planning decisions to be made on the basis of informed intentionality and not by anecdotal information. Southern Baptist research cannot afford to neglect the largest minority group in the denomination.

A sixth challenge confronting the SBC is the assimilation of African-American indigenization into the denomination. Indigenous strategies from the African-American church experience exist within their churches. Indigenous manifestations of African-American culture may be seen in preaching style, music, ministry evangelism, church starting methodology, and other areas. Southern Baptists need to accept and recognize what is culturally effective in the African-American community and utilize it to develop strong programs to reach people. African-American cultural strengths need to be accepted and utilized for the benefit of all people groups.

A seventh major challenge for the denomination is bonding new African-American churches into the total life of the Convention. This challenge involves leading African-American members from non-Southern Baptist backgrounds to “own” their new Southern Baptist experience so they function like the SBC is really their denomination. This means they participate significantly in all areas of Convention life; they are involved in praying, paying, and playing denominationalism as Southern Baptists. The process begins with orientation about the denomination, continues with welcoming, and results in significant involvement just like any other church. When denominational bonding is successful, new African-American congregations will say: “We are proud to be Southern Baptists.”

## Conclusions

Southern Baptists have a great challenge to be on-mission Christians committed to reaching African-Americans with the gospel. A review of recent Convention history and trends reveals several conclusions about the denomination's efforts.

The most obvious conclusion is that the SBC is undergoing a major transition in its identity as a result of reaching various people groups, including African-Americans. Increasingly, churches, associations, and SBC entities/institutions are racially/ethnically inclusive. No longer is it possible to identify a Southern Baptist by the color of his or her skin or language. They come in all colors and speak all languages.

Another conclusion is that the contemporary Southern Baptist experience is a successful transition to inclusiveness. The new day in the SBC is moving in the right direction. The Convention's racial image is becoming more Christian as churches increasingly reflect the values of Christ toward other people groups. The absence of major backlash along with increased acceptance of minorities in mainline leadership are significant factors pointing to the dawning of a bright day of progress.

A third conclusion is that Southern Baptists are being equipped as never before to accelerate their impact in reaching all people groups with the gospel. As a result of the movement toward inclusiveness among Southern Baptists, the denomination is better equipped to reach the multiracial society. This is reflected by a new openness, readiness, and commitment of congregations to accept responsibility for reaching people groups. It is seen in denominational program designs by associations and state conventions. Another indicator is denominational agency leadership staffing patterns as they reflect inclusiveness and diversity. The present arrangement has equipped Southern Baptists to be better prepared than any other period in their history to implement the Great Commission.

A final conclusion is that Southern Baptists have a major opportunity to grow as a denomination. As old traditions, barriers, and mores have passed away, behold, a new denomination has emerged. The modern SBC is bigger, better, and more Christian because of embracing inclusiveness. God is not finished with Southern Baptists. The denomination is still in the process of growing. As the maturation process continues, the potential of doing even more is great.

### Principles

1. Prayer is essential to the African-American church. Historically, African-American churches have depended on God to meet their needs.
2. Worship is a key in all models of African-American churches. Worship of God is vital through music and preaching of the Word, which is wrapped in the culture of the people.
3. Equip the laity for the work of ministry.
4. Ministry evangelism has been one of the most effective methods of reaching the community. The church can reach out through clothes closets, after school programs, bus and van ministries, meals, visitations, counseling, health and nutritional fairs, and so forth.
5. Network with various agencies and political leaders to make sure the needs of the African-American community are met. Networking is vital if anyone would be involved in urban ministries.
6. Preaching is a key in reaching the lost and a vital component in reaching African-Americans.
7. Be flexible. The African-American church is not monolithic. Many churches have been very effective in reaching the lost through small groups and Bible studies. There is a strong emphasis called Sunday morning Bible study—known as Sunday School. In order to reach adults, many churches are changing the name from Sunday School which has been perceived as being geared more toward children, to Bible Study, Bible Hour, Fulfillment Hour, Faith Hour, Back to the Bible, and other terms, in order to reach the whole family.
8. Plant a church. African-American churches have been involved in planting new congregations for many years. Like many churches, a small group deployed from the mother church has been the model. However, many African-American pastors have planted churches in their own homes. The term church planting is not well-known in the African-American community, but founding pastor is a familiar term.

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#### Note

1. *Black Church Directory: A Directory of Black Southern Baptist Churches, 2001-2002* (Nashville, Tenn.: LifeWay Christian Resources, 2001).

## Chapter Thirteen

# Starting Churches in the Asian Community

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The Asian people in North America consist of people groups from the countries of East Asia, Southeast Asia, the Indian subcontinent, and the islands of the Pacific. When they came and settled in the United States the U. S. Bureau of Census classified them as Asian-Americans. They are the most diverse of the major racial and ethnic groups in the United States and Canada.

The 1990 U.S. Census listed more than 29 Asian ethnic groups. Asian-Americans had the fastest rate of growth in the 1980s and early 1990s. Between 1980 and 1996, the Asian population more than doubled—rising from 4 million persons to more than 9.5 million in 1996 (excluding nonimmigrants and undocumented Asians).<sup>1</sup> Asian groups are expected to continue to increase in numbers well into the twenty-first century. Projections of the Census Bureau indicate 34.4 million Asians by the year 2050. At that date, nearly one in 11 Americans (almost 9%) is expected to be of Asian Pacific Islander origin. These projections assume that net immigration through the year 2050 will include 235,000 Asians per year. Even if immigration were to stop today, the Asian population would continue to grow, due to the number of young Asians reaching childbearing age in the next century.<sup>2</sup> According to the 2000 U.S. Census Bureau there are 10,027,314 Asian Americans.<sup>3</sup> This excludes several million nonimmigrant and undocumented Asians who choose to stay in the United States. It is estimated that there are more than 20 million first- and second-generation Asians in North America.

Asian peoples bring to North America their varying languages, cultures, and subcultures. Many Asian families have more than one generation level. First-generation Asians are mostly monocultural and monolingual.

Second-generation Asians gradually assimilate into the American language and way of life. These Asian peoples have become part of the American mosaic and are involved in the dividing tensions of religious, social, political, and cultural changes in their new country.

The March 1999 Current Population Survey (CPS) of the U.S. Census Bureau<sup>5</sup> regarding the Asians in the United States listed the highlighted facts and figures:

**Geographic Distribution:** The majority of Asians and Pacific Islanders live in the West; 53 percent resided in the Western region; 20 percent in the South; 18 percent in the Northeast; and 10 percent in the Midwestern region.

Nationally, 96 percent of these people lived in metropolitan areas. The percentage of Asian and Pacific Islanders who lived in central cities (45 percent) was double the proportion for non-Hispanic whites (22 percent).

**Age Distribution:** The Asian and Pacific Islander population is young. In 1999, 29 percent of Asians and Pacific Islanders were under the age of 18.

**Marital Status:** Among young adults, Asians and Pacific Islanders are more likely than non-Hispanic whites to have never married. 34 percent were never married compared with 24 percent of non-Hispanic whites.

**Family Type and Size:** The majority of Asian and Pacific Islander families are maintained by married couples.

Asian and Pacific Islander families are larger than non-Hispanic white families. Twenty-three percent of Asian and Pacific Islander families consisted of five or more members, compared with 13 percent of non-Hispanic whites.

**Education Attainment:** Among people 25 years and older, Asian and Pacific Islanders (42 percent) are more likely than non-Hispanic whites (28 percent) to have earned a college degree.

**Labor Force Participation, Unemployment and Occupation:** Among Asians and Pacific Islanders, men are more likely than women to participate in the civilian labor force.

Asians and Pacific Islanders (37 percent) are concentrated in managerial and professional specialty occupations as compared with non-Hispanic whites (33 percent).

**Family Income:** While one-third of Asian and Pacific Islander families have incomes of \$75,000 or more, one-fifth have income of less than \$25,000. About 33 percent of Asian and Pacific Islander families and 29 percent of non-Hispanic white families had incomes of \$75,000 or more in 1998.

**Poverty Status:** Asians and Pacific Islanders are more likely to be poor than non-Hispanic whites. In 1998, 13 percent of Asians and Pacific Islanders and 8 percent of non-Hispanic whites were poor.

These various groups of multilingual, multicultural, multilingual, multigenerational, and multireligious (non-Christian) people challenge Southern Baptists to develop contextualized church planting strategies.

The New Testament presents a church planting process similar to a biological reproduction or agricultural production. It is a spiritual plan involving human instrumentalities. Starting churches has stages and steps to accomplish the process. It has its beginning, growing, reproducing, and continuing processes. The dictionary defines “process” as a series of actions; a natural phenomenon marked by gradual changes that lead toward a particular result.

When a new congregation is started with a group of believers, it does not end there. It experiences a process until it is capable of reproducing itself with reproducing results. This is the church starting plan that Jesus Christ commanded His disciples to implement. He provided them the necessary needs and tools to accomplish His Great Commission with the ultimate goal of reaching the world unto Himself. This is through starting New Testament healthy and reproducing churches where believers are equipped to reproduce His church starting plan in Matthew 28:18-20: “Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age’ ” (NIV).

The Greek word for nation is *ethne* from which the word ethnic is derived. After His resurrection, the Lord Jesus Christ commissioned His disciples not only to go into all nations—all parts of the world where there are people—but also to minister, disciple, and baptize all nationalities. In his book, *The Church Planter's Handbook*, Larry Lewis, president of the former Home Mission Board, wrote, “Some have translated the Greek word *ethne* as ‘people groups.’ This is a true and accurate translation, for many times great cultures of people transcend all national and political boundaries. For example, the Jews are a people group that can be



reached effectively within their own heritage and culture. People groups must be reached in a manner consistent with their culture and heritage without compromising the gospel we proclaim.”<sup>4</sup> This is also true for the Asian peoples in America who are to be evangelized with the purpose of gathering them as a church with a contextualized plan in their own languages and cultures.

### **The Church Starting Opportunities Among Asians**

God instituted the family and the church. They are inseparable blessings He planned and gave to mankind as revealed in the Scriptures. In these two institutions, man finds the purpose of his being and fulfillment with God's creative biological and spiritual plans. The Asian peoples are noted for their close family ties and religiosity. These are effective bridges in church starting. Asian churches are God's best strategy in bringing the unreached and unchurched Asians to a personal relationship with Him.

### **God Brought the Asians to North America**

The Asian peoples settled in America. They are here to stay. Their population keeps growing. More continue to come because of migration, marriage, military, and moneymaking purposes. The nonimmigrant Asian population is fast-growing also. Asian peoples live across the street from the Anglo and African-American churches and members. Asians are visible in their communities, in schools, and places of work. They are our neighbors. They look like Asians, talk like Asians, act like Asians, and, yet, they want to be a part of the American life in pursuit of the American dream. It is more expensive to send and support missionaries to the homelands of the Asian peoples than to have church planting missionaries among them in North America. These peoples need their own churches where they can worship in their languages and cultures.

### **Starting Contextualized Churches is the Most Effective Method of Reaching Asians**

Anthropologists, sociologists, missiologists, church growth strategists, and church planters can testify that people groups meet, fellowship, and worship within the same sociological groupings into which they were born or raised. Asian peoples can incorporate the Christian gospel and church into their languages, lifestyles,

and cultures. Asian peoples more effectively evangelize and start churches by and for themselves because of their common heritage, language, and culture. They naturally feel at home among others of their nationality than in other settings. Existing Asian churches need assistance from their denominational partners in implementing an indigenous church planting process among their own people groups.

### **Asians Are Increasingly More Likely to Be Born-Again Than Other Ethnic Groups**

According to Barna Research, the most outstanding growth in the likelihood of accepting Jesus Christ as Savior has occurred among Asian peoples. If spiritual revival has occurred among any group of people in the U.S. in the past decade, it is undeniably among the Asian peoples. In 1991, only 5 percent of them had made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ and believed that they would have eternal life because they had accepted Him as their Savior. That figure has jumped by 440 percent, to 27 percent today who now claim Christ to be their Savior. The percentage of Asian peoples who have accepted Christ has now eclipsed that of the Hispanic Americans. The number of Southern Baptist Asian churches started every year, as well as in other evangelical groups, is evidence of the responsiveness among the Asian peoples. Mission funds need to be prioritized to start churches with responsive people groups, like the Asians.

### **Available Resources to Start Asian Churches**

The Southern Baptist Convention is richly blessed by God with churches, mission funds, facilities, training institutions, programs and materials, and people resources to help church planters and pastors of sponsoring churches to start churches among Asian Americans. In *Church Planting for a Greater Harvest*, Peter Wagner uses Southern Baptists as an example of a denomination that has grown primarily as a result of its strong emphasis on church planting. Wagner credits the Southern Baptist Convention, the largest Protestant denomination in the United States, with constantly investing substantial resources of personnel and finances in church planting on all levels from the local church to the state conventions to its national agency.<sup>5</sup> Many Asian churches are also involved in starting churches in partnership with the Southern Baptist agencies in North America.

### **Church Starting Inspires Asian Christians and Churches for Missions and Starting More New Churches**

Mission-minded Christians naturally want to know and see where their prayers and missionary financial participation go. They want to personally visit mission fields at home and overseas where they and their churches are involved in evangelistic and church starting ministries. Great Commission churches, such as the church in Antioch (Acts 13), continue to grow in ministries, give to missions, and start new congregations. Many Anglo churches that start Asian congregations inspire their members to participate in the actual church planting process of their sponsored work. Some of them even become members of the Church Planting Core Team. Starting new congregations inspires churches to be more involved in mission giving and participating in seeing a new church grow to be like its mother church.

### **Starting Asian Churches Provide More Believers to Be Equipped**

As church members are discipled and equipped as leaders in their churches, they become ready to be involved in starting new congregations. New believers and churches are more excited about sharing their faith and participating in starting new churches. Two well-known laws of the harvest are: “What you sow, you reap” and “The resources are in the harvest.” Charles L. Chaney in his book, *Church Planting at the End of the Twentieth Century*, said: “In the process of reaping, individuals will be converted to Christ, leaders will be discovered, and believers will receive the gifts to perform those ministries necessary for the future effectiveness of the new church.”<sup>6</sup>

### **Contextualized Church Planting Strategies for Asians**

Not all Asian peoples are alike. They are different in their countries of origin, languages, dialects, cultures and subcultures, religions, generation levels, economic, education, and political backgrounds. Generally, they are classified as *Southeast Asians*, coming from Cambodia, China, Korea, Laos, Japan, Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam; *South Asians*, coming from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka; and *Pacific Asians* from Guam, Micronesia, Samoa, and Tonga. Different cultural groups need appropriately fitted church starting strategies. This is the big challenge in starting churches for the Asian peoples in North America.

## **The Need for Starting Asian Churches**

While I was starting a Filipino church in Honolulu, Hawaii, I was asked by an Anglo pastor from Alabama, “Why start an Asian church? Why don’t you bring the English-speaking Asians to the existing American churches? What is your scriptural basis for targeting Filipinos and other Asians and starting churches among them?” I responded by saying that Asian church planters are commissioned by Jesus Christ to start churches among Filipinos and other Asian peoples in the same way as Anglo Christians were commissioned by Jesus Christ to start English-speaking churches by His Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20. Then I asked him, “Why are the Asians living around American churches not being reached and brought to assimilate with these churches? Why do we send American missionaries to Asian countries to start churches in the local communities of Asian peoples?” I concluded by declaring how grateful I was that the Southern Baptist Convention, through its Home Mission Board (now North American Mission Board), appointed and financially supported me in the Asian church planting ministry.

God’s plan for evangelizing and congregationalizing not only the Jews but the Gentiles was given as a vision to Cornelius and Peter (Acts 10; 11:1-18). Cornelius, an Italian centurion, and Peter, a Jewish apostle, understood the vision from God was to be implemented with a contextualized strategy for the Italians in Caesarea, the Roman capital of Judea just 60 miles northwest of Jerusalem.

It is God’s plan to accept any and every person who fears Him and does His righteousness (Acts 10:34-35).

It is God’s plan that the same gospel be preached to all people groups (Acts 10:36-43; Romans 1:16-17).

It is God’s plan that Jews and Gentiles be equal recipients of His love, Holy Spirit, and gifts (Acts 10:44-46; 11:17-18).

It is God’s plan for Gentile believers to be scripturally baptized, to worship and serve Him with their own linguistic and cultural traits in their community (Acts 10:48).

## **The Need for Indigenous Church Planting Strategies for Asians**

The term “indigenous” means something native, domestic, and national. It is

something that springs from and develops within a particular culture. Indigenous church planting is sowing the gospel seed in the native context of thoughts and things, allowing the Holy Spirit to do His work in His own time and way. Under the Holy Spirit's leadership, people are free to be and do what God intends. An indigenous church is a contextualized church. It is able to grow within the culture where it finds itself without outside interference or control.

Indigenous church starting employs indigenous strategy, indigenous leadership, indigenous programs, and indigenous materials in the language and culture of the targeted people group. This helps the Asian churches' self-image to grow and to reproduce through a self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating process. Starting and growing indigenous churches for Asian people in their own communities has been a successful strategy implemented by the North American Mission Board and its field partners. The number of growing Asian Southern Baptist churches in the United States and Canada is evidence of this.

### **The Process of Starting Asian Churches**

Evangelizing and starting churches among Asian peoples is a process that needs contextualized strategies. It is a slower process than the strategies used for Anglo church starting. This is due to non-Christian backgrounds of most Asian peoples who brought their Hindu, Buddhist, Islam, Shinto, animistic religions, and atheistic beliefs to North America. It is not easy for them to come out from their indigenous cultural and religious practices. To start a church among them means to begin from the ABCs of becoming a Christian before giving them the steps of forming a group of believers to worship Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. To hurry the starting and forming of an Asian church may result in a sickly and dying congregation. This can be a poor example for plans to start other such congregations.

A church planter and a sponsoring church wanting to start an Asian church must envision the kind of strategy to implement, what kind of church needs to be started, and what is the best way to implement the planned strategy. In the United States and Canada, Asian churches have been started in various ways.

### **Sponsorship by Anglo Churches**

Many mission-minded Anglo churches that help support international missionary works become concerned about ministering to Asians in their communities. An Anglo church can contact its Baptist association and state convention for possible

assistance in reaching and ministering to Asian people groups. One ministry could be to provide English as a Second-Language classes. This could lead to forming an Asian Sunday School class that could grow into a mission congregation of the sponsoring church.

Refugee families sponsored by an Anglo church can become a nucleus for an Asian-American church supported by the sponsoring church. The sponsoring Anglo church should contact its local association and state convention to assist in providing indigenous leadership and materials for the Asian-American group. Sometimes a partnership with financial assistance for the leader and new work until it becomes a self-supporting congregation is possible.

### **Baptist Associations Enlisting Sponsoring Churches for Identified Responsive Asian People Groups**

By conducting community surveys, a Baptist association may discover Asian groups in its community. The Church Planting Group of the North American Mission Board has survey tools, such as the LASER, PREP, and PROBE available for churches or associations. Through these surveys, the association can find and enlist capable and willing churches to sponsor new Asian works. Partnership is then developed with the state convention and the North American Mission Board for the implementation of a needed and fitted church starting and growing strategy for the targeted Asian people group(s).

### **Asian Church Planting Missionaries Jointly Employed and Funded by SBC Entities**

By using the partnership church planting strategies of their state conventions, associations, and the North American Mission Board, Asian church planters start churches among their people groups. They work out a plan with sponsoring churches for added funding of the new work and for the use of their facilities by the Asian congregations. These missionaries look for a pastor or raise a pastor from among the group and make the leadership transition as they move to another place to start a new Asian work.

### **Asian Fellowships of Churches Partner with SBC to Start Asian Churches**

Most Asian Fellowships of Churches include in their Mission and Vision Statements their intent to find ways and means of starting new works among their people groups. These fellowships know the communities where their people live and where churches can be started. They also provide church starting training for church planters, encourage church members to go to seminaries, and help support students while in seminary. They partner with Southern Baptist entities in enlisting Asian sponsoring churches and leaders for new Asian works. They also have a list of Asian church starters who can be matched with a potential new Asian work.

### **Healthy, Reproducing Asian Churches**

Growing Asian churches become Great Commission churches. They intentionally plan to expand and extend themselves by starting other churches. These churches include in their growth plans a strategy to start new churches of their own kind in nearby communities or in another state. They purposefully set up a church starting budget, select and approve a church starter, form a core group from their membership, assist in evangelizing the targeted community, and guide the new workers and works to grow healthily into self-supporting churches.

### **Anglo Baptist Churches Adopt Independent Asian Churches**

Asian churches started by non-Southern Baptist leaders often seek the necessity of joining or affiliating with the Southern Baptist Convention. These churches seek a Baptist association leader or a state convention Asian missionary and explore the process of affiliation. Anglo Baptist churches are enlisted to sponsor these incoming non-Southern Baptist Asian churches.

### **Newly Arrived Asian Leaders Seek Partners to Start New Churches**

Many Asian pastors come to America to further their seminary studies. Some seek possibilities of staying in America by finding sponsoring churches to assist them in starting new works among their Asian people group. They are provided with a Southern Baptist orientation and assessment prior to their enlistment and deployment as church starters. They are assigned to mentors to guide them in church starting in a new environment.

### **Unexpected Birth of Asian Churches**

It is a great joy to pray, plan, and implement an intentional church starting process and see its good results. Many Asian churches have “family planning” in their vision to become a mother church of new works. Like in all people groups, several churches began with the painful process of a split in membership. Most often both congregations would remain in the same Baptist association. In God’s providence, healing of relationship slowly takes place.

### **Retired International Missionaries Start Churches in America**

Anglo missionaries who are retiring from ministering in Asian countries return and work to start churches with the same people group in North America. They are knowledgeable church starters in America because they already know the language and culture of the Asian people group they related to overseas. Often, these Asian churches are sponsored by the home churches of these retiring missionaries.

### **Starting Second-Generation Asian Churches**

Asians in North America see themselves with four generation levels. These are Asians (immigrated overseas); Asian-Americans (born overseas and naturalized as U.S. citizens); American-Asians (born in the United States), Americans (children of American-Asians). The children and grandchildren of the first-generation Asians have assimilated into the American life and dream, but are still in need of contextualized churches. These Americanized generations are English-speaking people, but they want to have their own church meetings and prefer a leader of their kind as well as programs and ministries that relate to their needs.

### **Characteristics of Church Starters for Asians**

1. Asian people need church starters with a definite call into their chosen areas of work. This sustains them with stability and tenacity to their ministry.
2. Asian church starters need to demonstrate a vibrant faith, commitment to the Bible, and a disciplined Christian life. This inspires people to follow them.
3. Asian church starters must exemplify a model Christian family that supports them and their ministries.
4. Asian church planters need to be proactive spiritual leaders with integrity—able to lead believers from non-Christian backgrounds into



- their newfound faith and church family. This motivates church members to bring others to their leader.
5. Asian church planters are expected to have good ministerial training to be good communicators, teacher-equippers and organizers of Asian groups. This prepares church members to become leaders, too.
  6. The best model of Asian pastors is that of the Good Shepherd in John 10. They know how to be at the front to lead people, stay behind to encourage them, and walk beside them as friends and coworkers. This demonstrates servant-leadership.
  7. Asian church starters need to incarnate Jesus Christ and the gospel in the cultures or subcultures, languages, and dialects of the Asian group(s).
  8. Asian church starters need to have a prayer-saturated life balanced with a positive outlook of life. This gives them spiritual energy to face and overcome criticisms and temptations.

### **The Ripened Asian Fields are Waiting for Harvest**

Where there are many Asian people groups but no Asian Southern Baptist church, there is a challenge to start churches among them. The U.S Bureau of Census reports that most Asians live in five states: California, New York, Hawaii, Texas, and Illinois. However, Asians do live in metropolitan areas in all states. The U.S. Census Bureau's 2000 report ranked the counties with Asian populations. The top 15 counties were:<sup>7</sup>

|                                 |           |
|---------------------------------|-----------|
| 1. Los Angeles County, Calif.   | 1,137,500 |
| 2. Santa Clara County, Calif.   | 430,0985  |
| 3. Honolulu County, Hawaii      | 403,371   |
| 4. Queens County, N.Y.          | 391,500   |
| 5. Orange County, Calif.        | 386,785   |
| 6. Alameda County, Calif.       | 295,218   |
| 7. San Diego County, Calif.     | 249,802   |
| 8. San Francisco County, Calif. | 239,565   |
| 9. King County, Wash.           | 187,745   |
| 10. Kings County, N.Y.          | 185,818   |
| 11. New York County, N.Y.       | 144,538   |
| 12. San Mateo County, Calif.    | 141,684   |
| 13. Sacramento County, Calif.   | 134,899   |

14. Fairfax County, Va. 126,038

15. Middlesex County, N.J. 104,212

Where there are Asian peoples, growing populations, and communities, there should be the prioritized areas for mission-minded churches, Baptist associations and state conventions to target for church starting endeavors. In these communities, a survey will indicate if there are enough responsive families to start churches.

### **Stages of the Asian Church Starting Process**

A good process to understand in starting Asian churches is provided in the parable of the sower (Matthew 13:1-23). A corollary passage is John 4:34-38. Jesus Christ taught principles to be used in starting churches.

The sower is the church starter who has helpers or partners. The field is the chosen community to start a church. The seed is the gospel with a strategy to be implemented. The preserved seeds taken from the harvest for the next planting season are the reproduction of the planter and the process of starting more churches. The good sower:

1. Plans what crops he will harvest by the kind of seeds he will need and what kind of fields in which he will plant them.
2. Finds the good soil or prepares good ground where he sows the seeds.
3. Knows how to plant good seeds, water them, and protect them from destruction so they can grow as healthy plants.
4. Nurtures the growing plants until they are ready for harvest.
5. Selects the best seeds for the next planting season.

### **The Planning Stage**

1. Pray for God's wisdom, guidance, empowerment, and provision in implementing His Great Commission through starting an Asian-American church.
2. Assess the purpose of the project. The qualified, compatible, needed church starter; the community; the targeted Asian people group; and the planned strategy to be implemented.
3. Find committed partners to accomplish the envisioned church starting plan, such as a sponsoring church, mentor, a core group, praying and other support partners.

4. Develop a Sponsor Agreement between the sponsoring church and the Asian-American mission congregation. A sample of this document is an appendix of *The Seven Steps Training Manual*, available from the Church Planting Group of the North American Mission Board.
5. Write and review the church starting strategy with partners. This includes a clear *modus operandi* of core team, goals, budget, action plans, and evaluation plan.

### Preparing Stage

1. Prepare the intentional involvement of the sponsoring church through its On Missions Team in starting an Asian daughter congregation.
2. Visit the targeted Asian community to become familiar with the targeted new church community. The church starter and his core team could schedule several prayerwalks around the targeted Asian-American community.
3. Gather demographics, psychographics, community directory, and other information with the targeted Asian people group.
4. Conduct a survey (LASER, PREP, PROBE—available from the Church Planting Group of NAMB) to learn the religious life of the community and responsiveness for the gospel and plan to start a new church.
5. Locate a place to hold meetings and church services for the new Asian congregation. It can be in a home, a rented facility in the community, or the facilities of the sponsoring church.
6. Prepare the needed promotion and invitation for the targeted Asian people group.
7. Prepare the Church Starting Core Team for actual involvement in the next stage.
8. Plan for the compatible church starting strategy for the targeted Asian people group.

### Planting Stage

1. Contact the people through mailing of promotion and invitations, house-to-house visitation, telephone, posting of promotion and invitation in the community (with permission). Advertise through newspapers and the community paper.

2. Visit responsive families and plan for home Bible study fellowships in the targeted community.
3. Determine the time and place to gather the people for the first congregational meeting. The first public worship service must be a “user-friendly,” welcoming, celebrating, and worshiping atmosphere. Introduce the church starter and core team to the group. The church planter and core group should be prepared to carry out their responsibilities in the church meetings (greeters, nursery, children’s ministry, and vibrant participants in the public worship).
4. Introduce the name of the new Asian congregation. It needs to reflect the identity of the targeted people group. If the Asian group so chooses, the name can be changed when it constitutes into a church.
5. Develop programs, such as outreach ministries; leadership training; Bible study groups inside and outside the congregation; stewardship; and music, children’s, and youth ministries. These will contribute to the growth of the new congregation.
6. Prepare—with the help of the sponsoring church—the constitution and bylaws of the new church.<sup>8</sup>

### Growing Stage

1. Continue to discover effective outreach ministries—reaching and discipling believers. Keep feeding the congregation with healthy foods and proper exercise and it will grow.<sup>9</sup>
2. Organize the Asian mission congregation into a local church when the sponsoring church agrees that it has reached self-support status. This is a big milestone of the church for a community-wide celebration involving the Baptist association and state convention.
3. Develop the church budget, which includes cooperative mission giving as a partner with its former sponsoring church and with supporting Baptist entities.
4. Affirm the Asian church planter as pastor or call a new Asian pastor to lead the church.
5. Implement a strategic growth plan to fulfill the mission and vision statements of the church. Christian A. Schwarz’ book, *Natural Church Development: A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches* is a good source for this plan.<sup>10</sup>

6. Institute a continuing process for leadership development. Rick Warren's book, *The Purpose Driven Church's Turning Members into Ministers*<sup>11</sup> is a good resource for this project.

### **Reproducing Stage**

1. The plan for a church to reproduce itself, or start churches when it is capable, needs to be included in its mission and vision statements.
2. The pastor needs to cast the vision and guide the church to become a Great Commission reproducing church. He influences the church leaders to be his partners in motivating and preparing the church for this exciting venture. He promotes this from the pulpit.
3. The stages of Asian church starting process needs to be reviewed and implemented in the context of the new Asian people group targeted to start another congregation.
4. The strategy of starting Asian churches needs to be reproducible and adaptable to all Asian people groups.
5. An Asian church that is blessed by God to be growing healthily needs to be a happy reproducing church.

### **Carrying Out the Great Commission**

Planting healthy reproducing churches of all people groups is the most effective method of implementing the Great Commission of Jesus Christ. This is a great rewarding experiential blessing of a church planter, his team, and partners. It is done through healthy teamwork. Every church planter, pastor, and missionary needs to reproduce himself. Every church needs to reproduce itself. This is God's strategy and blessing to Christians and churches.

Jesus said, “. . . I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not overcome it” (Matthew 16:18, NIV). He promised His presence and power. “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria” (Acts 1:8, NIV). And he gave us a glimpse of the reward of His Great Commission churches. “After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before. . . the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried with a loud voice: Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne and to the Lamb” (Revelation 7:9, NIV).

## Principles

1. Have an intentional understanding of the demographic and psychographic elements of the particular targeted people group and their community.
2. Have a strategy of planting churches for every people group identified in North America with biblical, theological, philosophical, denominational, cultural, practical, beneficial, and reproducing foundations.
3. Start a church among Asians. It is the most effective way of reaching them for Christ and discipling them to implement the Great Commission in reaching their own people for indigenous and contextualized church planting strategies.
4. Provide opportunities to raise home-grown Asian leaders for churches to be planted for, with, and by them.
5. Help meet the challenge to Southern Baptists to develop an effective contextualized and indigenized reproducible church planting strategies for multilingual, multigenerational, and multicultural Asian people groups.

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## Notes

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# Starting Churches in the Hispanic Community

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**T**he twenty-first century has the potential of being the greatest Hispanic-American church planting period ever. More churches are currently being started among Hispanics than ever before in the history of this country. This is encouraging in light of the fact that Hispanics are the fastest-growing ethnic group in America today. Also encouraging is the fact that Hispanics are showing greater receptivity to the evangelical message than ever before. To maximize this opportunity that the Lord is giving us, we must approach the task of planting churches among Hispanics in the same way missionaries design strategies to reach target groups around the world. For us this involves establishing a solid biblical foundation, becoming thoroughly familiar with Hispanic cultural characteristics, and designing culturally appropriate church planting strategies. This chapter will address these issues in an effort to inform and inspire us to respond to this challenge in a way that reaches and disciples unprecedented numbers of Hispanics in the context of biblically centered, culturally relevant churches for the honor and glory of God.

### **Biblical Basis for Hispanic Church Planting**

The Bible clearly reveals that it is God's desire for every person on the face of this earth to have an opportunity to hear and to respond to the message of salvation in Jesus Christ. This is reflected in the incarnation of Jesus, His missionary mandate, and the establishment of His church. An examination of the cultural implications of these truths can motivate and guide us in the development of church planting strategies among Hispanics.



### **Biblical Mandate**

Before communicating the missionary mandate, Jesus provided a supreme example of cultural identification. “The word became flesh and dwelt among us, . . . full of grace and truth” (John 1:14, NKJV). Jesus took on “the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men” (Philippians 2:7, KJV).

Charles Chaney points out the cultural implications of the incarnation of Jesus when he states:

This intrusion of the Divine into the context of human history has meant the identification of Jesus with the needs, hurts, and hopes of men and women for almost two thousand years. Jesus responded to the needs of people within their cultural contexts and adapted his approach uniquely to them. He based his approach on his understanding of their values, attitudes, and conversations.<sup>1</sup>

In the Great Commission, Jesus said: “Make disciples of all nations.” The word for “all nations” in Greek is *ta ethne* which is where we get the word “ethnic” which means “people group.” To implement this mandate, the followers of Christ are to cross linguistic, racial, cultural, religious, and geographical boundaries with the message of salvation. Every barrier to the gospel needs to be bridged by establishing churches that are near the unchurched, not only geographically but culturally. This applies to the Hispanic communities as well as all of the other sociocultural groups.

### **Biblical Model**

#### **The Antioch Church**

The Antioch church was started by refugees who “were scattered because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen” (Acts 11:19, NKJV). These Jewish Christians had fled from Jerusalem but were not hesitant to preach the gospel at Antioch. At first, they were speaking the word to no one except Jews alone. It was natural for them to concentrate on their own social group, for they understood their language and culture. Their vision, however, was expanded by other Jewish Christian refugees (originally from Cyprus and Cyrene) who came to Antioch and “began speaking to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus” (Acts 11:20, NKJV). It is evident that this pleased the Lord, for verse 21 states that the “hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.” As a result of this, Antioch became a multicultural congregation (Acts 13:1).<sup>2</sup> This church was the first to send a missionary team (Barnabas and Saul)

to plant churches in the Gentile world. This team had the freedom to start churches that were doctrinally sound, yet culturally and linguistically different from the sending church. The Antioch church is an inspiring example of a congregation that took the Great Commission seriously. It reached out to its own group, expanded its vision to include other cultural groups within its own city, and willingly gave of its money and personnel to send a missionary team to start culturally contextualized churches in Asia Minor and Europe. Following the example of the Antioch church, contemporary churches need to be open to reaching everyone they can through their congregations while at the same time making the strategic adaptations necessary to reach those who will respond better in congregations that utilize their heart language and reflect their culture.

### **Cultural Dimensions of Hispanic Church Planting**

The most effective Hispanic church planting approaches being utilized today are those that take into account the cultural characteristics of their target group. Among the factors that need to be considered are religious background, personal relationships, family ties, emotional traits, and assimilation stages.

#### **Religious Background**

Understanding the religious background of the Hispanic community has significant implications for the development of church planting strategies. Even though a large percentage of Hispanics are not actively involved in the Roman Catholic church, they often experience pressures from their families and friends when they participate in evangelical outreach activities. They may also go through periods of doubt and confusion when they begin to compare what they are learning from the Bible with some of their religious traditions. Evangelical efforts to lead Hispanics to a personal faith in Christ need to be accompanied by much prayer, study, love, and patience. An understanding of the Roman Catholic concept of salvation (through the church and the sacraments) and an attitude that establishes bridges of communication (over criticism, ridicule, and pressure) is absolutely essential.<sup>3</sup> Often, even after a person has indicated interest in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, it may take months or even years for him or her to make the decision to be baptized and become a member of an evangelical church. Many Hispanics go through a pilgrimage that involves discovery, deliberation, decision, dissonance, and discipleship.<sup>4</sup> This pilgrimage needs to be taken into account in designing evangelistic strategies and establishing time lines for church planting efforts among Hispanics.

### Personal Relationships

Because many Hispanics do not have an evangelical background, they often experience apprehension and pressure when they are invited to a Protestant church. This obstacle can best be overcome through the establishment of genuine friendships and the utilization of cultivative evangelistic activities. On an individual basis, there are many things that can be done to establish bridges of communication. These include having them as guests in our home for a meal, inviting them to join us in a sports or artistic event, and befriending them when they are in need. When it comes to group activities, block parties, dramas, Christmas and Easter cantatas, Backyard Bible Clubs, Vacation Bible School, arts and handcraft festivals, film festivals (relating to marriage and the family), and *JESUS* film showings (in public places or homes) can go a long way toward establishing a bridge between the target persons and the church.<sup>7</sup> Home Bible studies are proving to be some of the very best approaches for reaching Hispanics in this country and throughout the world.<sup>5</sup>

### Family Ties

Hispanics generally have strong family ties that go beyond the nuclear to the extended family. Alex D. Montoya explains the importance of the family:

The family is the main unit in the Hispanic community, superceding the church, political parties, or any other group. Hispanics think and act as a family unit. . . . In evangelizing them, this structure can either be a hindrance or a help. If we try to convert a member of the family, the family ties and pressure make it very difficult for that person to make a decision for Christ independent of the entire family. But a whole family may come to Christ when the elder member of the family is won first.<sup>6</sup>

In light of the role that the family plays in the Hispanic community, decision-making styles need to be taken into account in church planting strategies. If children or young people make a decision for Christ, it may take awhile for their parents to be reached. If a wife makes a decision for Christ, it may take some time before her husband becomes a believer. During this time, the church family needs to surround the new believers with genuine love and fellowship.

### Emotional Traits

Another Hispanic cultural characteristic is the important role emotions play in their everyday lives. Montoya describes this when he states:

Hispanics are people of the heart . . . If something is not from the heart, el corazón, or for the heart, then it is hard to accept. . . . All culture is

permeated with what strikes the heart not the head alone. . . . A truth wrapped in cold logic without warmth of life and emotions is not very well received.<sup>7</sup>

This characteristic has significant implications for church planting activities. The outreach approaches utilized and the type of congregations established need to reflect the affective as well as the cognitive dimensions of the Christian life. This was made very clear in a survey on the response of Hispanics to evangelical efforts. Hispanics often give as their attraction to evangelical congregations as being a deeper involvement with their faith and Scripture, more relevant worship services, understanding ministers, and a laity that is as equally concerned with worship as with spiritual growth and a concern for others. Freedom to pray in a style true to their culture. Sermons preached in such congregations are practical, speaking to daily issues; prayers focus on specific needs. Emphasis of evangelical churches on a personal relationship with God and on the fellowship of believers encourages intimacy at a divine and human level.

In light of these observations, it is important to make provision for cultural adaptations in the planting of Hispanic churches. Regarding worship services, the style of music and the instruments that are used should reflect the culture of the Hispanic congregation. In selecting these, a distinction should be made between the meaning and the form. The meaning of the songs should be theologically sound but there can be flexibility in the style (form) of the music. In most instances, the extent to which the worship service reflects the culture of the target group has a direct bearing on the way in which Hispanics respond to the gospel in a church starting effort.

The sermon as well as the music in an Hispanic church should be felt as well as understood. People in Hispanic churches respond better if the sermons touch their emotions as well as their intellect. The minister, therefore, should not be afraid to show genuine emotion while he is preaching. Conveying joy, sorrow, compassion, and other emotions through the words that are utilized, facial expression, and tone of voice can help the listener feel as well as understand the thoughts that are being expressed. The use of carefully selected illustrations can also help the listeners to comprehend and internalize the gospel message. Sermons on key parables (e.g., the prodigal son), on persons whose lives were changed by Christ (e.g., the Samaritan woman), and on key events in the life of Christ (e.g., birth, miracles, death, resurrection, and ascension) can establish bridges between the religious experience of Hispanics and what they need to know about a personal experience of salvation in Jesus Christ.<sup>8</sup>

Assimilation Stages

The varying degrees of cultural assimilation need to be taken into account in the selection of languages and leadership that are to be employed in Hispanic church planting. As new arrivals begin to experience cultural assimilation, they begin to adopt some of the language, customs, and values of the predominant (Anglo) society in this country.<sup>9</sup> Three principal factors contribute to the rapid assimilation of the children of immigrants: (1) schooling, (2) the media, and (3) peer groups. It does not take long before linguistic and cultural variations begin to develop between Hispanic groups. The following chart illustrates the assimilation process and its implications for the selection of appropriate types of churches.

Assimilation and Church Planting

| Generation                   | Cross-Cultural Contacts | Language Preference             | Church Language | Church Culture     |
|------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| 1st<br>(Immigrants)          | 0                       | Spanish                         | Spanish         | Hispanic           |
| 2nd<br>(Children)            | 25%                     | Bilingual<br>(Spanish Dominant) | Bilingual       | Hispanic           |
| 3rd<br>(Grandchildren)       | 50%                     | Bilingual<br>(English Dominant) | Bilingual       | Hispanic/<br>Anglo |
| 4th<br>(Great-Grandchildren) | 75-100%                 | English<br>(English Dominant)   | English         | Anglo              |

As seen in this chart, first-generation (immigrant) Hispanics need churches that utilize the Spanish language and reflect the Hispanic culture. The fact, however, that their children experience rapid assimilation, necessitates that Hispanic churches become bilingual if they are going to retain them. Often, third-generation Hispanics prefer English-speaking services but with an Hispanic cultural touch. Fourth generation (and beyond) Hispanics are often the best prospects for Anglo churches. While there may be some variations, this chart can inform church planters in the process of determining what type of church is needed for a specific community.<sup>10</sup>

This chart also has implications for the selection of church planters. Often, a first-generation (newly arrived, monolingual person) will have serious problems in trying to start a church among third- and fourth-generation Hispanics. Conversely,

a fourth-generation Hispanic American may have difficulty starting a church among first-generation Hispanics. As is true in church planting in general, the selection of the right person for the right setting is absolutely essential.

### **Hispanic Church Planting Strategies**

There is a sense in which church planting in the Hispanic community has much in common with church planting in general. In all types of church planting, there are basic steps to be followed. There are, however, some unique characteristics pertaining to the Hispanic community that need to be taken into account if church planting efforts are to be effective. To facilitate this discussion, we will utilize some of the key steps in David Hesselgrave's "Pauline Cycle"<sup>11</sup> and highlight the cultural adaptations that are needed.

#### **Missionaries Commissioned**

In order for churches to be started, church planters need to be called by the Lord and set aside by the churches. This means that churches and potential church planters need to catch a vision of what the Lord wants them to do. Several things can contribute to this. A church can catch a vision as it studies the Bible and prays. Studying the New Testament (especially the book of Acts) will help a church arrive at the conviction that it is the will of God that new churches be started. When the church of Antioch persevered in the study of the Word and in prayer, they caught a vision of God's will regarding its missionary work (Acts 13:2). A study of the Antioch church itself can provide the motivation for churches to reach out beyond their own group to other cultural groups in the community and globally.

Church members can also catch a vision by participating in prayerwalks. When they see children playing in the streets without supervision, senior adults sitting in front of their houses just passing the time of day, and young people hanging out on street corners, they return with a new vision of what their church should be doing to reach these people with the gospel. Visiting ministry points in the community can also help church members catch a vision for church planting. A church that has established hundreds of units (home Bible studies, ministry centers, and missions, especially in apartment communities) has the practice of taking key church members every Sunday to visit the house churches during the Sunday School hour. They are invariably touched when they see children, young people, and adults participating in worship and Bible study and giving testimonies of how these ministries have changed their lives.

### **Audience Contacted**

Before an audience is contacted, there must be a clear understanding of its sociocultural characteristics. Some of the standard steps to accomplish this involve: (1) a demographic analysis, (2) a religious survey, and (3) a survey of the people in the community.

### **Demographic Analysis**

A demographic analysis can be of great help to a church because it can provide an idea of the potential that there is in that community for starting a congregation. A complete analysis can include factors like: number of inhabitants; socioeconomic groups; types of housing; educational level; types of employment; and types of family structures.

In addition to this, the church planter in a Hispanic setting needs to have information about the geographic origin of the various subcultural groups (e.g., Cuba, Puerto Rico, Mexico, Central or South America, etc), about their mode of entry into this country (annexation, immigration, refugee, etc), about their length of residence in this country (first-, second-, third-generation, so forth), and about the language utilization of each group (Spanish, English, bilingual). These factors have significant implications for the decisions that are made regarding pastoral leadership, worship styles, outreach methodologies, and congregational models.

### **Finding a Person of Peace**

One of the most important things to keep in mind in determining where to start a Hispanic church is the discovery of people who are receptive to the idea of starting a new church in their community. In Matthew 10, Jesus instructed His disciples to go into a city and focus on finding a man of peace. Once they had found that person, they were to remain in his home and utilize it as a base for the evangelization of the city. Finding a person (or persons) of peace in the Hispanic community is crucial in the strategy. The surveys that are typically utilized can provide the church planter with vital information about the community. Often, however, it is not a matter of focusing on the area with the greatest numerical concentration but on the one with the greatest spiritual receptivity. Since Hispanics place a strong emphasis on kinship and friendship ties, finding a person of peace in a community can open the door for key networks that can be very helpful in reaching people with the gospel and starting new congregations.

### **Gospel Communicated**

Communicating the message of salvation in a way that relates to the target group is of utmost importance. The strategy church planters need to employ in Hispanic

communities should be one that cultivates friendship and sows the seed of the gospel. For children and youth, Vacation Bible School, Backyard Bible Clubs, activities for recreational groups, voluntary tutors, musical and arts festivals, and handcrafts can be very effective. For adults, a video series (especially on marriage and the family), the *JESUS* film (or video) in the homes or a public building, English-as-a-second-language classes, specialized classes (e.g., cooking, sewing, job training), dramas (especially on Christmas and Easter), and prayer surveys can help establish bridges for the communication of the gospel.

A personal touch is also needed in media efforts. A Hispanic church planter, for example, tried to use some of the media approaches that innovative Anglo church planters have employed successfully. He discovered that in addition to the recommended methods (direct mail, newspaper advertising, radio, TV), personalized telephone calls, home visitation, and other cultivative activities were needed to get Hispanics to attend the first public service. All of this had been preceded by six months of home Bible studies. Culturally appropriate communication methodologies and the sponsoring church's patience and understanding have contributed to the growth of this church.

### **Hearers Converted**

One of the most difficult concepts for non-evangelical Hispanics to understand is that of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ by grace through faith alone. This needs to be the focus of witnessing efforts in Hispanic church planting. It must be kept in mind, however, that even after they experience salvation in Christ, due to their religious traditions, social pressures, and often limited knowledge of the Bible, it may take a while for them to understand the implications of their conversion for the vocational, financial, domestic, social, and spiritual aspects of their lives. This means that discipleship must be viewed as an integral part of evangelism in Hispanic church planting efforts. Culturally relevant discipleship needs to deal with the "putting off" (previous unbiblical cultural and religious practices) as well as the "putting on" (the new Christian lifestyle) aspects of their new walk with the Lord (Colossians 3:8-10). Helping Hispanics understand the implications of their conversion is essential as the group moves toward the congregational phase.

### **Believers Congregated**

Paul was aware that, to disciple the converts adequately, he needed to gather them together in congregations. A question that church planters ask is: What model should we follow in establishing this new congregation? There are several models that are being utilized in the establishment of new churches.<sup>12</sup>



### **Model One: Mother Church – Daughter Congregation**

The mother church–daughter congregation model is used frequently. A congregation can be started in the building of the mother church or at another building. In this model, the church assumes responsibility for a new congregation and it watches over its financial development and doctrinal soundness. The mother church can be Anglo, Hispanic, or another culture, and the daughter congregation can also be among any of these cultures.<sup>13</sup>

### **Model Two: Multiple Sponsorship**

The model of several churches sponsoring a new congregation is helpful where there are few established churches with sufficient finances to sponsor a congregation on their own. A possible application of this model is that of establishing a partnership between a sponsoring church (Anglo or other culture) and an Hispanic congregation to start a new Hispanic congregation. This has the advantage of combining financial and personnel resources in the establishment of the new congregation. Combining their resources with the expertise and personnel of an existing Hispanic church can result in the formation of an excellent church planting team.

### **Model Three: Multicongregational**

The multicongregational model (one church, several congregations) is especially suited for urban areas in which property is extremely expensive. These congregations, bound by a consortium agreement, can share resources (e.g., financial, personnel, building, equipment), make provision for worship services in the different languages, and plan joint activities (e.g., fellowship, Lord's Supper) to stress unity in the midst of their diversity.

An adaptation of this model can be utilized in areas where Anglo (or other culture) churches come to the realization that their community is almost totally Hispanic.<sup>14</sup> If there is still sufficient Anglo (or other culture) membership committed to ministry in that community, starting a Hispanic congregation within the building of the existing church may be an excellent option. The degree of Hispanic assimilation and utilization of the English language will need to be considered in deciding the type of church that is needed.

### **Model Four: Church Planting Training Centers**

One of the most exciting church planting endeavors in the United States is the one that is occurring in Texas among Hispanics.<sup>15</sup> Otto Arango, an Hispanic minister in the city of McAllen, caught the vision for establishing church planting training centers in his part of the state. He began by starting a center in his church. Through that center, which has operated for two years and has trained

approximately 50 laypersons and bivocational ministers, more than 20 new churches have been started. Inspired by this, Arango caught a vision for starting other training centers in numerous churches throughout the state. In the year 2000, more than 100 new congregations were started by the students of these centers which broke all previous records for new Hispanic churches started in the course of a year.

Hispanic church planting is one of the greatest and most exciting challenges evangelicals face today. We have discussed the importance of establishing a solid biblical foundation, the need to understand the cultural characteristics, and the value of utilizing culturally relevant strategies in starting churches among Hispanics. The explosive growth of the Hispanic community gives us an unprecedented opportunity to start thousands of churches among them in this new century. May God help us to respond to this challenge.

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### Principles

1. Have a clear understanding of the sociocultural aspects of the Hispanic community.
2. Identify a person or persons of peace.
3. Be culturally sensitive when employing media resources.

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### Notes

1. Charles L. Chaney, *Church Planting at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Wheaton:Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1991), 133-34.
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8. For a more complete discussion, see Daniel R. Sanchez, "Preparing for a Revival Meeting in an Hispanic Church," in Dan R. Crawford, *Before Revival Begins* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Scripta Publishing, Inc. 1996), 111-121.
9. See Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).
10. For a more detailed discussion see Daniel Sanchez, Curt Watke, Ebbie Smith, *Starting Reproducing Congregations* (ChurchStarting.Com: 2001).
11. David Hesselgrave, *Planting Churches Cross-Culturally* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980).
12. For a more extensive discussion on church planting models, see Daniel Sanchez, Curt Watke, Ebbie Smith, *Starting Reproducing Congregations: A Guidebook for Contextual New Church Development*. (Atlanta: ChurchStarting.net, 2001).
13. See J. Timothy Ahlen and J.V. Thomas, *One Church, Many Congregations* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999).
14. For more information see Harvey Kneisel, *New Life For Declining Churches* (Houston: Macedonian Call Foundation, 1995).
15. This model has some of the characteristics of a church planting movement. See David Garrison, *Church Planting Movements* (Richmond: International Mission Board, n.d.).

# Starting Churches in Rural North America

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**A**s a preteen in rural north central Texas, I sensed God's call to vocational ministry. Since then, my ministry assignments have all been in rural areas of Texas, Oklahoma, North Dakota, Rhode Island, and Eastern Colorado. My passion since 1971 has been the planting and strengthening of indigenous, vibrant, authentically relational expressions of churches of the Lord Jesus Christ. My work is distinctly Southern Baptist in denominational expression. However, my ministry has had a heart cry for what our Lord taught us to pray and work toward: "Thy kingdom come."

The following are kingdom principles that transcend sectarian identity. The vast field of rural North America is ripe for harvest for whoever is willing to enter that harvest field. May God raise a vast army of church planters from this generation.

## Spiritual Foundations

Hearing from God: "Who will bring me to the strong city . . . through God we will do valiantly. For it is He who shall tread down our enemies" (Psalm 60:9,12, NKJV).

Successful church planting must have an authentic spiritual foundation. No matter how proficient one may be in the skills of ministry, an intimate encounter and personal walk with our Lord is essential. One part of this foundation is a clear and definite "calling" from our Lord. This is "Survival 101." When the days are bright and everything is turning gold, this "calling"

will guard you from the dangers of pride and self-sufficiency. When you are in the pit of despair and reverses are on every hand, the “calling” will keep you from quitting. During these extremes, there is real danger of being defeated in church planting, whether in a rural or urban setting. Regardless of the circumstances you will be strengthened to endure if there is a definite sense of “calling.” Not only is this true in the general sense of the “calling” to church planting, but also regarding the specific sense of geographic location and ministry assignment.

Claudine Duncan, a good friend and member of Bethel Baptist Church, a rural church I pastored in Oklahoma, encouraged me with a statement she had read. She said, “Never doubt in the dark what God has revealed in the light.” There have been many crisis times when I have had to encourage myself, my wife, and my children with the question, “What was the last thing God told us to do? That is what we must continue to rely on, regardless of how good or bad things appear.”

A “calling” will be very definite and will come from the Lord through His Word. Scripture has one interpretation, but it may have many applications determined by the Holy Spirit. When considering the beginning of a ministry or facing life-changing decisions, anticipate God speaking His will from His Word in your quiet hour with Him. I mark well when I understood my “calling” as a church planter. As a background, I will recount some of my journey.

Having been involved in new work areas in the 1970s as a pastor in Langdon, North Dakota, and North Kingstown, Rhode Island, I led our churches to do multiple new starts. At that time, I did not think of myself as having a specific calling as a church planter. I was attempting to lead our church to be obedient in what I thought God commanded all churches to do. Following this time, I served as a bivocational minister in North Texas for six years. In the fall of 1983, my wife and I mutually began to sense that the Lord was leading again into new work areas. We waited, watched, and continued faithfully in the work at hand. Through a series of events, I was asked by the Colorado Baptist General Convention to move to eastern Colorado to plant a new church in Limon. This church, the Hi-Plains Baptist Church, became a multiplying church, planting new work in towns along Interstate 70 from Byers to Burlington. Again, I did not see myself as a church planter, but was simply trying to be obedient to the Great Commission.

God’s hand was upon us in miraculous ways. In 1986, God interrupted me through His Word at a church starter strategist conference. Lyndon Collings of the then Home Mission Board, SBC, was speaking from Acts 8. He read and reflected on the occasion when Philip was involved in the great awakening in Samaria. In the middle of this movement of God, the Spirit of God called Philip to leave that

successful ministry. He was told to go down to the lonely stretches of Gaza to introduce the gospel to a singular man in a chariot. During this Bible study, the Spirit of God spoke to my spirit. His application was, “George, are you willing to leave the movement in Limon and go to the lonely forgotten pockets of small population throughout the plains of rural eastern Colorado? Are you willing to take them the gospel by planting My churches?” It was that time of “calling”—hearing from God—that kept me serving 17 years in eastern Colorado.

### Getting a Burden

“Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved” (Romans 10:1, NKJV).

Beyond the “call” there is the need for a burden. I want to be careful not to reduce a “calling” merely to an intellectual and academic commitment. A faithful servant lives in a commitment of obedience when he is certain that a matter is God’s initiation. That is to say, obedience should not require the romance of emotion. However, beyond the “calling,” we can expect God to give us a burden or a broken heart for what He has called us to do. Look for that, and wait upon the Lord to give a burden for your assignment. The apostle Paul was speaking about this burden-beyond-the-call in Romans 10:1. He went further to say that he was willing himself to forfeit his own salvation if Israel would be saved. That is a burden!

A sense of burden came to me in the early days of the church planting ministry of eastern Colorado. We were there because God told us to go. I had begun a weekly Bible study in Hugo, Colorado. While driving alone from Limon on a Thursday night, I began praying and fellowshiping with the Lord. I anticipated meeting with the handful of folks who would be there. They were so excited about this fresh authentic church setting where God was meeting us weekly. Earlier that day I had met a man named Keith from the nearby town of Flagler. Several of the Limon church members were working on remodeling an old building to use for our church meetinghouse. Keith, a fully committed, active believer, had come to Limon on a business matter. Having some extra time, he walked over to the construction site. He asked my wife what was happening. She answered his questions and briefly told of how each man there had recently come to Christ. When he greeted me, I could tell he was deeply moved and revealed a deep longing for being involved in such a movement of God. As I reflected on all of these events, God overwhelmed me with burden for the people of eastern Colorado. The emotion was so great that I almost had to pull the automobile to the side of the highway. God knew my obedience to the “call,” but had broken my heart as well.

### Practical Principles

Calling and burden produce the proper motive for ministry. Proverbs 27:12 says, “A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself; The simple pass on and are punished” (NKJV). A prudent church planter is wise to equip himself with knowledge of his context. The sharper his skills, the more sure is his effectiveness.

### Debt Free

Population and funding are key issues in planting churches in rural America. In the typical rural area, the population is sparse. Because of limited resources, rural areas will have a low priority for strategists in regard to funding. The prevailing thought is that funds should be expended “where the people are.” The extreme of this thinking will leave the rural areas abandoned as a viable church planting priority. This may make sense on paper; however, could you be talking about your unsaved father or mother in that rural community? In these terms, the money would be well spent. In the traditional approach to church planting, buildings and property are large funding issues. One way of overcoming this funding concern is to never lead a new rural congregation into debt for a church building. There are so many benefits in allowing God to provide ahead of time.

As I began the church planting ministry in Colorado, I sensed God’s leading to never lead the new work into debt for a church facility. This was wise for very practical reasons and for some significant spiritual reasons. Most new starts in purely rural areas are slow growing. This is especially true for rural planting in new work areas. Therefore, it is unwise to encumber a small group with a large indebtedness for a church facility.

Also, there are some significant spiritual benefits to a “debt-free” approach. This forces a congregation to cry out to God and to watch for His provision rather than the provision of the local banker. When the people see provisions that are unmistakably from God, they grow in their faith and trust. Some examples of this commitment were seeing God provide a church building and parsonage in Joes, Colorado, for \$6,000 (a building fully equipped even to dishes in the kitchen cabinets); a church building and parsonage in Idalia, Colorado (purchased for \$600); and a hotel for an associational conference ministry with adjacent property and buildings remodeled for a church meetinghouse in Flagler, Colorado (acquired debt-free). Others had the same commitment that resulted in new construction church facilities in Lindon, Limon, Hugo, and Deer Trail, Colorado. All of these were debt-free by the time they were completed. Equally important was the assurance of God’s precise will overarching the well-meaning will of the planter and the people.

This approach may also help to overcome an indigenous barrier. As we entered the small towns of eastern Colorado, we were often greeted with the perception that we were a cult. This was especially true in towns where there were no existing Baptist church or other evangelical churches. Once we became known for what we stood for, the cult idea was lessened. Nevertheless, we continued to be seen as “outsiders.”

When the church facilities were purchased in Idalia and Joes, Colorado, immediately a history of 75 years in the community was gained. Regardless of the building being “the Baptist church,” it is “where my daughter was married,” or “where my mother’s funeral was held.” This sentimentalism can be a wonderful benefit. Because the new group is housed in a landmark, this gives an identity to the community that may otherwise take generations to acquire. Likewise, a new congregation may endear itself to the community by investing funds in a facility that may otherwise have become a deteriorating eye-sore. A part of the community history has been preserved that otherwise would have been lost.

### Leadership Models

Another critical issue in rural church planting is securing capable pastoral leadership. If one limits himself to being a “fully funded” pastor, he most likely will not be willing to be a church planting pastor or an existing church pastor in slow-growth rural areas. The brightest and sharpest pastor-leaders are a must for successful church plants in rural areas. The small rural church in North America can be one of the most exciting ministries. However, because the small congregation in a rural area may not have the potential to ever “fully fund” a pastor-leader, other models must be sought.

Three leadership models for rural church plants, other than the fully funded pastor, are the bivocational model, Mission Service Corps model, and the lay planter model. Some students enter our modern seminaries with the idea of becoming a bivocational church planter or a pastor. Some have a trade or occupation that will allow the freedom to also be a pastor-leader. Bivocational pastors are nothing new. It was the farmer-preacher that facilitated the expansion of Baptist churches on the frontier. Many modern-day Southern Baptist churches in established areas have a bivocational pastor.

An example of the Mission Service Corps model is Richard Keith. Richard retired from *The Wall Street Journal* in Orlando, Florida, as a maintenance engineer. He had also been a bivocational pastor. Richard and Sharon, his wife, came to eastern Colorado for a two-month church strengthener assignment. They funded



themselves and lived out of their RV. While with us, they helped launch a new work in rural Joes, Colorado. A vacant building was rented for Sunday evening Bible study. At the end of their assignment with us, an associate and I led the weekly Bible study. We asked the Keiths to return the following summer for another short-term assignment. God used them to reach people. When they again returned to Orlando, others of us maintained the ministry. Finally God led the Keiths to return to further develop the Liberty Baptist Church, Joes, Colorado. This time they sold their property in Orlando and planted themselves in the plains of Colorado.

Another model is the lay church planter. Using the word “lay” today often implies someone who is less trained or less gifted. This, by no means, is true of those in this model. The lay church planter responds to God’s call to be a planter or part of a planting team, but does not see himself as a long-term vocational pastor or planter. If the number of congregations that are needed across North America in rural settings are to be planted, we must call out and equip lay church planters.

### **Subsidy Breeds Contempt**

Another concern in new church plants is the wrong use of outside financial funding. It has been proven that a sustained subsidy will weaken the new church plant. A good pattern in growing population areas may be to fully fund a church planter pastor from outside the congregation in the beginning stages. There is the expectation that the new congregation will assume its own financial responsibility within a given period. However, our experience is that if this goes beyond three years, including a yearly phase down, outside funding becomes a detriment to the congregation. Planting rural churches is much like planting ponderosa pines or junipers in the plains. In the initial stages, a good “drip system” is needed to provide moisture for the roots to become established in that semiarid environment. There is, however, a critical point in the initial stages. If the “drip system” is not removed, the tree will become dependent on the unnatural source of moisture. It will then not develop to become self-sustained in that natural environment. Outside subsidy for a new work is much like this.

Churches in rural settings need to be planted like they will be able to function in the long term. Therefore the model of fully funding a church planter pastor from a “big brother source” will most likely not work in the rural setting. This will work only if the rural area is one experiencing suburban sprawl where there is new population growth. The typical unreached rural area of North America is not like this. Rather, in these areas, we have essentially no growth. Yet the need for a church to reach unreached persons is there. In this typical case, the bivocational, Mission Service Corps, or lay church planter models make for a more stable plant.

### Indigenous Leaders

Another concern is the lack of indigenous planters and pastor-leaders. In this case, I define indigenous as a planter who understands the cultural environment in which he is working and has gifts and skills that relate to that context, and is satisfied to remain there for a lifetime if necessary. One way to ensure this kind of pastor-leader is to grow them within the congregations of that culture. As God calls them out, we can affirm them and facilitate their becoming pastors and leaders in their home area. Greg Scherrer, pastor of Hi-Plains Baptist Church, Limon, Colorado, is a good example of this. I met Greg at the time I was planting Hi-Plains church. He came right out of college to the local high school as band and music director. My three children were in his band program for four years.

Greg and wife, DeAnn, came from religious backgrounds other than Baptists. They both came to the Lord and were baptized during the ministry of Mike Chadwick, who followed me as pastor. In six years, Mike and a key leader, Gail Allen, led Hi-Plains church in developing men through personal discipleship and doctrinal pulpit teaching. The church's ministry had a good balance of solid teaching and urgent evangelism. Greg, mentored in this ministry, became a significant key leader in the congregation in the ministries of teaching, personal witnessing, and music.

When Mike left this pastorate to begin a new church in his home area of San Angelo, Texas, the church began a traditional pastor search process. After some bumps and bruises over an extended period, the leadership of the church approached Greg about becoming a pastor candidate. They recognized his gifts and sensed a call of God in Greg's life. Unknown to anyone in the church, God had put this in Greg's heart months before. Greg believed that if this were a direction of God, it would be made known to the church. The church proceeded in the formal process with Greg as with any outside candidate. He became pastor of the church in 1998, resigning from his 14-year music teaching position. The church is prospering under his capable leadership.

### Territorialism of Existing Churches

Turfism is one of the most devastating concerns in church planting. I once thought this was simply a philosophical issue: people just have a difference of opinion in approach. However, the more I see this in the raw, I believe it is a spiritual issue. It is a sin for a denomination, local church, or pastor-leader to believe they own a territory and there is no room for new churches. No one church will reach all the unreached people in an area. The mega churches will reach many, but not all. The middle-size churches will reach many, but not all. The small church will reach some, but not all. Those that protect their turf are

ultimately protecting against the God they are called to serve. God is sovereign. He raises new starts to reach the lost that we overlook or refuse to reach. If a local church does not have an intentional strategy of multiplying itself, God will give birth to new starts through other means.

You may ask, “Are you saying that God causes ‘splits’ in local churches?” My answer is, “No.” The cause is our self-centeredness and stubbornness. As a result God allows these splits that come from our disobedience. God is able to turn these splits into churches that reach new people.

In a strategy for a church plant, geography is not the deciding factor. It is a false concept that there is room for only one church within a prescribed geographic territory. Denver Baptist Association, Denver, Colorado, at one time had a rule that another Southern Baptist church could not be started within a two-mile radius of an existing Southern Baptist church. God had His way, as He always does, in spite of this naive policy. Scores of other evangelical churches sprang up in those communities. Thankfully, through the leadership of associational directors of missions E.R. Cagle and Rob Norris and church extension strategist Kenny Moore, this policy has been removed from the books.

It is proven that unchurched people are generally reached through networks of personal relationships. These happen naturally within ethnic groups. Many local churches have Anglo, Korean, and Hispanic congregations meeting in the same building. However, any church planting strategy must also evaluate the unreached subcultures. A classic illustration of this is the Good Shepherd Mission of First Baptist Church, Dallas, Texas. This church reached a certain socioeconomic group in the shadow of First Baptist Church. Hence, there is a need for all kinds of new church models touching every strata of our cultural multiplicity in North America. I have also seen the truth of this in rural areas. Because of limited population, the thought might be that you should start only one new church. Very soon it becomes apparent that the new church creates its own unique lifestyle and expression. There are various reasons that a segment of the population will not “come” to that church.

### **Overcoming Barriers**

The planter or planting group must be culturally relevant, do appropriate evangelism, meet needs, discern spiritual strongholds, define church, recognize where God is at work, and pray. There are some key ways to overcome significant barriers for rural church planting.

### Be Culturally Relevant

Each rural community has its distinct history and culture. It is important to understand this before planting a new church. In his November 1994 *SBC Life* article, “Farley’s Lists,” Gary Farley (then director, Town and Country Missions of the former Home Mission Board, SBC, and now associational missionary for Pickens Baptist Association in Alabama) gives 13 questions that can be asked to help understand the culture of a rural community.

1. How did the community come to be?
2. What is its focal symbol—courthouse square, grain elevator, mine tipple, or some other image of community function?
3. What is/are its chief economic function(s): farm trade, marketing, government service, reaction/retirement, college, transportation, bedroom community, or institution?
4. Who are the honored, the despised, the loveable characters, and the marginal people of the town?
5. What worldviews, values, and norms inform the everyday life of the residents?
6. What cultural/racial/ethnic groups are present in the community?
7. What are the barriers that separate people/groups of people: race, religion, education, and social status? Are they visible or invisible?
8. What are the sins/hurts of the community: the loss of an industry, a disastrous flood, a lynching?
9. What has become of its sons and daughters?
10. What is the peoples’ perception of the place; awareness of other’s perception of it?
11. Does the community have distinct sub-communities?
12. What seems to be the future of the community—its dreams, who is responsible for dreaming/implementing?
13. In sum, what is the “story” of the community?

I was told of an interesting concept of a certain church planting group. During the first year, the church planter did not spend his time launching worship or developing an organized structure. Instead, the first year was spent in “having fun.” Although this sounds a bit sacrilegious to most “sober, spiritually minded” church planters, this group makes a significant point. As a community is entered, this approach suggests the imperative of listening to the stories, participating in the county fairs, and attending ball games. Church planter apostle Paul exhorts in

Romans 12:15 to “Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep” (NKJV). There is a principle here: If we do not learn to rejoice with the people in their rejoicing, they will never allow us to weep with them in their times of distress and need. This can be done in every culture without compromising our convictions.

### Store to Store

One of the key functions of the church is evangelism. There are many methods of evangelism. In a seminary class on Christian ethics at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Professor Bill Pinson told a story about a young man from the gangs of New York City who was converted to Christ. While walking down the street one night, a wino stumbled out of an alley and bumped into him. His immediate instinct from his past gang life was to defend himself. Slamming the would-be assailant against the brick wall, he drew his hand back to deliver a karate chop across the throat. Suddenly it flashed to his mind that this was his old life and he was now to do things differently. So rather than deliver the fatal blow to the pinned victim, he asked, “Are you a Christian?” The man in sheer fright with eyes as big as saucers replied, “No sir, but I always wanted to be.”

We must employ methods of evangelism that will give us the hearing of people in the rural setting. In every community where I have planted churches, I soon found that cult groups and other zealous evangelicals had already been door-to-door. In most cases, we could use this method because it gave the perception that we were like the others who had come before us. It was also received as an unnatural offensive intrusion into their lives. Whatever method of evangelism one employs in rural church planting, it cannot be divorced from genuine relationships.

I advocate what I call store-to-store evangelism. Every time I went into a place of business, I introduced myself and told them what I did. So it was in the post office, the grocery store, the bank, the utility offices paying my monthly bill, and everywhere else. Wherever possible we looked for the natural opportunities of personal interaction. It is amazing how often you can find a reason to visit the local school to check on your kid's progress. Instead of mailing a bundle of letters, mail them one at a time at the post office. Within time you will get the opportunity to meet and greet every clerk. Don't buy a week's supply of groceries; rather, make daily visits to the grocery store. Do these encounters result in a soul-winning visit? Seldom, but they build a relationship that may bring that result.

### Meet Needs

How often it has been said, “People do not care what you know, until they know that you care.” How true this is in rural America. This kind of trust does not

happen overnight. If you learn to care about what they care about, people will more likely become interested in what you care about. Before you can have the opportunity to impact a community concerning eternal matters, you can find ways to meet needs in individual lives and in the corporate community.

Limon, Colorado, is a crossroads for Interstate 70 and US 40/287/24 right in the heart of the eastern plains of Colorado. When weather patterns come through, there is no place to hide—just duck. After moving there to plant a new church in 1984, I went store-to-store, but also kept office hours in the coffee shop. I asked about the winters. They told me about the 15 times the Interstate was shut down the past winter because of blizzard conditions. When this happened, as many as 2,000 travelers were detained overnight, and there were not enough motel rooms to house them. Therefore, the police chief coordinated arranging places for shelter when the motels were full; the city hall was opened as a shelter, and, if needed, the school or local churches were called upon.

With all of this in mind, our church saw a need that we could meet. First, we could assist the efforts of our local community officials who had a heavy responsibility in these disaster times. Second, we saw the opportunity to help the motorists. We found many of these at their wits end, stranded out in the middle of nowhere. These were those who waited in the truck stop anticipating that the roads would open at any moment. When nightfall came they were told that the roads would remain closed. They began to seek lodging in local motels only to find there were no vacancies. Hi-Plains Baptist Church began an intentional ministry to help meet these needs. It was called Limon-aide, A Shelter In The Time of Storm. The church was equipped with cots, blankets, food pantry, recreation equipment, and box games. I do not have the space to share the many fabulous stories that surrounded this ministry.

Our church volunteered to be the first shelter to be used following the motels. This meant that the city hall would not have to be open and city officials could go home and get a night of sleep as we shouldered the responsibility.

A good gauge of whether your ministry is making a significant impact on your community can be done. If overnight the church vanished from the community, would it be noticed? Would people of the community say, “Good riddance,” or “Oh? How we miss them, they did so much good for our community.” Seek for favor without compromise with the community that they may see your good works and glorify the Father. Meeting needs that others may not see can do this.

### **Discern Spiritual Strongholds**

While you are having fun getting to know your targeted rural culture, pray

fervently for God to give you insights concerning the spiritual issues of that place. Church planting is serious business. It is reclaiming territory that has been given over to the enemy of our souls. The truth of Ephesians 6:12 is never more real than it is in church planting venues in rural areas. Church planter Paul writes, “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (NKJV). There are spiritual strongholds and spiritual conditions unique to each rural community or area. I first learned this from a Chinese Christian friend, Frank Jean, who came to New England as a missionary to the United States. He spent countless hours and days in Bible reading and prayer when he moved to the specific area of Massachusetts. He asked God to give him spiritual discernment of the region. Often, we do our surveying and contacts too soon. We go out without adequate spiritual discernment.

Every community where I have planted churches has had its own unique set of spiritual issues and strongholds. There may be commonalities, but the mix will be unique to each. The Father will show them to us as we allow Him. For example, one community was noted as having the most saloons per capita. Another had wholesale incidences of incest, another of witchcraft. Another had been “spiritually raped” by cult groups, charismatic excesses, and legalistic churches. Another had developed a cultural elitism and selfish pride that they were above other communities. Another had its culture permeated with the influence of a reprobate liberal Protestant church. Once these things are known, the church planter is on good grounds to watch, pray, and apply the truth of Scripture accordingly.

### **What Is Being Church?**

What do you visualize when I say, “Plant a church?” The stereotypical model usually comes to mind. This model is of a church building (white columns, steeple, and all), fully funded pastor, and complete organizational structure. With this as the only model, little church planting will be done in rural North America. There must be a flexibility and understanding of how to do church. If we will be faithful at least to go, we can trust God to put the shape to the church. My definition of church is basic. It is when two or more people have committed themselves in a given place and given time to be church. A group even this small can do all the functions of the church. For example, when we began the Wellspring Baptist Church in Flagler, Colorado, our core group consisted of two: Barbara, my wife, and me. Our children were grown and gone. For Wellspring, we established the normal relations that are traditional to us as Southern Baptists, such as enlisting a sponsoring church. After we had met for a few weeks with just the two of us, Barbara used this term: “When we become a church. . . .” I interrupted her and explained that we were already a church. We had the barest

essential, which was our commitment to be a body of Christ in that place, at that time. There was no budget, no building, no Sunday school literature, no pews, and no piano. We eventually added all of those except for the pews. Her baseline definition of church was a building with pews.

In order for a church planting movement to occur in North America, we must arrive at an adequate definition of what it means to be church. If we will not limit ourselves to the stereotypical church models, we can plant churches across North America. In rural America, we must have a commitment to do something in every pocket of population—that is, have a strategy model for every place. This must take into account the existing churches and the opportunity to partner with other evangelicals. It may mean only to do event projects there. It may be indefinitely a preaching point, or a summer day camp, an ongoing rural Sunday School class—but do something and let God develop it, don't write off or ignore any place.

### **God Was Working Before We Arrived**

A few months after arriving in eastern Colorado, I met Craig Chaney. He became a true friend and was tremendously spiritually minded. He heard me talk of my vision, watched our church grow, and eventually joined the vision. As he heard my vision, and sensed my burden for the plains, he asked, “George, are you willing to let God fulfill that vision even though it might be through someone else?”

What was he saying? He was saying that a vision from God is owned by God, not by us. The Father never relinquishes His ownership; He simply shares it with us and allows us to carry it out. We should take it as our vision, but understand that He owns it. Others will be partners in its implementation. That truth has helped me. To William Carey's famed statement “Pray as though it all depends on God, and work as though it all depends on you,” I add, “share as though it all depends on your partners in ministry.”

A great pitfall of youthfulness in ministry is to assume that when you showed up, God showed up. God was there already at work long before we got there. He has been working through our predecessors. Don't look with disdain on what a servant has done prior to your arrival as though God was not in it. Don't assume that you are God's best gift to beginning an authentic ministry. Coming before us were our pioneer forefathers, immediate predecessors, or other denominational groups.

Harold Amos was my charismatic friend. I had heard of him, but had never met him. One day he came into The Bright Spot, my wife's Christian bookstore in Flagler. By that time, we had been doing ministry in eastern Colorado for 10 years. My office was in the same building as her bookstore, so Barbara called and



asked me to come up. There was a man who wanted to meet me. Harold told me, “I have been following your ministry since you came to eastern Colorado.” Then he told me about a vision God had given him several years before we came on the scene. He spoke of seeing prairie fires spreading across the plains. But these prairie fires were not physical fires; they were spiritual fires. He said, “In that vision, I thought God was showing me what He was going to do through the Full Gospel Fellowship. However, everywhere that those fires were burning is where you people have been planting churches. I have come to realize that God is fulfilling that vision through the ministry you are doing.” We must be faithful to the convictions and persuasions that we have as distinct denominations, but may we never forget that the kingdom vision belongs to the King.

### **Don't Forget to Pray**

Prayer can save a town. God calls us first and foremost to pray. No church planting strategy can be without it. A dear saint of God is Irma Jaurez. She and her husband, Herman, owned and operated Maranatha Café in Joes, Colorado. They were the only Hispanics in the small plains town. They received their share of ridicule and rejection that ungodly people can dish out. But they stayed. People drove miles to eat their Mexican dishes. They were known for great food.

We knew Irma for more than food—for prayer. When we began the Bible Study Fellowship in their café on Sunday nights, she attended. We had met for months with just Barb and I and Irma and John Fadenrecht in attendance. I thought they might be getting discouraged with the little response in attendance and might want to quit. I asked them if they believed our coming was worthwhile. I remember Irma with tears saying, “Oh yes, Brother George, this is the only church I have.” She said, “Since my husband began keeping the café open on Sundays, I cannot attend church.” She told us that our being there was an answer to prayer. And what a prayer warrior she was.

I asked her to tell me about some of her prayer experiences. She told of being awakened every night on a regular basis over several months at 2:00 a.m. She got out of bed and looked out the window. Every night she saw a suspicious looking man walking on the street. She was impressed to pray for him but also for their protection from him. Within time, the law officials raided this man's house and impounded an arsenal of firearms and explosives. There were enough explosives to blow Joes, Colorado, off the map. I choose to believe that it was Irma's prayers that saved that town from such a disaster.

### **Conclusion**

There is a people group in North America that represents all age groupings, economic levels, and many ethnic heritages. Members of this people group can be

found in nearly every state and province in North America. Yet they remain invisible. Who are they? They are rural people, town and country residents to whom the gospel has become increasingly unavailable over the past few decades.

We face an ever-increasing challenge that is complex and diverse in that of church planting in rural North America. This is compounded by the changing dynamics of rural communities and lifestyles. Technology, changing demographics, and the impact of urbanization upon rural areas make it essential that we understand the new rural context and develop creative change that will result in a sustainable church planting movement for the future.

If we are to re-church town and country, there are two major issues that must be addressed. The first is the acknowledgment that town and country North America is a viable church planting venue. The second is the implementation of strategies that can be sustained and flourish in uniquely rural settings. With these two basic commitments, churches and church planters will begin to rediscover town and country, for it is truly calling you home.

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### Principles

1. Start the rural church debt free.
2. Understand the best leadership model for the community and the new church start (i.e., fully funded pastor, bivocational pastor, Mission Service Corps, or lay church planter).
3. Practice lifestyle evangelism.
4. Make prayer a priority.



# Chapter 16 Chapter Sixteen

## Bivocational Church Planting

By Steve Nerger  
Strategic Places Manager  
North American Mission Board  
Alpharetta, Georgia

**T**he greatest church planter that ever existed was a bivocational church planter!

This man is perhaps the most quoted speaker and writer in the history of the Christian church other than perhaps Jesus Himself.

This man not only started a church planting movement, but also had time to write over a dozen books read by millions upon millions of people.

It was not easy for this man, for you see he was quite educated, quite wealthy, quite intelligent, and quite successful before he was ever called into the ministry.

To become bivocational he had to empty himself of everything in his fleshly spirit. He had to seek God, rather than what this world could offer. He had to say YES!

Did I tell you that it cost this man dearly?

Yes, he was probably disowned by his family, disinherited, and alone.

Listen to his own words as he describes the trials of his church planting experience as a bivocational church planter, comparing his life to others who think they have accomplished something:

**2 Corinthians 11: 23-28, NIV**

Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.

By now you know that I am referring to the apostle Paul, one of God's choicest servants. He was a servant of God first and foremost, an apostle to the Gentiles, a preacher of the gospel, and finally, a bivocational church planter.

Most of you know that Paul worked as a tentmaker so that he would not take money for himself from anyone to do ministry. This was a part of his ethos, his ideal, his thought pattern, perhaps even his theology. He did not want to be indebted to the ones to whom he ministered. He had no trouble collecting money for anyone else. He did not even have trouble with people being fully funded by the ones to whom they ministered. He just simply thought it would be best to be bivocational; serving the churches and working to make a living.

Many people think that Paul was taught tentmaking by Priscilla and Aquila, who he met in Corinth after they left Italy because of persecution. But Scripture tells us that Paul was drawn to them because they were of the "same trade" (Acts 18:1-3).

We all know that Paul came from a wealthy family in Tarsus. Maybe his family business was tentmaking. This seems like a long shot, but no one knows. A more plausible explanation is that when he was first saved, and went to Arabia for three years, he learned tentmaking as a means of survival, preparing himself for the ministry ahead.

Whatever the circumstances, Paul was equipped mentally and physically to be a tentmaker, serving his Lord as a church planter!

## What is a Bivocational Church Planter?

By most definitions, a bivocational church planter is someone who starts a church, and gains part of his personal income from an outside source and part from the church. This outside income could be from work, investments, retirement, or any other source. The income from the church could be as little or as great as plausible. It could include housing allowance, travel allowance, annuity, or any other form of income. Usually, these agreements can be seen in one of the following arrangements:

1. The church plant cannot pay a livable wage at first, and the pastor works anywhere from 20 to 40 hours in a secular job to support his family.
2. The church planter has a very adequate profession and wants to only accept a token of his worth to the church, such as travel or annuity.
3. The church plant cannot pay a livable wage, so the church planter accepts another ministry position, such as a part-time staff member in another church or a consultant for an association or state convention.
4. The church can pay a livable salary, but the pastor needs to help in other areas of ministry; therefore they release him a day or two per week to hold another ministry job.
5. The church planter desires to have some time in the workforce to meet people. This is an intentional part of his church planting strategy.
6. Sometimes a church planter just does not want to be in financial bondage to a church body such as the apostle Paul—and desires to stay bivocational for this reason.
7. Finally, this could be a retired person who sees the need for a new church plant and “steps up to the plate.” Using his retirement as his primary source of income, he takes a small stipend from the church (such as a housing allowance, which can be a tax advantage).
8. As you can see, there can be any mix of possibilities as God would lead.

Note: It must be pointed out that a “lay church planter” takes no money at all from the church body.

### **Why the Need for Bivocational Church Planters in North America?**

At the time of this writing, there are approximately 300 million people in North America. It is estimated that at least 200 million of them are lost—without Christ as their personal Savior. The easiest solution to this lostness problem is to train and require the 100 million saved people to lead two people to Christ this year, then all of North America will be saved. Sounds too good to be true, but the math works. The method however, is flawed by humanity—especially saved humanity.

God desires the church to be salt and light among the nations. We all pretty much agree that healthy church plants are the most effective method of evangelism and discipleship. So how do we start enough churches to reach 200 million people?

Using the most common method available today, it will not be done. Training people for three years in seminary and sending them out will not be sufficient because of people, resources, and time. This method only allows us to begin a certain number of churches each year- determined by the amount of resources to fund a pastor and the number of pastors available, which is limited to graduates from seminary.

Now I am not against seminary, and I believe that every pastor should be trained to the best of his life and church planting circumstances. However, to reach North America with gospel-preaching churches, we must utilize more bivocational church planters who will use their talents and gifts for making money to free a church to start without all the costs involved in our “one, seminary-trained man/one church start” model.

God has blessed men with abilities and humility to work bivocationally as he did the apostle Paul. To do this, he could not burden the churches to care for him. Today, there are men available to do the same thing if they would consider and humbly accept the challenge.

This is the future of church planting if we are to reach the nation: men of every people group and population segment who are called by God to start churches. These are men who have different cultures, languages, and jobs, but the same calling as fully funded pastors.

In America today, eight churches close each day. Six new churches are started each day. Four of these six new church starts are Southern Baptist church plants. Last year, Southern Baptists started 1,781 new churches and the United States lost 730 churches for a net gain of 970 churches. These statistics will not win America, but

be not dismayed; God is raising the bar of the bivocational pastor and church planter. Everywhere I go in the country, people are exploring and talking about both bivocational and lay church planters. So what do we do now?

### **Raising Up and Utilizing Bivocational Church Planters**

#### **1. Raising the bar.**

What if we really let our young men know that it is acceptable to go to college, get a degree and start churches? What if we really let our retired believers know that they can serve God in their retirement like never before through church planting? What if we were able to tell young seminarians that part of a strategy of church planting will include working in the town where they are starting a church? What if bivocational church planting was used by God to bridge the gap of laity and professional clergy?

What if God helped us see the potential of this kind of church planting movement in America as it is happening in other parts of the world?

#### **2. Calling them out.**

To some people, calling out bivocational pastors is an impossibility. I am not so sure about this. In every existing church, there are leaders that people follow. They are deacons, Sunday School teachers, businessmen, lawyers, doctors, laborers, and even staff members. Each leads in their own way. Suppose we were able to discover the people who lead in our existing congregations and challenge them to go to the next level of leadership. Suppose that we made available opportunities, experiences, and training to prepare them for a church planting assignment. I think we are just around the corner from such a movement because the average disciplined church member in America today is asking privately, "Isn't there more to this than rotating jobs within the walls of the church as it grows bigger?"

#### **3. Developing the training.**

Training can come in one of two ways. Locally, it can come from the church and association in training events and ongoing training. If a person is not in a place where this could happen, then the Internet is a great place for us to begin to develop pastoral training for the bivocational church planter. Each of these two are now being considered of and developed at the North American Mission Board.



### 4. Developing the implementation strategy.

Strategies of church planting abound all around us. Bivocationalism will and should be embraced by all people groups and geographical areas in the United States and Canada. Do you know that there are at least 17,000 bivocational churches in North America today? Suppose that these pastors and churches found it in their heart to reach out to another people group or small town around them. Wouldn't a church that is led by a bivocational pastor be the best sponsor for a new church that will be bivocational? Wouldn't a bivocational church pastor be the best mentor for a new bivocational pastor trying to start a new church? Sure they would, and we would be wise to implement a strategy that includes these elements. Our God has given us tremendous resources in North America that include the word "bivocational." Isn't He the ultimate planner?

## Challenges and Benefits of Bivocational Church Planting

### Benefits

1. If a church planter works in the right secular job, he can meet and reach out to many people in his community. For example, if a person takes a job at a school, he would have contact with many people. If this was the school in which his new church met, it would be even better. Or, what if a person worked in a grocery market? He would meet all the customers as well as the employees. These examples are just a token sample of what lies out there in the field of church planting.
2. In order to start a church, a church planter either has his wife work outside the home or lives in a substandard financial condition to start a church. However, many of our church planters come on the field just to develop a core group or to work with a very small group of people. They do not need 60 hours weekly to develop what they have been given. Working bivocationally will lighten the financial load, while at the same time help him meet people.
3. If a church planter works bivocationally, he will stay in touch with the lost humanity in his community. Quite often and quite quickly, church planters get caught in just dealing with "saved" people and their difficulties. This can come at the expense of meeting people who need Jesus as their Savior. Working in the "world" allows a mission pastor to continue to experience life as his community also does.

4. One more benefit would be that with a bivocational pastor, the people of the church membership will be more willing to step up and help, not just allow the pastor to do it all. This usually helps the church grow spiritually, as far as service and commitment are concerned, much faster than a fully funded church plant.

### Challenges

1. It is not easy to focus your mind on two distinct jobs and job descriptions. Whether a person works 20 or 40 hours weekly outside the church, his brain will continue to view them as two full-time responsibilities. This can be difficult for most people.
2. Time is always an issue. How do you divide your time between family, church, job, self and others? When you hold another job, there is a real strain of time that must be constantly worked and evaluated as the church grows and takes more and more time. Remember, some church plants may remain bivocational forever, while others are bivocational only for a given period of time.

### The Future of Church Planting

As I write this chapter, I am so excited about the future of church planting in North America. I sense a small breath of wind from God that is leading us to a place where we have never been before. When I began church planting 24 years ago, a young church planter was not allowed to work outside of the church field if he were given any type of financial funds. Today, more and more state conventions and associations are realizing that allowing a church planter the opportunity to work outside of the church, frees him financially and gives him great opportunities within the community. Bivocationalism is becoming a viable strategy of church planting as it should. In the last 25 years, we have learned how to start churches in the North American context using one seminary-trained person start with volunteers and assistance from all over. We do not want to throw out this model, but now is the time to go the next level of church planting, using indigenous people who start churches where they live out of their own life experience. Bivocational church planting fits this plan.

However, an even brighter star is shining. Bivocational leaders and pastors are beginning to see why God has allowed them to operate like the apostle Paul. Where for years being a bivocational pastor was looked upon as second-rate,

today—because of the great needs in North America and the ethnic diversity we find here—we are looking at the bivocational pastor with new glasses. And so we should! All across North America, God has placed bivocational pastors who thought that all they were there for was to keep one church going; but in the near future I see a day when the small spark of these men beginning new bivocational churches becomes a fanning flame that stretches to every people group, small town, and village in North America.

The future of North American church planting may very well lie in the hands of men from every nationality whom God has led to North America—to work hard at making a living, and at the same time, start churches to meet the needs of their lost fellow travelers. It just might lie in the hands of the farmer, feed salesman, or insurance agent in middle America or Canada who says to himself, “I must bring the gospel to the people who live around me.” We can help them. Let’s raise the banner of the bivocational church planter.

So what about you, the reader of this chapter? Has God specially prepared you—maybe even without your knowing it—to become a bivocational church planter? Does your heart burn with excitement and challenge as you think of this next step of leadership and responsibility? If so, just do it. Talk to your local church leader or pastor. Tell them your thoughts and heart and let God work out the rest. It probably will not be easy, but in the end it will be well worth the ride. To God be the glory on earth as it is in Heaven!

## Chapter Seventeen

# Associations Assisting Churches in Church Planting

By Bill Agee, Director  
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Associations today are positioned in a strategic way, enabling them to offer great assistance to churches desiring to plant other new, reproducing churches that are relevant to their context and culture. This chapter will address ways an association can help create a climate in which new churches can grow up and reproduce other healthy, mission-minded churches. It will also outline a systematic process with principles that have been proven in the field.

Growing up in the Midwest in Oklahoma, there was much in my life that was predictable, but none quite as predictable as the springtime ritual of the local weather man interrupting my favorite program to inform me that the conditions were right for the development of severe weather and tornadoes in the viewing area of the station. As an adult in Arizona, I discovered a similar ritual that occurred in July and August which lasted for approximately 56 days—the Monsoon. In a very dry and arid climate during those 56 days; clouds would develop and it would rain almost every day. In both cases, when certain conditions were brought together at the same time for a certain period of time, a reaction would occur that led to fairly predictable results. In Oklahoma, the combination of moisture, winds, and low pressure systems led to the prediction of these violent storms. In Arizona, when the dewpoint would reach 55 degrees for three consecutive days, the Monsoon was declared active.

So how does all this relate to successful church planting and how an association can assist churches in the process with a greater predictability of success? If certain elements can be brought together in our atmosphere that create a climate where predictable assumptions can be made, it is possible that there

could be a correlation to creating a climate where healthy, relevant, and reproducing churches can be birthed. It is at this point where the association can be of significant assistance to the churches in helping create this climate. Without exception, pastors today are very busy and often do not have the time to research where and when a church needs to be birthed. They have a heart and a passion for birthing new churches, but simply do not have the time to do the legwork necessary to bring the elements together for the church plant to be birthed in success rather than in survival. The director of missions can assist the churches in church planting by proactively bringing all the elements together in the same place, at the same time, for a sufficient length of time so that a pastor can see the opportunity and serve as the trigger point to initiate the birth of a strong new church.

What, then, are the elements the director of missions can bring together to create a climate in the association among the churches where healthy church plants are the predictable outcome?

### **1. There must be a belief that new churches need to be planted.**

In my own personal observation and practice as a church planter, pastor of a sponsoring church, and as a director of missions, it is clearly evident that church planting is the most effective evangelism methodology we have today. The new churches were much more effective in evangelism and in impacting the lostness in their field than the existing churches. The new churches were near the 1:1 ratio (one church member to reach one nonbeliever), while the more established churches fell somewhere in the 1:35 or 1:40 ratio. The new churches were able to focus their thoughts, attention, resources, and activities on reaching the unchurched.

### **2. There must be a complete understanding of the context where the new church is being planted.**

Nothing can hinder or even kill a new church plant more than having the wrong person in the wrong place at the wrong time. A director of missions and an association can assist churches in church planting by providing potential sponsoring and partnering churches with: 1) Demographics that answer the question, “What people groups are in the area and in what numbers?” 2) Psychographics that answer the question, “What are people listening to, reading, eating, and so forth?” This kind of data gives the partnership team valuable information that will indicate style and possible ways to address the needs of the people groups in an area. 3) Listening groups that help all parties understand how the people in an area feel about certain issues that are or will be affecting their

lives. This can help the church understand the best way to communicate the message that will touch them at the point of their need. 4) Informal activities that will answer the question, “What is the best way to engage the people in the target area and to establish relationships with them apart from the subject of church and religious things?” 5) Bridge events that will assist the partnership in discerning what will be the best ways to interact with and intersect the lives of the people groups in the area.

The elements listed above are time-consuming and somewhat difficult to interpret. The director of missions can assist churches by having this information available at several places within the association and by becoming skilled in reading and interpreting the data for churches interested in planting a new church.

### 3. An extensive support system must be developed and put in place.

Without an adequate support system, a climate for church planting cannot be sustained. The support system could include but not be limited to the following: **a) Sponsoring Church:** This church that has a burning passion for planting a new church among a certain people group or in a specific location within the association. It has spent significant time in prayer regarding the decision to engage in the church planting process. The association that assisted them in understanding the context now assists them in developing a support system to ensure the predictability of short- and long-term success. **b) Supporting or Partner Churches:** These churches have seen the need, understand the context and culture, and feel led to join the sponsoring church to strengthen the new church with financial resources, expertise, and often human resources. **c) Prayer Churches:** Prayer churches are those within the association that have a passion for prayer and commit to pray for the new church every time the prayer church meets. **d) Peer Involvement/Church Planter Networks:** These networks of all partners and other church planters provide not only encouragement, accountability, knowledge, and understanding of the context and culture, but also the church planting system itself. Without the network, the church planter and his family will feel alone and can become easily discouraged with the pressure and the workload necessary for a church to be birthed and grow up and reproduce. **e) Mentor/Pastor/Coach:** This is the person who walks along with the new church planter. He is extremely valuable to the process of creating a climate for church planting. The mentor/coach provides local knowledge and expertise that will assist the church planter in avoiding things that may cause a disruption of the work as well as helping him better come to grips with the local

context and culture. **f) Association/State Convention/SBC Support:** All these entities play an important role in the new church, but the association has the best opportunity and is more strategically positioned to assist since it is closer to the field than the other groups. The association can facilitate partnership meetings, provide initial documentation and research, provide financial assistance, equipment, and many other things the new church may require to be successful. The association in an assisting role can truly be what it is designed to be, namely a resourcer of church vision as the church seeks to carry out the Great Commission. The association in its assisting role does not plant the church, but helps to create a climate where healthy churches can be planted by bringing together these elements.

#### **4. A process must be implemented that will last the test of time.**

When our forefathers were seeking to elect a President to lead our country, the question they faced was not, ‘who would make a good President?’ The question they faced was, ‘what processes can we put into place that will ensure good Presidents long after we are gone?’ The association can assist churches in church planting by developing and implementing a system and a process that allows for all churches who desire to be involved in church planting to find their place to be involved. If the process is haphazard and unfocused, there will be no clear way to determine what elements need to be brought together to achieve predictable results.

#### **5. The leadership of the new church plant must be the “A” Team.**

Leadership is an element that cannot be overemphasized in a new church plant. The leader must be the person who has a definite and clear call from God; is visionary; a soul-winner; focused; flexible; teachable; and tenacious; a people person; adaptable; and relevant to the context and culture where the church is being planted. The church planter must be someone that people will follow; a person of spiritual strength and insight. He must evidence his clear call from God as he shares his vision. He must realize that vision will excite a person to their core, but it is the unshakable sense of calling that will carry the day and let him know the effort is worth the risk. The calling will instill in him conviction while the vision will keep him on course.

#### **6. There must be an intentional design of reproduction instilled in the new church plant at the beginning of the work.**

The DNA of the new church must contain the reproductive aspect of the work. This idea must be shared by the pastor and taught to the people

who become an integral part of the new church. It must be constantly shared and reinforced as the church grows and establishes its own ministries and traditions. The association has a lead role to play in modeling unselfishness to the churches. As it demonstrates that it exists for the churches rather than the churches existing to support the association, the association sets the bar for partnership, sacrifice, and kingdom advance. The association shows the new church how to give itself away for others.

There is little debate that more can be done in partnership than in isolation. The association has a great opportunity to develop partnerships among the churches in the association; among the churches and the state and national entities; and among churches in other parts of the country with a desire to do something of kingdom magnitude. The director of missions in the association must be willing to redefine his role and become more of a partnership builder and an entrepreneur than he has ever been before. He must exegete his associational context and culture, once again modeling for his pastors and leaders the need for them to do the same in their field. The association acts as a facilitator of the church planting process and continually fosters the church planting climate that allows a vehicle for successful church plants to become the normal and predictable outcome.

Once a climate for church planting exists, there must be a clear process in place to allow the new church to flow smoothly through the many difficult phases it will encounter in the first few months and years of its existence.

There are many different types of systems that can be utilized depending on the location and the type of church being planted, however, there are some basic principles that should be part of every system being used or developed. For example: 1) Every system should contain a long-term business plan showing the initial starting point and mile markers along the way that ultimately lead the new church to self-sufficiency and strength. The plan must take into account the cost of staff, rent for a meeting place, operational costs, and all other financial aspects of being a strong mission-minded church from its inception. As the church grows, the plan needs to indicate at what point the church will be in a position to add additional staff or a permanent location if that is the desire of the new church. The plan must be detailed enough to show monthly, quarterly, and annual mile markers for the first few years of the church. These must be maintained with great discipline if the church is to achieve its overall goal of growing up and reproducing another strong, healthy



church. A business plan of this type will show anticipated growth projections and financial projections indicating surpluses and shortfalls in the life of the church that must be considered on the front end of the work. The association can and should be the catalyst for inputting the various pieces of data to produce the plan.

By taking time to see where the needs are for this new church, the association can then become the facilitator for others entering into partnership with the new church to meet those needs. In this way, the new church is able to be birthed in success, not in survival.

Associations from all sections of North America and from all sizes, structures, and designs are being effective in resourcing the churches and assisting them in planting strong, healthy, reproducing churches that are making a dramatic kingdom impact. The role of the director of missions for an association that is resourcing and facilitating churches and seeking to create a climate for church planting is much different than the traditional view held by most people.

The Associational Initiatives Team of the North American Mission Board is addressing the issues being faced by directors of missions desiring to move to this type of model in several significant ways:

1) First, by understanding clearly that the association of the future is not and cannot be the association of the past or even the present. The world today is changing exponentially; the association must redefine its role and function in order to facilitate the climate for church planting to occur. The association of the future must be fast, focused, flexible, and friendly if it expects to create a climate where church planting can occur in a predictable way.

2) Since many associations are actually functioning in this role, their locations will become learning laboratories where other directors of missions can receive a hands-on learning experience, ask many questions, and actually see in action what an effective association is doing to create a climate for church planting. They will see how the process, the system, and the plan are being developed and implemented in a variety of contexts and cultures. The directors of the learning laboratory associations will give their time and attention to the directors of missions who desire to learn from the experience.

3) Not only will directors of missions receive a hands-on experience, but

over the next months they will receive personal coaching from the directors of missions who are successfully creating a climate for church planting.

4) Experiential learning and coaching will be valuable tools in the tool belt of any director of missions, but there is another component as well. Peer learning is another very critical piece for equipping for directors of missions. Directors of missions will have several opportunities throughout the year to attend large regional gatherings where their fellow practitioners will be leading the sessions and will be sharing what is happening in their association. In these meetings, the directors of missions will be able to get the basic nuts and bolts of creating a climate for church planting from people they know and trust who have the credibility to address the critical needs from a contextually and culturally relevant position.

5) The future for church planting is extremely bright, especially in regard to church planting among people groups. Associations can and will play a key role in assisting their churches to reach these people groups. To prepare associations for that wonderful opportunity, the Associational Initiatives Team is also investing in the equipping and preparation of potential directors of missions who understand the key role they will play in creating a climate for church planting in the future.

There are many great pieces of material and help on the Web site of the Church Planting Group of the North American Mission Board. Check out their site or contact the North American Mission Board for additional resources and opportunities to make a kingdom impact.



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“They are coming! God is sending them! Have you seen them? They are the next generation of church planters and preachers, pastors, and missionaries. They model what they do by what they see other pastors do. The gospel they see in us is what they learn. There is a generation of preachers coming behind us who are watching our every move and, as pastors, we must take the responsibility to mentor them. What Paul gave to young Timothy we must give to them. They are too valuable for us to do anything less.”

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Woodstock Baptist Church  
Woodstock, Georgia

“The pastor must articulate and cast the vision. Many of our faithful people are more than ready to move into reproducing their church; but let’s face it, they can only go as far as the pastor’s passion and support for the project will allow. By God’s grace, He has given us the ‘bully pulpit.’ For heaven’s sake, we must use it. 1 Chronicles 12:32, NIV states ‘the men of Issachar, who understood the times and knew what Israel should do. . . ? Those ancient men had two things going for them—discernment and vision. With the spiritual need so great around us, only one with closed eyes and heart could miss the season of harvest. Pastor, go for it. That’s what leadership does.”

Jim Henry  
Pastor  
First Baptist Church  
Orlando, Florida

**Richard H. Harris** serves as the Vice President of the North American Mission Board leading the Church Planting Group. Dr. Harris and his staff passionately proclaim a vision to lead Southern Baptists to double the number of churches by 2020. He has a heart for the local church, having served as a pastor and having led 23 interim pastorates. For over 20 years, he has been a leading spokesman for church planting and evangelism for Southern Baptists and other evangelicals in both national and international arenas.



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