



Church Planting 101

A field guide for the curious, the called, and those hungry to see lives transformed by the love of Jesus.

“The vigorous, continual planting of new congregations is the single most crucial strategy for 1) the numerical growth of the body of Christ in any city, and 2) the continual corporate renewal and revival of the existing churches in a city.”

-Tim Keller

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Evangelical Presbyterian Church
5850 T.G. Lee Blvd., Suite 510
info@epc.org
www.epc.org

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Introduction: Church Planting Begins with Prayer



Shawn Robinson, Pastor of Clayton Community Church (California)

“... my house will be called a house of prayer for all peoples.”

–Isaiah 56:7

The first step, the last step, and every step in between when planting a church begins with a simple direction: *pray!* As you read through this manual and consider your part in the church planting process, bear in mind the unspoken role of prayer in every piece of advice and guidance.

In this field guide, you will hear a passionate call to begin new church ministries in the name of Jesus; you will learn how to create new pathways for a new generation. These ministries may not necessarily reflect the traditional church that you or I are familiar with. They may not even look like the church you are personally a part of. Regardless, their health is vital to our goal of a thriving body of Christ.

So how do you begin?

Ask what the Lord wants of you and be willing to follow no matter the cost.

Stay open to changes.

Pray for greater revival and courage! This prayer is a good place to start:

“Lord, please give me/our church the courage to not settle in the comfort of corralling the already convinced. Help us to step out in faith to begin new works that will reach even more people for your kingdom. Give us resources to accomplish this mission, people who are called to new places, a hunger for all to experience your amazing love, and the humility to admit that our present condition is not enough to reach everyone. In Jesus’ name, we pray, AMEN.”

Use the following prayer guide as you meet with your Session and staff over the next 6 months.

Month 1

Key focus: Lord, grow our hearts for the many who don't yet know you.

“And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”

–Matthew 9:35-36

Month 2

Key Focus: Lord, help us to deal with our fears about church planting. Help us to trust you with change and go wherever you lead us.

“Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go... Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”

–Joshua 1:7, 9

Month 3

Key Focus: Lord, Open our eyes to new possibilities outside of our own church's capabilities. Help us to cherish the old, while still embracing the new.

“No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the patch tears away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins—and the wine is destroyed, and so are the skins. But new wine is for fresh wineskins.”

–Mark 2:21-22

Month 4

Key Focus: Lord, raise church planting leaders. Show us the possibilities within our congregation and our community.

“Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.’”

–Matthew 9:37-38

“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns.’”

–Isaiah 52:7

Month 5

Key Focus: Lord, give us the fortitude to be more than “all talk” when it comes to church planting.

“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.”

–James 1:22-25

Month 6

Key Focus: Lord, provide the resources for this new adventure.

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

–Matthew 6: 19-21

Jesus’ great commandment is simple: *“Go and make disciples.”* Let’s lean into our Lord’s command despite our hesitations, fears, and excuses – let’s passionately pursue His call to bring new believers into His kingdom.

Will you trust the Lord to grow your own heart and the heart of your church for church planting starting today? What is God saying to you now and what will you do about it? The time is now, so buckle up; you’re about to go on the ride of your life! We promise it will be an adventure you won’t regret.



Part I: The Role of the Church

Chapter 1: Parent, Partner, or Patron?



Tom Ricks, National EPC Church Planting Director

EPC church planting success is not only measured by the number of new churches planted; it's also measured by the number of existing EPC churches that are engaged in church planting. In other words, *everyone can do something!* We can measure participation in our passionate, driving, unswerving goal for every EPC church to be a parent, partner, or patron of church planting.

The only question left is: which are you going to be?

Parent Church

A parent church takes full responsibility for birthing a new congregation. This includes but is not limited to the following commitments:

Recruiting and hiring a church planting pastor.

Financing 80-90% of the new church startup costs for a minimum of three years (this includes the planters' salary and benefits package, office/worship space, part-time staff such as worship or children's leaders, and miscellaneous costs).

Identifying the target area and committing human resources from within the parent congregation to create a launch team working with the Planting Pastor.

→ A launch team is comprised of 4-8 individuals who take on specific areas of responsibility, such as discipleship, outreach, children, worship, care, etc.

Assisting in the establishment of a core team.

→ A core team is 20-60 individuals, couples, or families that are committed to attending and supporting the ministries of the new church plant. Church members who live near the new church plant should be encouraged to prayerfully consider leaving the parent congregation and joining the new church plant.

Offering ongoing prayer support.

→ A prayer team should be set apart to pray for the church plant. Ongoing prayer in public worship services of the parent church is also expected.

Reviewing and providing oversight of the Planting Pastor by the Parent Church Head of Staff and Session.

Providing HR, Finance, and Bookkeeping support under the direction of the parent church business office.

Does this sound overwhelming? You might be better suited as a...

Partner Church

A partner church is one of several churches that band together to birth a new congregation. The responsibilities of partner churches vary depending on best practices in their setting:

Partner church planting works best when the costs for starting a new church plant are beyond the resources of one congregation. A significant investment from several churches in a city or region makes the burden lighter for all.

The partner model: it is usually best that one church takes on the role of caring for the planter as described in the parent model above. In this model, the lead church's business office also handles benefits, payroll, bookkeeping, etc.

An oversight team representing each participating church can also be a strong model. It is key that each area listed in the parent model is covered using each of the partner churches.

Still sounds like too much? How about being a...

Patron Church

A patron church is a congregation that invests financially in church planting but is not directly involved in the hands-on logistics. This could also be an individual member of a local congregation who is interested in a legacy gift for EPC church planting.

A patron church/individual may offer a one-time gift or determine to participate in ongoing support of EPC church planting. However, patron churches/individuals should be faithful in prayer for church planters and should receive an annual. If your leaders are cautious, perhaps you could get started by committing 1% of your annual budget to church planting. Make your desire known, get it on the radar, and invite people to pray for a greater harvest.

No matter what role your church occupies, every EPC church is called to be a...

Praying Church

What is the Lord asking of us? Where can we start? How can we share the vision? What will be our part in growing the Kingdom of God through church planting?

The purpose of this document is to give a brief description of the EPC church planting model as well as a working definition of all three categories. It is not intended to be exhaustive, but to introduce you to our EPC way of thinking about church planting.

For a more detailed understanding of the possibilities for church planting, contact the EPC National Director of Church Planting: tom.ricks@epc.org

Chapter 2: Initial Steps



Shane Sunn, Church Planter, Presbytery of the West

People often wonder, “How do we become a church planting congregation?” On the surface, the answer seems obvious: “Just plant a church!” Experience, however, confirms the answer is much more nuanced. These are a few considerations to help you get started.

Consider your church’s understanding of church planting.

Let’s be honest: some congregations have church planting built into their vision, values, and structure, while others have church planting on a short wish list, and still others don’t even have it on a long list. Frankly, the scenario that describes your congregation best will dictate where you need to begin.

For our purposes here, let’s assume that church planting has yet to be a topic of consideration in your congregation. *What will you do next?*

Do something!

You can begin by starting conversations with your leaders and parishioners about evangelism and church planting; one method could be providing literature that highlights the urgent need in the U.S. to plant churches. Consider organizing prayer walks in the neighborhood surrounding your place of worship and/or in the neighborhoods of your parishioners, or even inviting a church planter/regional leader in church planting to speak with your session (and if you don’t have one, your mission’s team).

Above all, *don’t stop praying!* Pray regularly for God to use your church to reach new people during weekly worship.

Do the necessary work to create “buy-in.”

Don’t be surprised to discover that this step is more difficult than you might have imagined! The natural tendency of the local church is to focus inward on itself. Usually, there is more congregational zeal and support exists for plans and programs that feather the nests of the gathered sheep rather than seeking lost sheep.

The Gospel is, by nature, centrifugal; it spins outward, claiming new territory in our hearts, our congregations, and the world. Like DNA, the Gospel replicates and grows – so pay attention. Seek to grow “gospel renewal dynamics” within your congregation, and this will create buy-in. Consider small group studies like *The Gospel-Centered Life* or doing “Sonship” with your leaders. Gospel life begets gospel life!

Realign your vision, values, and plans to include church planting.

Again, this must be a deliberate process that doesn't necessarily follow the steps above. Once you have the necessary "buy-in," incorporate church planting into your vision statement and core values and begin to budget accordingly.

Don't be discouraged by small steps in the right direction. Church budgets are "persnickety beasts," but you must begin somewhere. Once an initial commitment to church planting is included in your budget (even a small amount), consider deliberate yearly incremental increases.

Note: If your congregation is smaller, don't be derailed by the price tag. Consider partnering with other churches in your region or a church planting network. Every church can do something!

Take advantage of local, regional, and national expertise.

Church planting in the current cultural climate can be challenging. Be discerning and informed before you allocate any resources to this effort and get help vetting potential church planting candidates. After all the hard work outlined above, you need an initial win.

A good next step would be to contact your presbytery, network, or regional church planting support person. If you're not sure whom to contact, reach out to our National Director Tom Ricks (tom.ricks@epc.org); he will connect you with the best resources in your part of the country.

Suggested Further Reading:

Tim Keller, *Why Plant Churches*¹

C. John Miller, *Outgrowing the Ingrown Church*²

Mark Sayers, *Reappearing Church*³

John Edmund Kaiser, *Winning on Purpose: How to Organize Congregations to Succeed in Their Mission*⁴



Part II: The Role of Leadership

Chapter 3: The Role of the Session



Tom Ricks, National EPC Church Planting Director

Jack Cathey, Lake Forest Family of Churches (North Carolina)

Ruling elders play an important role in local EPC church planting, so where will you begin your church planting exploration?

Ruling Elders vs. Teaching Elders

The main role of the teaching elder is to shepherd God's people through the preaching of the Word, casting the vision, and leading the Session. Ruling elders are also shepherds involved in each of these tasks but from the position of support, partnership, and accountability. Therefore, all elders, ruling and teaching, must understand, support, and work together when undertaking church planting.

Behind the Doors and Building Trust

One core idea is true in every aspect of church ministry, but especially in church planting: The Lead Pastor and ruling elders of the planting church must be in lockstep regarding their approach and commitment to the new church planting. This is crucial to the success of church planting.

Giving birth to a new church is challenging, uncertain, and often has unexpected twists and turns. Strong agreement within the leadership of the mother church is essential to navigating this terrain. For this to happen, the following must be true:

The Lead Pastor must create an environment in which elders can collectively and honestly discuss the ideas and implementation tactics of church planting. All voices must be welcome and listened to at the table.

Everyone must prayerfully become a student of church planting to produce godly and wise conversations that consider church planting from all angles.

Pastors and elders must “speak the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15) for a robust church planting conversation.

Once all parties have been heard and a decision has been reached, both the Session as a whole and individual elders themselves are bound by Scripture to uphold and support the work of church planting.

Ministry Management

No Session should seek to manage a church planting project in its entirety, nor should a Lead Pastor bear the sole burden of the chief architect of a new congregation. Instead, the Session should appoint a small Commission of 3-4 elders to work alongside the Lead Pastor and the Church Planting Pastor. As a Commission, this group should be authorized by the Session to act on its behalf. Matters delegated to the Commission by the Session should be documented and retained for consultation during the planting process, and the Commission should give an oral and written progress report at each Session meeting.

At least one or two ruling elders should go with the new church plant as part of the launch team. Elders who join the mission may end up settling with the new congregation or may return to the mother church as new leadership takes root.

While most Lead Pastors want to take responsibility for many aspects of church planting, wise ruling elders set specific parameters on the pastor’s role in planting to guard his/her time and create space for the Planting Pastor to lead much of the endeavor.

Remember: Elders are a critical key to the success of church plants. Elders can (and should) support church planting by being well-informed and able to easily answer the congregation’s questions about the church planting work – this includes the specific plant and philosophy of ministry when it comes to church multiplication.

It’s also vital to speak positively of the church planting work while also speaking honestly about the challenges and opportunities associated with it. Giving vocal and prayerful support of the church planting work is one of the most important ways elders can support it; this can manifest in attending worship at the new plant every few weeks for the first year of public worship, and sharing what they learn from the congregation with fellow elders. Furthermore, prayerfully consider what God is calling you to do in this process; if, for example, your residence is in the target area of the new work, He may call you to move membership to the new church plant.

All these methods and more are valuable to the church planting effort and fall to the Elders to enact accordingly. It’s important to be an active student of church planting as your church goes through the process.

Chapter 4: Communication and Congregational Buy-In



Mike Moses, Lake Forest Family of Churches (North Carolina)

The Senior Pastor's primary responsibility in the church planting process is communication with the congregation. Congregational buy-in is critical, and the Senior Pastors' voice can ensure the support of a plant. While each congregational situation is unique, this pathway can be used as a starting point.

Session Buy-In

A Teaching and/or Ruling Elder with a conviction for church planting or multiplication must first confidently assert this calling to fellow elders.

If a Session is open to exploring this calling, the elders should read Tim Keller's, "Why Plant Churches," a six-page white paper, and agree to discuss it at the next meeting. The Session must agree to emphasize the biblical rationale for church planting – this approach is what the original hearers of the Great Commission *did* in the book of Acts. This is what they understood the Great Commission to mean.

The Session should spend a season of discernment concerning how their church is called to be involved in church planting/multiplication. Next, they may appoint a task force or subcommittee to evaluate methods and strategies of church multiplication that fit the church's strengths and gifts. Finally, they should make a recommendation to Session in 1-3 months.

The Session should identify a Ruling Elder who shows potential for being a champion of church planting. This elder should chair the team that helps organize the church planting work. The Senior Pastor should be on this task force unless there is a well-trusted Associate Pastor whose voice will be sufficient for the Session.

The Task Force will recommend they become one of the following:

Parent Church (fully initiating one or more church plants and taking full responsibility for all that is involved)

Partner Church (investing significant annual dollars and relational care/prayer in one or more prayerfully selected 'Partner' EPC church plants regionally or nationally)

Patron Church (giving part of their mission money annually to a specific EPC church plant).

Congregational Buy-In

The primary way to obtain both congregational buy-in and enthusiasm for supporting church planting (and to gain congregational joy as you attain it), is to cast a practical vision of church planting as the most natural and biblical aspect of missions. Evangelical Christians are nothing if not committed to missions, biblically and financially. If the leadership of a church can cast church planting/multiplication as the center of local/national/global missions, the congregation will joyfully follow, – and for good reason.

The primary way to accomplish this vision is through biblical preaching. Connect the Great Commission in Matthew to the Specific Commission in Acts 1:8, then connect *that* to the apostles' actual strategy as recorded throughout the book of Acts, especially through the ministry of Paul and Barnabas. A helpful corrective might be to recast Paul's journeys from "missionary journeys" to "church planting journeys," because that was what they were!

The Session (led by the TE) must at some point decide if church planting will be funded through a reallocation of mission dollars or a portion of a new capital campaign. **Without significant funding, a church cannot be a church planting church.** What will be your church's perpetual funding mechanism?

The congregational buy-in will be at its highest if the mother church's leaders first identify as a Parent, Partner, or Patron EPC church plant. Once they have established this, a financial commitment to the new church is initiated; finances are committed by Session; this investment must be communicated to the congregation regularly, visually/through story/regularly, particularly when the new plant begins to bear fruit. A church plant will have a higher likelihood of success if its culture and values align closely with those of the mother church.

Congregational buy-in for becoming a church planting/multiplying church usually comes after the fact. When worship planners are intentional about regularly sharing stories from the church plant and showing evidence of other signs of growth, such as pictures of baptisms enthusiasm, *support* grows. Disciplined regular church-wide communication is of paramount importance.

If successful, all this can lead to a newly positive congregational self-image, as people within the mother church begin to say, "We're a multiplying church! That's what we do in response to Acts 1:8; when we do this, people meet the Lord and are baptized, and that means we are an evangelistic Great Commission Church. We should do *more* church multiplication! What is our plan?"

Chapter 5: Financial Planning & Budgeting



Tom Ricks, National EPC Church Planting Director

Jack Cathey, Lake Forest Family of Churches (North Carolina)

As people of faith, we know prayer and wise counsel are essential for all spiritual endeavors, including church planting. As a result, it can be easy to minimize financial planning and budgeting as an essential element in the church planting process. Good financial planning and budgeting for church planting are both practical common sense and spiritual maturity. Since all truth is God's truth, every aspect of funding a church planting ministry must have both practical and spiritual wisdom.

Biblical Foundation

Good church planting is biblical church planting, and that is true for the financial side as well. Some key biblical principles to remember:

God is a God of abundance, not scarcity

"I will not accept a bull from your house or goats from your folds. For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the hills, and all that moves in the field is mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell you. for the world and its fullness are mine."

—Psalm 50:9-12

Planning and preparation are godly

"For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and

is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.'"

–Luke 14:28-30

Trust in the Lordship of Jesus Christ is fundamental in church planting funding

"For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here, I have made five talents more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'"

–Matthew 25:14-21

Here's how we translate these principles into funding for church planting:

Prayer in planning

The world and everything in it belongs to God. We are only stewards, so we pray for God's provision when funding church planting.

Plan for what is fiscally appropriate, not for the least dollar amount possible

Often Christian leaders are guilty of thinking, “How can we get by with the smallest investment?” This is not only foolish, but it also ignores the counsel of scripture. We must be wise with our resources, but that is a far cry from a man-centered approach to funding, which lacks faith in God’s provision. If, for example, the genuine startup costs for a church plant are \$150,000 for the first year, why would we try to get by on less?

Plan for what the new church needs, not what we want

God admonished the children of Israel in the wilderness who took too much manna by spoiling the excess they took because they lacked faith and were greedy. We must fund appropriately but not selfishly.

Practical Application

The following list isn’t meant to be a complete “one size fits all” approach to financial planning for church planting, but it is meant to be a guide that can be adjusted.

Costs:

Church Planter Terms of Call

The EPC Terms of Call for an Evangelist should be followed when determining all church planting pastors' pay and benefit structure. A good rule of thumb is that an Evangelist’s housing and salary should be commensurate with the pay of an EPC Associate Pastor of an established church in the planting area. Other considerations include but are not limited to the following:

Level of education

Years of service

Previous church planting experience

Median household income in the city or region

Cost of living and inflation

Here’s an example:

The median household income in St. Louis County is just under \$49,000 per year.

The average housing/salary for an Associate Pastor with a Master of Divinity degree in a Presbyterian church in the greater St. Louis area is \$63,000.

Assuming education and experience are like the Associate Pastors in the St. Louis area, the housing/salary will be closer or slightly higher than \$63,000 instead of the lower figure of \$49,000.

The total cost would be roughly \$90,000.

Salary & Housing: \$63,000

EPC retirement plan @ 10%: \$6,300
EPC Health Insurance (family of 4): \$20,000

Pre-Launch Budget

A good practice is to develop a pre-launch budget and a first-year (post-launch) budget. In addition, planting churches may want to budget through to the point that the church plant becomes financially sustainable. Commonly, new churches take 3-5 years to become financially sustainable.

The pre-launch budget should include the following:

Salary and benefits for the church planting pastor for the pre-launch period

Most church plants need 6 to 12 months for the pre-launch phase. This period could be longer or shorter depending on the circumstances of the launch. Using the \$90,000 annual cost from above, a planting church would budget \$45,000-\$67,500 for this time frame.

Contact allowance for the Church Planting Pastor in the \$200-\$300 range per month

Using a 6–9-month pre-launch period, this would imply a \$1,200-\$2,700 range.

Pre-launch events, including core team meetings

This will include any food and childcare costs to support these critical times. A reasonable budget for this element would be in the \$1,000 to \$3,000 range.

Children and worship staff

These are a common component of new church plants. It is best to budget for 1-2 months to allow these staff to get up to speed and be prepared for the launch of the church. Using a rough cost of \$1,500 per month per staff member, this would imply a cost of \$3,000 to \$6,000.

Gear and hard costs

Laptop and mobile phone for the Planter: \$2,500-\$3,500

Audio/Visual equipment including speakers, mixing board, projectors, screen, lighting, risers/stage – this can be purchased close to the first public service but should be available for the AV team pre-launch for practice and working out any bugs connecting and using the system. Most new plants can purchase the necessary equipment for this purpose in the \$15,000-\$20,000 range.

Chairs, if needed, can be purchased for \$40-\$50 each. So, for 100 chairs, the budget would be \$4,000 to \$5,000.

Children's ministry areas may require infant and nursery equipment in the \$1,000 to \$3,000 range.

Hospitality ministry, including coffee and other supplies in the \$1,000 to \$2,500 range

If the Sunday morning space does not include onsite storage, the plant will need a trailer in the \$2,500 to \$7,500 range. Don't forget to buy insurance on the trailer and its contents, as trailers are often stolen, even with good locks.

Total Pre-launch budget: Using the items and amount above, the mother church will probably need to budget between \$80,000 and \$120,000 for the pre-launch period

Post-Launch Budget:

Once a church starts public worship, the planting church must budget for spending – which will be mostly personnel people costs – and for financial support, including tithes and offerings at the plant.

Spending

The Church Planter will require a full year of salary and benefits, plus contact allowance and mobile phone plan funding. The range will be in the \$90,000 to \$100,000 range.

Other Staff: Children's Ministries, Worship, Administration, and Media

A common practice is to fund these as part-time positions initially, with the possibility that they may become full-time as the church grows. Assuming only Children's Ministry and Worship for 8 hours a week, the church will need to budget between \$20 and \$25 per hour. Assuming a 4-week month, that works out to a total of between \$1,280 and \$1,600 a month or \$15,360 to \$19,200 for the year.

Rent

The rent for Sunday morning space will be a new cost once the church you launch begins. These costs can vary significantly based on the cost of living within your community and the options available in the target area.

School buildings

These may be available and very affordable at the lower end of the range. We know of churches launched without rent from generous private and charter schools.

Recreational facilities (including YMCA and other community facilities)

These are usually available in the range of \$500 to \$1,000 a month.

Unoccupied retail spaces with sufficient parking on Sunday mornings

These may be more expensive as the church will probably need to rent them for the full week and not just for Sunday morning; this kind of space can range from \$1,000 or more per month. During pre-launch, work and pray hard for a great, affordable space!

If you only have space rented on Sunday morning, consider renting some office space during the week. This kind of space can be helpful for worship practice, staff meetings, group meetings, and pastoral care meetings. Again, rental rates vary substantially but are likely to be in the range of \$12,000 to \$18,000 a year.

Other costs

This includes food and childcare for events, ongoing Hospitality and Children's ministry costs. A good starting point would be to budget \$200-\$400 per month for these costs.

Generous churches often experience God's generosity. From the start, commit your budget to support missions, benevolence, and church planting. A good starting point is the 10-15% of the church's annual tithe.

Financial support and tithing

Most new plants will have a blended support base starting with support from their parent (or partner churches), other supporters, including other churches and Presbytery support, and giving at the church plant. The most difficult number to forecast will be the actual giving at the plant, but there are some ways to predict first-year giving.

If your plant has individuals and families attending the parent church, you can reasonably assume their giving will probably shift to the plant. For example, if 10 families, currently giving between \$20,000 and \$30,000 moved to the plant, you can assume they will continue to give at that level.

For others, you can start with a rough estimate of how many new individuals and families (not currently attending the parent church) you will attract in the first year. Try to make this estimate neither pessimistic nor optimistic. To help with this, develop a range with a low and a high amount and then choose a reasonable number between these two.

Next, take the average amount of giving from each giving unit at the parent church, cut this amount in half, and multiply this by your best estimate for the number of people you estimated. The 50% reduction considers the fact that people will be joining throughout the year and that early in their attendance, they may be less inclined to give.

For example, if you estimate that 30-40 new individuals and families will be a part of the new church in the first year and the average amount per giving unit at the parent church is \$2,000, then your estimate of giving would be \$30,000-\$40,000 (30-40 givers X \$2,000 per giver X .5).

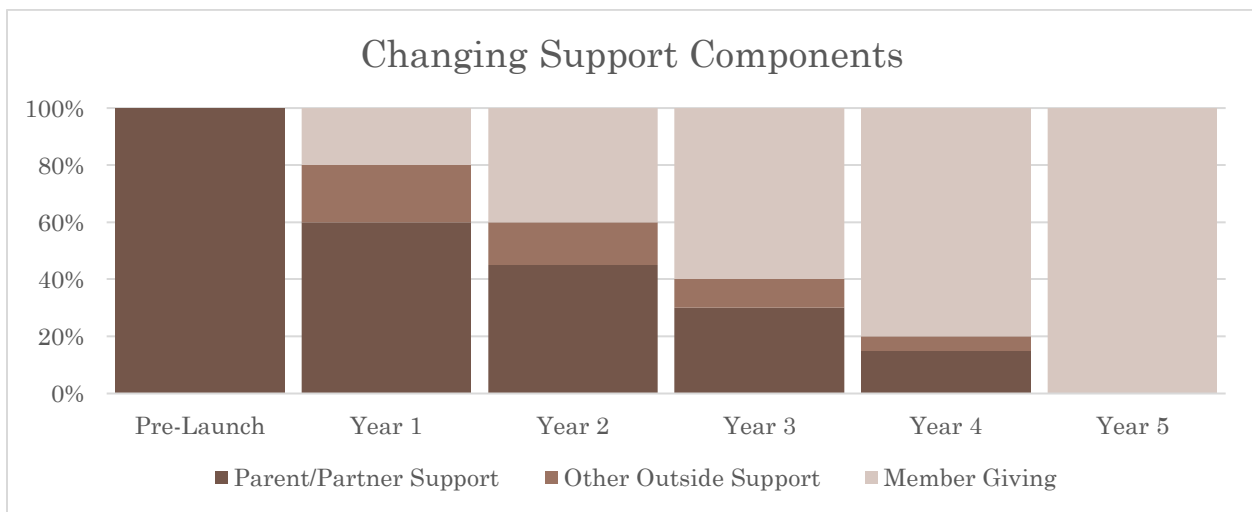
Although perhaps obvious, you also need to consider the community's demographics that will be drawn to the plant. It will be the role of the parent church and others committed to

providing financial support to make up the gap between the estimated giving at the plant and the spending budget. Using the estimates and ranges above, the support needed would be in the \$75,000 to \$90,000 range.

Budgeting for subsequent years

Once the church has launched, you will begin to have a better handle both on costs and giving. A common need will be for additional staff hours and, potentially, additional staff positions as the plant grows larger.

As mentioned earlier, it is common for a new church plant to need 3-5 years to reach the point of being financially sustainable. Each year, the plant should aim to reduce the need for external financial support. The following graph gives a picture of a healthy plant.



If you are feeling some sticker shock, don't worry! That's a very normal reaction when being introduced to the funding side of church planting. This is just one common model; it isn't the *only* model. We intend to be honest about costs so churches can plan accordingly and not be caught off guard by costs.

Funding

As we have seen, it can cost between \$150,000 to \$250,000 (or more) to launch a new church. Here are some common practices for parent and partner churches to fund this kind of investment:

Strategic Investment

Financial planning for a new church plant should begin at least two years before launching a new congregation. We suggest an EPC church set aside 3% of its annual budget (income) for church planting every year.

For example, if the annual church income is \$1,000,000, this would provide \$30,000 per year to fund church planting.

Capital Campaign

Linking a church plant with a capital campaign is another option for funding. While capital campaigns are often linked to new buildings and/or to retiring existing debt, church planting can also be a component of a capital campaign.

For example, if a church has a campaign to raise \$2,000,000 to invest in a new worship center, they could include an additional \$250,000 to the campaign goal to fund a new worshipping community (a new church plant).

Presbytery and Sister Church Investment

Most presbyteries will invest a minimum of \$5,000 per year for up to three years for new church plants.

Let's reasonably assume that we have two sister churches in the region that want to invest \$10,000 annually for three years. Combined, these sources would provide additional first-year funding of \$35,000.

Church Planter Fundraising

Church planters understand that fundraising is part of their calling. We know church planters who have successfully raised 50% of their first 2-3 years' salary package.

Additional Information

- ➔ Every church plant launch team should have one solid financial planner.
- ➔ The time to think about a financial commitment to church planting is normally two to three years before your first plant (unless there is an endowment fund for seed money).
- ➔ Parent or Partner Churches should have a written agreement with the Planting Pastor and Launch Team on the time frame and amount of financial investment pledged.
- ➔ No church plant should be launched until there is a minimum of six months of budgeted income in cash on hand.
- ➔ Parent or partner churches should receive a bi-monthly financial report from the new church plant, which includes a chart that tracks giving / income levels.
- ➔ Church planting pastors should receive an annual review, including compensation from parent or partner church elder leadership.
- ➔ Coaching for fund-raising is available through the EPC National Church Planting Team.

Remember: The fiscal side of church planting is crucial to the success of the church plant. Too often, it is relegated to a second-tier priority or a necessary evil instead of a key aspect of the overall work of the gospel. Establishing a funding model/plan will serve any parent or partner church when it comes to successful EPC church planting.

For more information on funding/budgeting for EPC church planting, reach out to Jack Cathey (jmcathey@gmail.com) or Tom Ricks (tom.ricks@epc.org).



Part III: Church Plants in Under-Served / Under-Resourced Areas

Chapter 6: Demographics



Dave Strunk, Planting Pastor, Church of the Redeemer (Tennessee)

Many potential fields ripe for a new evangelistic church exist, and it's important to assess the context of a desired demographic. In other words, discerning the *whys* and *hows* of planting a church “over there” helps a planting church count the cost of the potential church planting endeavor, and whether you should even do it.

Why?

A parent church, (or a series of partner churches/church planters) may want to reach a specific demographic for several reasons:

Specific location

Perhaps there's a certain major part of a metro area that is growing in population, and existing churches are just not keeping up with the potential demand or need for new churches.

Parent church dynamics

Perhaps the mother church is becoming too large for its building and notices that certain people are coming from a drive 25+ minutes away. An evangelistic endeavor could be more effective in that new area farther away if those church attendees planted a new church.

Specific target demographic

Perhaps all the residents of a particular area have their desired cultural preferences met, while those of a different demographic within your church do not. You may need to plant a church that recognizes the needs of a different race or aims at a different socio-economic

status if people from a different demographic background are underrepresented in a church where you are.

Whatever the "why" for planting a new church "over there," the motivation should be evangelistic and aimed where new efforts are needed.

How?

Before launching any evangelistic endeavors, some important groundwork must be done. Usually, the church planter will identify a target audience or target area, and thus be a natural fit for that demographic. On the other hand, a parent church/series of partner churches may identify a demographic before a church planter is selected. In this case, a church leader should be matched based on ministry philosophy.

The next step is demographic research, which is easily done through a wide range of data that is available for free at websites such as the United States Census Bureau; alternatively, a simple search of demographics for a particular city will yield numerous aids. This research will offer information on the population, age ranges, church attendance, income, religiosity, and other key metrics for that area.

Next up is ethnographic research. A key church leader and/or the church planter themselves should get to know the area for a while. Here are some questions to consider, and who can answer them for you:

Who is moving here? (Realtors)

Why do people like living here? (Residents in local establishments)

What kind of businesses flourish here? (The local Chamber of Commerce)

What are the major concerns of people who have lived here a long time?

(Attend a neighborhood association/town hall meeting)

Considering these types of ethnographic questions over several weeks or months will give the planter a sense of the ideals and virtues of a particular area, and that sense will help to shape the Gospel message to the audience the new church is seeking to reach. For instance, a church in a suburban area with young families moving in but *without* young adult cultural activities should prioritize evangelistic children's ministries over local coffee shop ministries.

The final part of the demographic survey is understanding who the current churches in the area are, and who they are already serving. The goal should not only be to plant an EPC church where there isn't one; rather, it's to fit within the Kingdom of God where there is a need and a call for supplementation.

Chapter 7: Seeding Churches in the Most Unlikely Communities



Rufus Smith, Lead Pastor Hope Church (Tennessee)

It is *arrogant* to think that in the Western world checkered by under-resourced communities, existing churches have been of no value. God forbid that mindset. These churches were integral to the spiritual vitality of neglected communities in the 19th and 20th centuries based on the circumstances of the time. However, the past methods of traditional churches have become irrelevant in addressing the spiritual deficiencies of a new generation.

Not only do the programmatic paradigms need to change but the proclamation of a more holistic gospel is necessary. Seeding new churches is needed to spiritually revitalize these communities. The 300,000 churches that exist in America have not arrested our nation's spiritual decline, which is proof that we need a more comprehensive gospel message with more relevant gospel methodologies.

"If you want to build a ship, don't drum up some men to gather wood, divide the work, and give orders. Instead, teach them to yearn for the vast and endless sea."

–Antoine de Saint-Exupery⁵

The author quoted above recognized that planning an expedition or planting a church is more than the mechanics of recruiting a core team, locating a site, or convincing donors to invest. Planning an expedition or planting a church is first mystical, with the planter/pastor voicing a vibrant compelling vision and painting a practical picture of the present/future which can change the recent past due to the existence of a new community of Jesus-Followers.

"Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord

was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord.”

–Acts 11:19-21

Note in the passage above that two types of people in the same geographical area were presented with the gospel. One group was Jews, and the other was Gentiles. Notice also that two types of preachers spoke to the same geographical area. One preacher spoke to Jews only, and the other spoke to both Gentiles and Jews.

Keep in mind: Gentiles were marginalized. They were not the popular choice to whom to preach the gospel or to plant a church. And yet, verses 20-21 emphasize that it was this under-served people group of gentile Antiochians who responded most to the liberating light of the gospel.

Based on my limited experience, frequent failures, understanding of God’s word, and a lot of grace from the Father, I offer the following principles to seeding a spiritual community in neighborhoods that are considered the least and left behind in areas of town where people are materially poor but spiritually hungry, often not even knowing it.

Have you been “called”?

There are two “calls” in life: One to salvation and one to service. Both begin with an unction, a sense or subjective feeling from within validated by objective evidence without. I believe that if one is spirit-led, they can in most instances choose their service to the LORD. However, no one thrives in – or even survives – the ups & downs, highs & lows, or ebbs & flows of seeding any type of church (or maintaining an established ministry, for that matter) if they have not been “called,” summoned or equipped by the Lord to do it.

Have you lived in under-served environments? Or did the Holy Spirit plant this desire in your heart for this level of ministry? In my case, it was the former. As an African American living in Houston, Texas, I was raised around the businesses of cafes and bars. And while there were some wholesome aspects to this environment, there were also some ugly underbellies. Thus, even before I became a Jesus-Follower, my heart was already conditioned for this branch of ministry.

In addition, part of the clarion call is not simply individual but also communal and collective. We must not be afraid to ask other people to consider becoming local missionaries at home, just as we are not afraid to challenge them to become global missionaries abroad.

Are you credible?

Credibility is important in any context, but especially in an under-resourced or under-served community. The best way to earn credibility is to be present and pedestrian. Jesus earned his credibility by being a pedestrian.

While on earth, He lived in the Galilean proximity and mingled with the marginalized who needed mercy the most (John 1:29/36a). Everywhere he lived and worked was in the towns of Galilee: first in Nazareth, then performing miracles in Cana, and finally in Capernaum.

It is best and natural for a shepherd to live among the sheep. It would be unthinkable for a global missionary to serve in Kenya Africa but live in Lexington, Kentucky, or serve in Rio de Janeiro Brazil but live in Los Angeles California. Living in direct proximity to the people one is pastoring used to be the norm, but today it is considered optional.

Hope Church planted a daughter church, Hope City, in an underserved area. As we were interviewing candidates, the number one reason most dropped out was that we required them to move into the neighborhood. One of the weaknesses of the traditional church in distressed communities today is that the pastor as well as most other members *commute* into the community for church but live in other neighborhoods. This separation lacks credibility and dilutes the power of the gospel message.

Is there a compelling vision?

As a lifelong Houstonian, I knew our city's culture and cultivated empathic relationships with the indigenous stakeholders of our zip code, some of whom had no interest in spiritual matters. In 2000, our small potted church plant began to slowly germinate, so we needed a larger pot in which to grow. That meant moving out of the homeless shelter in which we were worshipping into another location.

Architectural Woodworks was a company that owned land across the street from our location at the time, but it was not for sale; plus, we had little money. After our initial inquiry, the owners stated they had no plans for expansion nor were they even slightly interested in any offers – until, after a season of prayer and research, we painted for them a compelling vision of a community-conscious church.

Our tiny team compiled the history of the 3rd Ward: formerly a neighborhood mecca that empowered Black citizens, many parts of the area were now replete with hopelessness due to generational poverty, high rates of teen pregnancies, escalating numbers of dropouts, outdated schools, poor education, and low employment.

We then hired an architect to sketch a rendition of Hope that included a church building, school, and community development center. We positioned ourselves as an army of concerned citizens who could help change the psyche of a neighborhood over the next 20 years via spiritual renewal, humanitarian outreach, and proven after-school strategies. I hesitate to cast us as the best example, nor do I want to be the hero in the story – I want to simply relay our experience.

Our two-story church building cost \$1.5 million to construct in 2002. All three entities, church, CDC, and school, operated out of the church building until it was too small. We painted a compelling vision for our core team, the community, and donors, but all glory belongs to the triune Lord who brought it to pass.

Why a Community Development Center (CDC)?

Hindsight is 20-20, but if I had to start afresh in seeding a spiritual community, I would probably begin with a Community Development Center; either creating one or partnering with an existing one. Why? Sadly, most churches have become inward-focused and in the eyes of the community, a spiritual club only interested in providing spiritual help. In contrast, a CDC is viewed as outwardly focused and viewed as “being for” the community at large, providing holistic service.

We were *very careful* to consult with the indigenous neighborhood stakeholders to determine exactly what kind of CDC to build. It consisted of two gymnasiums, a commercial kitchen, a large multipurpose dining room, a separate educational classroom wing, a playground, and administrative offices. We named our building the Forge for Families, and it cost \$6.4 million in 2009. It was completely constructed with *no debt*.

How are you being creative for the 21st century?

To our foreparents’ credit, they created ministry models that fit their context in the 19th and 20th centuries. They were creative in establishing the church as the educational center for literacy because segregation forbade them from going to white schools. They were also creative in establishing the church as a civic force for civil rights. Today these entities are less needed, and a new cadre of initiatives needs to be created to reach a new generation.

For example, in 2006 someone in our church launched a toy store for Christmas. Instead of asking our suburban partners to buy gifts and bring them to us to distribute, we asked them to buy gifts so that parents could shop and purchase toys for their children at a deep discount. This approach treated parents with more dignity as well as empowered them in the eyes of their children.

Another example was members creating other electives to supplement literacy programs (which remain a great need in under-resourced communities), such as a safe place for sports, basic workforce skill training, and the arts. Kids and adults in 2023 are far less biblically literate, and thus we need innovative ways to modernize methods while maintaining the core of the gospel message.

Does your funding model need to change?

Do not impose a typical 3-year suburban church plant funding model on churches in under-served areas. Because of the geographical location and socio-economic class of these church-plants, a three-year funding cycle is a recipe for failure. It will take longer for this type of congregation to become self-contained or particularized; the average length is 7-10 years. This is a challenge to patrons, partners, or parents of seeding churches in distressed communities.

May the head of the church make His will perspicuous for the sake of the kingdom and the glory of the High King.



Part IV: The Church Planting Pastor

Chapter 8: Recruiting a Church Planter



Dave Strunk, Planting Pastor, Church of the Redeemer (Tennessee)

There is not a one-size-fits-all approach to church planting, which means there isn't a one-size-fits-all approach to the profile of a church planter. Nevertheless, some general questions will help find someone with the call of church planting.

Do they love Jesus?

Do they want to hear from Him, spend time with Him, and rely on Him?

Do they love the church?

Many planters start with an unhealthy (and often ungodly) disdain for the local church, thinking they can “do it better.” An entrepreneurial spirit and desire to start something new is a good thing (see below), but prideful comparison is not.

Is their call to pastoral ministry affirmed by close friends and family?

This can be found out by multiple reference checks early in a search process.

Do they love lost people, and prioritize them in their life and schedule?

A lot of planters are excited to start a new church to fulfill their sense of calling, which can be a selfish motivation and be at odds with wanting lost people to come to know Jesus.

Can they communicate the gospel clearly to non-Christians and Christians at the same time, addressing their deeper heart concerns?

A skilled, or growing, church planter will be able to do this and will want to get better at it.

Have they ever started something before, and did it succeed?

Maybe it was a Bible study, maybe it was a small business; regardless, church planters will have an obvious – or perhaps *latent* – ability to start new things. Do not ask someone to be a church planter if they've never started something new before.

Where do you find a church planter?

So, how can you find a person like the ideal church planter outlined above? In general, someone ready to plant a church does not come straight out of college or seminary (if under 30 years old), because some of the attributes listed above (like communication and starting new things) require a bit of seasoning in someone's vocational life. Below are some places you will generally find church planters ready to go:

Residencies

There are many churches and church planting networks that offer 1- or 2-year residencies. Once complete, the residents are encouraged to strike out on their own to plant a church or find a network of churches that will help them plant. The EPC has many of these, as does the PCA, Acts 29, and several other regional networks.

Associate/Assistant Pastor

Much of the time, the profile of a church planter fits comes from someone who has been in a healthy mother church as an associate or assistant pastor and has demonstrated the ability to start new things.

Campus Ministry Leaders

Pastors/Directors who have led in college ministry settings usually have a heart for the lost and an ability to communicate to a post-Christian world. Look for leaders ready for a vocational shift in CCO, Cru, Intervarsity, RUF, and Campus Outreach. Creating relational networks in the campuses close to you can place you directly in the pipeline of potential quality candidates who are ready for a career change into church planting.

Networking

Make cross-denominational and cross-network connections to field potential candidates. Find connections in the leadership or practical ministry faculty of your closest Christian colleges and seminaries. Continue to ask questions of the people who are mentoring younger leaders. Train those people yourselves or start your own residency!

Internet

Posting available jobs – church planters, residents, etc. – on available ministry websites will help you find applicants: epc.org, ministryjobs.com, indeed.com, and some Reformed seminary websites when appropriate.

Chapter 9: Church Planter Assessment



Mike Moses, Lake Forest family of churches (North Carolina)

Like a music minister without pitch, like a youth minister who is tone-deaf to teenagers, so is a Church Planting Pastor without the spiritual and natural gifts of entrepreneurship, vision-casting capacity, and ownership of the ministry.

Church planting is currently “in fashion” in some circles as a ministerial calling. However, it must not be allowed to become a calling of choice – it is a calling according to giftedness, a demonstrated track record, and a burning burden of a vision of a new, fresh version of the Bride of Christ (the church).

“Currently the national average of church starts resulting in a successful plant is only 35%. Candidates who attend (an) Assessment Center and follow through with the conditions and recommendations are experiencing a success rate of over 85%.”

–Ed Stetzer and Daniel Im⁶

After tall steeple mainline churches shut down church planting in the ‘40s and ‘50s, denominations and associations began again in the ‘60s, ‘70s, and ‘80s. During this time, a lot of energy, money, and relational capital was spent with disparate fruitfulness – that is, a lot of fruitless denominational money was allocated. The problem was acknowledged, new churches must be started, but how can we identify the pastors who are best suited to do so? From this dilemma, the “Ridley Behavioral Assessment” was born.

Church planting pastors were submitted to questionnaires and examinations pre- and post-planting of a church. What emerged were clear qualities of those gifted to plant fruitful churches. Below are the 13 behavioral assessments used then and today (the top six are generally considered “knockout out qualities”). The EPC recommends that churches only support church plants led by pastors who have been approved and affirmed by the assessment process.

1. Visioning capacity
2. Intrinsically motivated
3. Creates ownership
4. Relates well to the unchurched
5. Spousal cooperation

6. Relational
7. Committed to church growth
8. Responsive to community
9. Uses other's gifts
10. Flexible and adaptable
11. Builds group cohesion
12. Resilient
13. Exercises faith in calling and God

Church Planters Assessment is now a well-established process that the EPC recommends every church planting candidate go through. While there are several different ways this assessment is delivered, each case can be evaluated through all 13 church planting pastor behaviors/competencies. Recognizing that the Spirit is inspiring are various models and modes of new churches, this process can be modified for those called to plant house, dinner, or otherwise non-standard churches.

Church planting is a wonderful calling in the Kingdom of God. However, it is neither the best nor the only calling. Only those uniquely gifted, qualified, and burdened should become a church planter. It is incumbent upon every church called to become a multiplying church to take this dynamic of assessment and calling seriously.

Chapter 10: Every Planter Needs a Church Planting Coach



Richard Rieves, South Region Church Planting Coordinator

Church planting is risky, but risk can be managed. Businesses manage risk all the time. Trained experts spend their time employing their expertise to ensure risk is managed and catastrophe is avoided. Unfortunately, the Church has not followed suit when it comes to planting churches. We have sent out planters with planters out with little or no support and training, hoping their gut will guide them to success. Some experience success, though others do not.

Considering the amount of money churches and individuals invest in church plants and planters during their start-up season, it makes little sense not to invest in resources proven to increase success rates significantly. Coaching – rather, good coaching – does just that.

Every planter should have one coach at minimum. For best practice, a planter should be in a network that provides more than one-on-one coaching, such as cohort learning and regular training. A network's fundamental benefit is community. Coaching expands the planter's community to a small degree, but being connected to other planters in a communal learning environment is irreplaceable. Providing coaching without community can affirm a planter's instinct to "go it alone," and, as we all know, nothing good happens in isolation.

Effective coaching, within the framework of training and community, has proven to be very beneficial.

Soul Care

Pastors pastor, but who pastors the pastor? As of March 2022, 42% of pastors considered quitting full-time ministry the previous year.⁷ The primary reasons were isolation and stress. Few pastoral roles in Jesus' church are more naturally isolating than church planting; therefore, the chief job of a church planting coach is to pastor the heart, soul, and mind of the planter and the planter's spouse.

Unfortunately, overwhelming stress or burnout is often discovered too late. Coaching allows for regular check-ins meant to encourage and detect possible land minds before it's too late.

Both Pastor and Spouse

Keeping the planter and spouse healthy is mission-critical. The stress of planting puts pressure on the planter's marriage, exposing inevitable cracks and holes. To have a coach with a pastoral heart, and experience to speak into the marriage and/or recommend counseling is vital to the planter's overall health and success.

I have utilized the Sonship discipleship tool as my primary tool for soul care in my coaching. This tool is good at exposing just how a couple is or is not practically living out of the gospel in their work in the plant, their marriage, parenting, and all of life, and is good at calling

them back to repentance and faith. Every believer has the tendency to rely on their gifts instead of depending upon the spirit of Christ and God's love, faithfulness, and gospel promises. Because of the pressure to "succeed" and the fear of "failure," church planters are especially prone to this, and those who struggle need to be called back to the freedom of God's love as sons and daughters.

A Strategic Plan

As obvious as it may sound, a plan for a church plant is vital for its success. When plants fail, it is often the case that the planter either possessed a faulty plan or didn't follow the plan they previously made – sometimes, a planter may not have any plan at all. A good coach helps a planter think through and develop a plan that can set the church up for success.

It may seem far-fetched that a planter would go into the field without a well-formed plan, but it is more common than you would think. Though there are many reasons that a plant can fail, overconfidence and inexperience are at the root of most. Church planters need to possess a healthy level of confidence, of course, but there is a difference between confidence and pride. A planter's receptiveness to learning from and depending upon a coach's ability to assist in creating an effective plan is an early indicator of the planter's attitude, and subsequently, the future effectiveness of the plant.

A strategic planning process will result in a plan that the planter can follow as a guide. That plan will have indicators and checkpoints that must be met before moving on to the next phase, as opposed to hard deadlines (though dates are certainly needed in a good plan as well). In a profession that doesn't always provide tangible measurements of success, it is important to allow for defined moments of thanksgiving and praise and/or the opportunity for additional help if needed.

Accountability

A good plan is only as good as its implementation. A coach provides someone to monitor the planter's progress in the context of their plan, providing both encouragement and correction. There are seasons to most church plants; there are times when it seems as if nothing is being accomplished at all and seasons of highly visible results. A coach discerns when a planter needs to be encouraged, or when a planter has lost focus and needs help to get back on track.

I've seen many planters become discouraged for seemingly no reason, only to find out they hadn't taken a day off in weeks. In cases like these, correction is needed quickly. Others simply get distracted by urgency and need reminding of the strategic plan rather than the needs of the moment. A coach provides these perspectives.

No plan (other than God's) is perfect. A coach helps to make inevitable alterations to the planter's plan. Some planters tend to be too eager to change their plan, while some are too stubbornly committed. A coach walks a planter through the discernment of change. A coach also helps a planter discern if any pushback from the core team has merit. Just like planters, core team members have opinions of their own that can be beneficial. Many assume the principles used in a professional context relate directly to a church plant. While some business or leadership principles directly transfer, some do not; a coach helps to identify the difference.

A Safe Space to Process

The reality of church planting is that isolation can directly relate to the challenges a planter faces. As such, having a coach who has planted before can be a safe person to process ideas, feelings, or misgivings with. I have had many planters express how helpful and encouraging it is to know they are being heard by someone who understands what they are trying to do.

A good coach will also focus on being a safe space for the planter's spouse. Historically, spouses have not had access to who can knowledgeably speak into their context. Spouses have suffered in silence, and their burnout rate is high. What a spouse does when they are burned out impacts the marriage and can be a contributing factor to a planter quitting the work.

Coaches are an essential element to the success of a plant. A planter and their governing team should be committed to finding a coach if they are not already part of a network; every planter needs a coach.

Chapter 11: Planter Care



Cron and Elizabeth Gibson, Northampton Church Planting Network

The work of church planting is a deeply personal and relational journey of faith for the planter and the planter's family. Planters are busy sowing seeds for Gospel-centered relationships and live with a tension between the needs for organizational growth and relational care for people.

Planters and their families need to be seen and cared for as people, not as organizational leaders. Church planters are typically entrepreneurs at heart: they are passionate about building something new. Planter and spouse are both shaped by a call from God and a deep commitment to care well for people. These two forces, combined with the drive of the entrepreneur, can create tremendous and often unacknowledged internal pressure to perform, to hit goals, or simply to succeed.

Care for planters and their families starts with an effective assessment of the planter, the stability of their marriage, and a confirmation of a shared calling into the work. Trained assessors help the couple understand their strengths and weaknesses, identify blind spots, and acknowledge how the stress of planting will impact their marriage. Effective assessment also provides skills in team building, evangelism, and Gospel-centered preaching, as well as tailoring the care for both planter and spouse. Assessment uncovers distress, trauma, and unresolved issues that can stall or stop the work of the church plant.

There are practical solutions to help care for planters and their families. If you are a part of the planter's oversight team, pursue them as *people*. Invite them over for dinner, play with their children, and engage the planter's spouse in a friendship. Consider adding to the oversight team a seasoned ministry couple with shepherding gifts who are willing to share their challenges and failures with the planting couple. Vulnerable engagement from a couple like this may mediate how the pressure of planting impacts a relationship.

When you meet with the planter, ask them about their vision and mission. Take the time to understand the planter and the "why" of their vision. What parts of the planter's story have informed why and how they are planting a church? In other words, engage with them on a personal level, not as organizational managers!

The church plant budget should include care and support for the planter and spouse. This includes counseling, coaching, and spiritual direction for both! If hospitality is a key vehicle for the plant, house cleaning can be put into the budget to free up the planter's spouse to engage in the work. Care for the marriage should also be reflected in the budget; for example, childcare for date nights, Mother's Day Out, or childcare so that the spouse can be as involved as desired in the ministry.

The entrepreneurial drive comes with its own set of challenges. This can manifest as difficulty taking time off, or resistance to taking meaningful vacations out of the uncertainty that their "baby" will be okay while they're gone. It is necessary to remind the planter that their

personal life matters, and that their family and church depend on them to be emotionally healthy. Remember that Jesus rested; He walked away from demands to tend to His own needs. Provide accountability for the planter to take days off, engage family and friends, and, when needed, just take a nap!

The most important thing to remember is that the most common form of discouragement planters experience is difficulty separating their worth from the success of the church plant. Questions, metrics, and expectations from overseers that do not consider the planter's vision, mission, and methodology can be crushing.

Relational pursuit is the critical foundation for any oversight. The planter needs to be reminded that they matter as people, not as producers of outcomes beyond their control.



Part V: Further Considerations

Chapter 12: Hospitality



Jim Holland, Planting Pastor St. Patrick's Church (Tennessee)

I have planted a couple of churches throughout my career, and a few years ago, my church launched two church plants with men from within our body. One of those men had just moved into the field when I got a text: he was asking me to run interference for him with his oversight group about an expense he was about to make. Curious, I asked him what the expense was that it might need my influence. He sent back a picture of a large grill that would feed a host of people; it was on wheels so that a mobile feast was possible (and it was beautiful!). It was a costly expense, but I told him I would make sure it was covered if any questions arose.

My friend's instincts were correct. If you want to plant a church, hospitality is key. After all, hospitality is at the heart of gathering people; it's even better if you cook delicious food! When you plant a church, you usually move into a field of ministry among strangers. You have just a few years to turn these strangers into friends of yourself, your vision, and Jesus.

Jesus had three years to change the world, and what did he do? He ate meals with people. As Luke's Gospel says, "The Son of Man came eating and drinking" (Luke 7:34). Robert Karris summarizes, "[i]n Luke's Gospel Jesus is either going to a meal, at a meal, or coming from a meal."⁸

Nothing communicates welcome and belonging like food and conversation served to people with whom you've had little or no connection until recently. People may not show up to your launch party, but they will show up at your home! In the Bible, hospitality is both subversive and missional. We might say it is the centerpiece of the mission.

In Greek, the word "hospitality" is *philoxenia*. It combines the word meaning love and affection for people who are kin or connected by faith (*phileo*) with the word for stranger (*xenos*). This has perhaps never been needed more than in today's America. It seems that we are a nation of widows and orphans – that is, people who are strangers.

It's also true globally. Recent studies suggest that 40% of the world's population feels lonely. In 2018, the situation was such that Prime Minister Theresa May appointed a Ministry of Loneliness. In our American context, Surgeon General Vivek Murthy published an advisory identifying loneliness as a new public health epidemic, in which he states “[o]ur epidemic of loneliness and isolation has been an underappreciated public health crisis that has harmed individual and societal health.”⁹

We might say this is the logical end of “expressive individualism,” or perhaps the bitter fruit of social media, or any other number of cultural practices that have deformed us as human beings. Regardless, we should emphasize that turning lonely strangers into friends by offering them a seat at the table is a natural way to offer love, care, and true connection.

In the Bible, from the Old Testament to the New, it seems God has a special regard for the lonely and for “strangers.” Who are these strangers? Christine Pohl asserts that strangers, “in the strict sense, are those who are disconnected from the basic relationships that give persons a secure place in the world. The most vulnerable strangers are detached from family, community, church, work, and polity.”¹⁰

Walter Brueggemann, a great Old Testament scholar, said it like this: “Strangers are people without a place.”¹¹ I like that summation because it is basic. If you are without a place, you have no family, no people you know — no place you belong.

In that sense, any time you are new in a place where other people know and are known, you are a stranger. We all know and experience at times what it feels like to be a “stranger.” Even in the context of my ministry in suburbia, where people have money and status, most are transplants and have no family connections that give them a sense of belonging. They are thus rootless and placeless, lacking the deep connections to other people that we were built for.

Hospitality, then, is at the heart of the person of God and the mission of God. When we welcome people into our homes or our community, we create space and time to be present with others and to see them – not as a number on a friend list, or an image we see on a screen, but face to face. We meet, greet, and serve them and, hopefully, build a friendship. We cannot claim to love people in the abstract. Love is always particular and personal. It takes time, and that is why meals around a table are places where the lonely cease to be lonely, strangers become friends, and outsiders are invited in.

This is exactly how God finds each of us – outsiders from his community of love, strangers to his grace, and alienated from him by our sin. And God invites us as strangers and enemies and, in pure grace, accepts us because of what Jesus has done for us. He offers us a seat at His table. We not only get Jesus but a whole family in which to belong.

We are never more like God than when we open our homes and offer strangers the gift of friendship. There has perhaps never been a day when hospitality is so essential in planting churches.

When I first started planting churches, all our evangelism was propositional because most people believed in a moral framework and felt guilty. Thus, we could present the reason the atonement of Jesus made sense and was the answer to their deepest need. That day is past.

As Charles Taylor says in his book, *A Secular Age*, people now live in the “immanent frame;”¹² that is, nothing means anything, there is no revelation, and we make it up as we go.

How do you interest people in the gospel, people who don’t believe in God or even a fixed morality, without the same shared assumptions about life? You show them a better story! You invite them into a community that makes room and helps them to belong – a community of people committed to accepting strangers as God accepted them. This is the perfect place to deconstruct the liturgies of the world and offer them the hope of the gospel.

It is crucial in present-day evangelism to give people a place of belonging – a place that, over time, begins to feel like family, a place where they become curious about Jesus because they see us savoring his goodness. An associate of mine was with a cohort of EPC ministers who received a grant to study the elements of the Eucharist and the art of hospitality. They were recently “studying” in Birmingham, Alabama, at a fabulous restaurant; as they talked over wine and bread about the magic of food, a woman at the next table leaned over and asked, “Excuse me, are you food and wine critics? *I caught you savoring.*”

That is what hospitality does. Those on the outside are invited in to catch us savoring each other and Jesus. So, when my friend wanted to buy a grill to start his church plant, there was no hesitation. He had read both the Bible and our cultural moment correctly. It doesn’t take a lot of skill to practice hospitality. All you need is an open heart and an open home. You do not have to be an extrovert or have the sensibilities of *Garden and Gun*.

Just start where St. Brigit started – with prayer. St. Brigit was a fifth-century Irish Saint known for her hospitality, was the daughter of a pagan chieftain, and was a stubborn unbeliever until she converted. She wrote a prayer that is so concrete, so robust, and says the exact right things over a meal. We ought to pray like this at all our gathered and scattered meals in our new church plants, that God would make real what we pray:

*I should like a great lake of finest ale, for the King of Kings
I should like a table of the choicest food, for the family of heaven.
Let the ale be made from the fruits of faith, and the food be forgiving love.
I should welcome the poor to my feast, for they are God’s children.
I should welcome the sick to my feast, for they are God’s joy.
Let the poor sit with Jesus at the highest place, and the sick dance with the angels.
God bless the poor, God bless the sick, and bless our human race.
God bless our food, God bless our drink, all homes, O God, embrace.*

After prayer, you must plan. Unless you plan to open your home, you never will. Hospitality takes margins. You must make room in your life for strangers and guests. You must also be realistic. The goal of hospitality is not to save anyone; only God can do that. Your goal is to be Jesus to people and in doing so, know that you will be, at times, used and abused – and that sharing the word of God is worth it.

Yes: in church planting, hospitality is certainly where you must start!

Chapter 13: What Every EPC Church Planter Needs



Rev. Megan Hackman, Kitsap House Church Planting Pastor

As a church-planter who was sent from a parent church and maintained a healthy, trust-filled relationship (and to stretch the metaphor, has managed to graduate), here is what I can offer as some of the back-and-forth that made those launching years a success:

This is what we need, in somewhat chronological order:

(Release a) Person with Pay

Unabashedly, your church planter needs a living wage for a couple of years to allow them to live incarnationally in a new community. You might hope they can get by with a shoestring budget and a lower salary, but that does not match up to the need. The planter will be spending more on gas and setting up a home – and no one is picking up the coffee tab for them!

Release this person from the obligations they have to the mother church as much as possible (though inviting them to staff retreats and sermon planning may be life-giving) and set them up financially to be rooted in a new place.

Pitch

Here's where the mutual benefits begin: allow the lead a chance to hone their vision by sharing their pitch – during a sermon, announcements, borrowing your video team, on a website, etc. Not only will they learn to articulate what they're doing and why but expect God to be moving in those who are listening!

You can hope for a couple of responses: first, people catch a vision for living relationally and sharing Jesus in their own lives. The church planter is likely not doing anything someone in the pews couldn't do – making connections, praying for people, identifying ways the Gospel has yet to penetrate a community, and getting to the work of incarnating the Kingdom. This missional vision can multiply at home, too. People can also sense a call to join the planting team!

Prayer

Encourage your planter to use the pitch as an opportunity to raise up a prayer team. We asked people to set an alarm to pray at 10:10 on Thursdays (from John 10:10) and to join an email list that we still send out every Thursday at 10:00.

I cannot overstate the value of this prayer team. We started our plant with five months of weekly prayer in the neighborhood. Each week had me battling something significant, health-wise. A mentor advised me, "You think you plant in neutral territory; you're in occupied territory [spiritually]. You need to stop acting like a solo spying out the land and raise a

prayer army to come with you.” Thursdays have continued to be a “break-through day” of sorts. I’m not surprised that significant conversations, decisions, and struggles happen when 400+ people are joined in prayer.

Presence

Planters need people from the parent church who are invested enough in the plant to be “in the neighborhood.” Paul wrote about how significant it was when Epaphroditus came to visit or when Barnabas called for Saul’s help for a season. God wired us with this need.

For this reason, I strongly encourage the parent church to consider planting in a community where they already have some natural relational flow. Is there a town where a lot of students go to college that needs a missional church? Part of town where your congregation works but doesn’t yet live? Consider relational proximity as a need of your planter.

People

A church plant needs so many people. I was encouraged recently to read that in the church-planting movement in Ireland in the fifth century, they planted an entire community of people. George Hunter says this: “Priests, teachers, scholars, craftsmen, artists, cooks, farmers, families, and children, as well as monks and/or nuns-- all under the leadership of a lay abbot of abbess-- populated the communities. They had little use for more than a handful of ordained priests, or people seeking ordination; they were essentially lay movements.”¹³

People can be a great gift from the parent church. Our sending church lent us our first elders and interns. Some of the staff teams donated their working hours, especially in the realms of human resources, finance, facilities, and database management. Depending on the skill set of the planter, the best support might be to send your best worship leader, former chair of the Session, tech support, etc., to supply skills temporarily or seasonally.

Our early childhood lead left a volunteer position at the sending church to join us; two years later, trained and equipped in leadership and mission, she and her whole family decided they wanted to live more intentionally with and for their neighbors which meant returning to the church. Now she leads a preschool room and her whole family is engaged. Possessiveness is not an option in God’s church! We belong to one another and to the Church. So, both planter and parent must be willing and joyful to work together in season and receive and release as God directs.

My joy in planting has been found in people, so allow me to spark your imagination in a few other ways people might participate in church planting between the parent and daughter church. An elder served simultaneously on the session of the mother church *and* the commissioned session of the church plant, providing a vital communication link.

Two families with construction and design skills continued worshipping in the parent church while setting up our ministry residence and offices. A banker who worships at the parent church works in the vicinity of the church plant; his twenty-plus years of business acumen and connections have helped us significantly in our need for Sunday morning worship locations. Small groups provided weekly meals to the church plant’s local nonprofit, serving

teens experiencing homelessness. People filled in slots for a week of 24/7 prayer. A small group of high schoolers was sent to help us launch Alpha Youth. And on and on it goes...

Patience

A final resource is a fruit that I suspect God will grow in all parties involved because of stepping into church planting: the fruit of patience. I have found this to grow in the soil of disappointment, difficulty, and unprecedented challenges. Paul spent two weeks helping establish a church in one city and two years in another. Each church and planter will have their own personality and timeline. Please encourage the growth of this vital fruit.

Thank you for considering being a part of the church planting process! Remember, once you have launched a student off to college, you relationally keep tabs on and allow your focus to remain on your college students; *and yet*, you don't move in next door. Allow your planter to establish the community that you are hoping they will! And don't be a stranger – once a parent, always a parent.

Chapter 14: Church Planting Launch Indicators



Dr. Hunter M. Bailey, Heartland Regional Church Planting Director

“Aim at nothing, and you’ll hit it every time!” This leadership adage is well-worn for good reason, and it holds in church planting. Unfortunately, it’s all too common to hear of church planters struggling through the early years of planting, being tossed to and fro by every promising ministry opportunity and every new congregant with a persuasive personality and lots of ideas. Chasing unplanned opportunities or trying the latest, greatest idea of enthusiastic members is a recipe for burnout, not part of a proper plan for birthing a healthy new congregation.

It’s tragic but not unheard of for church planters to look up three or four years into their plants and think to themselves, “What am I doing?! How did I get here? Is this the church that I wanted to plant? Do I even like the church I now pastor?” These types of sentiments are frequently punctuated by a church planter’s exhaustion and a young congregation’s confusion. This invites fracture and can lead to costly missional stagnation and even threatens the plant’s vitality.

So, what’s the alternative? *Is* there an alternative? Isn’t “finding your way” just part of the risky nature of entrepreneurial ministry? It doesn’t have to be. There’s a better, healthier, and more sustainable way that alleviates mission drift and provides guidance and critical guardrails for both the planter and a young congregation.

Launch indicators serve as defined developmental goals, identified by the planter and regularly communicated to launch team members. They are measurable. They are not secrets but signposts, like strategically placed mile markers along the arduous journey to begin a new congregation. Their purpose is to take much of the guesswork out of early directional decisions and to offer missional accountability.

Furthermore, launch indicators should not be relegated to the private, wishful ambitions of a planter. They must be prayed over, crafted, honed, and conveyed to all the members of the launch team. Planters must externalize launch indicators so that new team members might adopt and internalize them.

Planting is full of countless micro-decisions that greatly impact the long-term trajectory and ultimately the vitality of a plant. Accordingly, planters need more than a general sense of where they hope to end up. They need a well-defined roadmap that includes more than the starting line and a vague notion of success.

When thinking of a roadmap, imagine the archetypal pirate’s map: “X” marks the spot at the end of a journey, but you’ll never make it to the treasure if you don’t closely follow the dotted line through each highlighted monument and obstacle. Launch indicators are these points along the planting path, providing reassurance to the planter and the launch team that they are on the right track, that they’re headed in the right direction, and that one day they’ll more fully embody the church they feel called to plant. Launch indicators are the carefully

developed macro-markers that govern the many micro-decisions a planter and the young congregation will face.

Church planting demands lots of prayer and an openhanded posture. There are many unpredictable aspects of planting. Nevertheless, the need for flexibility and adaptability doesn't mean that the church planter is simply flying by the seat of his pants. It's not enough to "go with your gut" or simply rely on ministry intuition.

Why? Planting involves establishing sustainable patterns that will not only serve the first 30 people who join the team but also the next 300 who will be welcomed years down the road. A planter's intuition plays a vital role in navigating the day-to-day circumstances and challenges of a young plant. However, simply being intuitive is an insufficient plan when a leading growing group of people.

Without clarity, a planter fosters an unhealthy dependence upon themselves, forcing every ministry decision and action to flow through their hands. This is not the vision the Apostle Paul outlines in Ephesians 4:11-12, which reads, "And He [God] gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ..."

Accordingly, one of the chief roles of the planter is that of an "equipper." A planter multiplies their gospel influence, not by driving all ministry through themselves, being limited by their time and talents, but through their work to build up and train others in ministry. A planter is a servant-hearted servant producer.

Launch indicators are a helpful tool to foster ministry ownership of every team member. Each team member knows "who we are," and therefore, is better able to be extenders of ministry rather than simply recipients of the planter's ministry. Launch indicators are not merely goals for the planter but for the entire team. They provide a shared language and framework for discussions, enabling the congregation to engage in meaningful dialogue and take collective responsibility for the church's progress. Each member of the team, led by the planter, is praying and serving in aspiration of reaching these goals.

How does a planter develop launch indicators? Launch indicators are born out of a combination of a planter's sense of call, their specific spiritual gifts, the demographics of the target community, and the core values that will define the gospel culture or "personality" of a plant. Given this complexity, it's no wonder the formation of simple and clear launch indicators is a painstaking process of prayerful deliberation and distillation.

This is best done with the assistance of a church planting coach and in conjunction with other seasoned planters. The more work a planter puts in on the front end refining their launch indicators the more likely each member of the team will share and work towards a cohesive vision of the church.

Launch indicators are rooted in the vision and core values of the church. Accordingly, churches with different types of "personalities" and ministry focus will necessarily need distinct launch indicators. For example, a church plant focused on community development and the shared experiences of daily life together might identify the need for ten trained "home group" leaders as a launch indicator.

Alternatively, for a church that highly values cultural transformation and social justice, it might be strategic to develop partnerships with five influential non-profits that are already involved in the target area. Another church might emphasize the importance of personal and communal evangelism. This planter might determine that every member of the launch team must be trained in personal evangelism and be willing to host an evangelistic Bible study with their co-workers or neighbors. If a church aims to reach a lot of young families, it might be appropriate to have a set of trained volunteers and a predetermined service rotation to assist with children's discipleship.

Launch indicators are not "one size fits all." They flow from the character and core values of the would-be church, serving to tether the planter and the launch team to their ministry focus. Launch indicators provide direction and guard against drift. By setting specific and measurable launch indicators, the planter and congregation can identify areas of strength and areas that require improvement, allowing the church to make necessary adjustments along the planting journey.

Finally, launch indicators, not only encourage a cohesive vision and provide a metric for accountability but also nurture celebration. God's grace is on the move in this world. He has never given up on His original plan to spread His glory. Church planting functions like the tip of the spear of the movement of God's grace to the ends of the earth. Indeed, the ministry of Jesus is necessarily full of suffering, yet this does not negate God's call to rejoice. Church planting is difficult work. It's costly.

Nevertheless, God is busy renewing and restoring all things. Developing measurable goals in ministry is not a nod to legalism or a sign that the planter has taken a performance-driven posture. The fruits of ministry are evidence of God's faithfulness. Launch indicators supply a mirror to better reflect on God's active mercy in the world and cultivate a heart of worship in His people.

God knows our forgetfulness, our tendencies to get busy in ministry, and our failure to reflect. That's why the Bible so often calls us to "remember." Launch indicators inspire planters and their congregations to "remember," to savor the work of our Savior.

Take aim! Faithfully focus! Pray and plan! Be strategic and stay the course! Then, take time to remember, taste and see the good fruit that the Lord bears through your labors. He is at work! His grace is on the move!

Chapter 15: The Role of a Launch Team



Dr. Hunter M. Bailey, Heartland Regional Church Planting Director

“Start in the way that you will go!” When I began to plant Christ Community Church in Fayetteville, Arkansas, I would tell people that planting a church involves not only making directional decisions for the present group of people but also keeping in view the church we desired to be 10 years, even 30 years down the road. Strategic planting meant keeping an eye on and considering a plan of how to care for all three of these “congregations” at once. I knew that the decisions we made in the early stages of our plant would either create future ministry obstacles or engender redemptive routines. They would either foster the type of gospel ethos we desire or invite chaos.

The value of a strategic plan holds, not only concerning programming but more importantly with people. The church is first and foremost people, a community called together in Christ. However, simply gathering people with an invitation to be a part of a new church doesn't necessarily mean that you'll be heading in the right direction, or that you'll inevitably end up becoming the church you desire to be. The default is missional drift.

The Bible frequently refers to God's people as sheep, and there's good reason. We're vulnerable outside of the protective care of our Shepherd. We're more fearful than faithful. We're prone to wander. We get overwhelmed and lost in the busyness of the day-to-day. We become so focused on all our immediate felt needs that we lose sight of the dangers ahead.

Accordingly, the role of the church planter is not simply to gather people but to guide a young congregation. It's a great temptation for all planters to become preoccupied with collecting enough people to constitute a critical mass that proper preparation is neglected. The vocabulary of “launch team” implies both intentional direction and increasing momentum. Mission and vision are not intuitive. So, both the missional direction and the growing energy to birth a new congregation must be painstakingly pursued. A launch team is created, not merely collected.

A launch team represents a planter's first group of disciples. They are invited in on the ground floor, at the foundational level. This team plays a vital role in moving a church plant from the conceptual to the actual. They serve as the first lay leadership. They model for future members, not just what it means to follow Jesus in general, but what it entails to belong to this particular body with its unique vision.

Lord willing, many more will follow this first group, but the special nature of these men and women in the life of a new plant demands special attention and unique care. In this section, we will explore several of the key characteristics involved in recruiting and cultivating a healthy launch team.

Top of the list of characteristics that ought to be present in a launch team member is missional alignment. All Christian churches include common forms of ministry: preaching, teaching, prayer, counseling, praise, sacraments, etc. These represent critical tools that God

offers His people for their growth in grace, their repentance, and their comfort in His love and faithfulness.

Nevertheless, reliance upon these tools without clarity around a particular vision and set of core values is like hiring a group of people to build a house with a pile of hammers and nails but with no blueprints. A church planter is an architect. Through prayer, discernment, and hopefully the help of a wise coach, the planter refines the picture and the plan for the plant long before picking up any tools and certainly before recruiting others to come and labor to build the church.

Recruiting launch team members who express deep missional alignment will safeguard the fragile body from ministry drift and will strengthen the core culture of the church. It's important to note that the energy for something new can often mimic missional alignment. Excitement for being included on a launch team is not a substitute for true engagement with the vision.

Planters must recruit launch team members who are not merely enthusiastic but who are willing to serve as ambassadors for this new mission. Planters must be careful not to fall into the temptation to be flattered by someone's interest in their church and overlook an underlying motive that might surface later.

For example, church plants often attract "church hoppers," folks who bounce from congregation to congregation in search of the ideal church. If a planter ignores the pattern in this individual or couple, these types of people will likely start strong and fade when the inevitable let-down comes.

Another type of person who might initially seem like a good fit for a launch team but probably shouldn't be included until post-launch is the person who is interested in being a part of the plant out of convenience over conviction. Certainly, things like location, programming, and worship style impact some people's attraction to a new church, but to be a launch team member requires deeper philosophical and theological buy-in. Those who arrive at the church by convenience will most likely "conveniently" leave in due time.

One final example of someone who might be mistakenly invited onto a launch team is the "wounded rebounder." If you follow Jesus, He promises all of us that we will suffer. We will all be wounded, and oftentimes, sadly, this comes at the hands of Christians. Nevertheless, wounds need to be tended to before a person steps immediately into leadership. Otherwise, it's extremely tempting to be driven by reaction and overcorrection to the previous wrong.

American Christianity specifically is littered with church "splants," new churches that break away and offer an alternative to "that church." It is never healthy to plant a church in protest or reaction to a wound. Planters ought to welcome the wounded but must be tremendously discerning that prior healing has taken place before inviting those who have been injured by the church onto their launch team.

In addition to discerning the missional alignment and the deeper motives sparking their interest, a church planter ought to seek launch team members who are marked by a joy in serving rather than being served. Many Christians in America function from a consumer mindset. It might be the size of the church. It might be the opportunity to feel more

appreciated. It might even entail the desire to be a part of a church that more accurately reflects a particular theological system. These are not inconsequential factors in most people's desire to consider a church plant.

However, they should not be foundational either; this is the adage, "There's no 'I' in 'team.'" Surely, being a part of a church plant ought to benefit launch team members. However, the person who consistently filters ministry first and foremost through the question of "what do I get out of it?" will likely regularly default to being served rather than serving and will often be an early ministry distraction or drain at a time when reaching and serving demands the team's full attention.

The third and most critical characteristic of a spiritually healthy and mature launch team member is someone marked by humility. Humility necessarily includes flexibility and a grace-giving posture. This is an essential characteristic of the ideal launch team member concerning both the person's working dynamics with the planter and how the team member relates to future visitors to the church.

First, in connection to the planter, a humble team member serves with an open hand, not demanding their way, but willing to follow. A humble team member recognizes that church planting is not about personal agendas or ambitions but rather about serving God and the community.

In addition to fostering a positive relationship with the planter, a humble team member also cultivates unity, collaboration, and a willingness to put others' needs above one's own. A team marked by humility creates a culture of grace, love, and servant leadership, essential for attracting others to Christ and nurturing a healthy church community.

Recent statistics show that if a church plant reaches 250 people, then on average, over half of those people would not previously have been connected to a church in that community. The humble leader is a welcomer, not pretentious but accessible. This characteristic is indispensable as a church plant offers the most likely avenue to reach unchurched friends and neighbors.

The launch team functions as the prototype of the new church. Its members offer a crucial form of plausibility that a church plant will one day be what it says it will be. The planter guides this group. The planter cannot be the church alone. They need others to share the weight of the mission and to embody the diverse unity God intends the church to be.

In this communal witness, missional alignment is vital; nevertheless, a healthy church plant is more than vision. A launch team not only assists the planter in holding fast to the vision but also begins to embody the vision.

This demands that launch team members participate out of conviction not convenience. They are seasoned by the ministry scars they bear but not reactive in their wounds. They are humble, ready to welcome the weary in need of rest. Launch team members are ambassadors at the center of a young plant's story, embracing and embodying the core culture of this new community in Christ.

Conclusion

There is a wide range of details, priorities, and structures that need to be considered when taking the first steps in church multiplication through church planting. Our goal in this short work is to give you an overview of some common practices in church planting. Please remember, all church plants are unique, and have a good bit in common with one another. One size doesn't fit all, but if you grasp and apply the general principles, you are well on your way to effective church multiplication.

In the EPC, our national leadership provides support and expertise to empower local church planting. We do not plant churches nationally. Every EPC church plant is a local plant. Therefore, we are very intentional about helping local congregations and presbyteries have the necessary tools for effective, biblical church multiplication. We are not here to tell you what to do. We're here to help you follow God in his calling on you and your people when it comes to fulfilling the great commission of our Lord Jesus.

So, never be afraid to call and ask for help. We'll be with you every step of the way!

Only By His Grace,

Tom

Dr. Tom Ricks
National Director, EPC Church Planting
tom.ricks@epc.org



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