



The Mother Church and Church Planting

By J. D. Payne, Ph.D.

“Church planting is a normal and natural function for a church. If it does not take on this task, it has become rootbound.”

-- Jack Redford¹

One of my scariest memories as a child is from a time in which I was in a department store with my mother. In a town and day and age when it was safe for a child to be separated from his or her parent in a public setting, I remember venturing off to the toy section.

After some time, I returned to my point of departure, but was unable to locate my mother. I walked around the aisles and displays, but my search for her was to no avail. I wandered around the circular hanging racks of clothes, but no luck. Thinking that I would be able to find her in another location, I then ventured out from the clothing section and into the main walkway that circumscribed the heart of the store. “If I keep walking around the store,” I thought, “I’ll find her.” After a couple of laps, I was still unsuccessful in my quest.

Soon I began to question if she was still in the building. Despite the fact that I knew she would never leave me, my fears of loneliness and insecurity began to intensify. After wandering for what seemed to be an eternity, I finally located her and was extremely relieved and comforted by her presence. Needless to say, I did not venture off again during that shopping trip, and all of a sudden, remaining in the clothing section became very delightful experience for a young child!

Many church planters today feel very much like a child who has been separated from his or her mother. These church planters are strong believers and have a passion for church growth. They value the Church and offer praise for the Church. To them, the Body of Christ is very near and dear to their hearts. They find comfort in her presence.

Unfortunately, many feel as if the Church has given up on them. They look around and see so many churches across North America who have no desire to assist in church planting, yet have enormous resources (e.g., people, finances, buildings) that could be used for missions. While serving in the trenches, they hope to be supported and encouraged as the Church advances throughout the enemy's territory, but in reality, the Church many times abandons them to the frontlines.

In this article, I will address several issues related to a much neglected area of church planting. First, I will discuss three reasons why churches are not involved in church planting. Second, I will address this problem in light of the Scriptures and missiology. Third, I will list and respond to the most common objections to becoming a mother church. Fourth, I will discuss several ways in which established churches can become involved in church planting. Finally, I will address the significance of church leadership in the churches planting churches process.

Very few churches are involved in planting other churches. For example, in my denomination the Southern Baptist Convention, it is estimated that less than five percent of all of our churches have been involved in healthy church planting.² In my research, many people involved in church planting noted that the lack of involvement among

established churches was the third most critical issue in North American church planting.³

Based on my findings, the reasons for the lack of established churches being involved in church planting are at least three in number: 1) Ignorance, 2) Turfism, and 3) Lack of Kingdom Vision. It should not be assumed that this list is exhaustive, nor should it be assumed that the items comprising this list are mutually exclusive.

Ignorance

Many church planters are struggling with the fact that the majority of the churches across North America are ignorant to church planting. To these churches, church planting is a novelty, some kind of fad or program that deserves little attention. Ironically, these churches exist today because of the faithful church planters of yesteryear who carried the gospel into pioneer territories.

Many churches need to be educated about church planting in general. As I write this article, I am reminded of this fact from a recent experience. During a class discussion in my Introduction to Evangelism and Church Growth course, I was addressing the topic of church planting. After some time of lecture and dialogue, a student raised his hand and politely made the following statement, “I don’t mean to be rude, but what is church planting?” I had been speaking for about fifteen minutes on the topic and assumed that everyone knew what I was talking about. Remember, this student was not just any church member, but a leader, a seminary student. Also, this student was part of the Southern Baptist Convention, a denomination known for its emphasis on church planting!

A Vineyard church planter noted this issue when he commented:

There is a huge job that needs to be done in communicating the need for church planting to the whole church, leaders and lay alike. It seems that there are only small streams from different denominations/church movements that are really committed to church planting. If vital churches are going to be started, the whole church needs to be educated.⁴

One church planter in Ohio observed the problem in his area:

I have found out that there seems to be a lack of helping pastors and churches understand what is expected and the levels of sponsorship they can do for planters. This takes time and training and relationship building but may not be done until they are looking for a church to sponsor a planter.⁵

Unfortunately, few churches will make the time to become involved in church planting.

This planter went on to say that associational and state denominational leaders should consider making regular visits to churches to educate them regarding church planting.

One Southern Baptist church planter in Louisiana candidly stated: “One of the problems is a lack of education among SBC ministers and laity about church planting. The only thing they know about is church splits.”⁶

Turfism.

Turfism is the idea of a parish mentality that believes a certain geographical area is “our turf” and is off limits to any other group desiring to reach unbelievers. It is a gang mentality, diabolical in nature, stemming from pride, arrogance, and insecurity. It is amazing how many churches are turfish in nature, believing they will reach all of the people living around their parish, yet reaching few to none!

I recall a time when I came face to face with the turfism mentality. As a pastor for a rural church, I attended an associational meeting in which several pastors in our association participated. Following the meeting, a meal was served. I sat across the table from a well-respected, retired pastor in our association. We conversed for several moments. Since I was new in the area, this was our first encounter with one another.

After sometime he began to inquire about an Independent Baptist church that had been meeting across the street from our property. Soon his frustration toward this congregation became apparent and he exclaimed, “That’s just like those Independent Baptists! They always plant their churches just across the street from our Southern Baptist churches!” I did not respond, and continued to eat my dessert.

Sometime later, I attended another associational meeting. Following the meeting I happened to be seated across the table once again from this gentleman. The conversation was very pleasant as we conversed on a variety of issues. For some reason, the dialogue, once again, became focused on “those Independent Baptists across the street.” Again, in his frustration, he echoed the refrain that I had heard months before, “That’s just like those Independent Baptists! They always plant their churches just across the street from our Southern Baptist churches!” This time, however, I felt a response was necessary. The church that met across the street was reaching more people than we were reaching. Overall, I was impressed with their work.

In a very polite and respectful manner, I made the following comment much to his surprise: “As long as they are faithfully teaching the truth of the Word, and reaching people with the gospel, they are welcome to meet anywhere, even on our property.” He did not respond to my statement.

Turfism is extremely problematic in North American church planting. One church planter from Alabama stated, “Many North American churches find themselves competitive, seeing the ‘new church on the block’ as a threat and not a friend.”⁷ Another church planter from Florida noted that even among those desiring church planting, there is irony: “Many say, ‘Yes, we may need new churches, but not in my back yard.’”⁸ Even

in a pioneer area, a church planter encountered this issue. He wrote, “Many of the churches (even in Utah) are territorial.”⁹ One would believe that a church plant reaching a different demographic segment would be welcomed in a particular area, but a church planter in North Carolina observed that this assumption is not always the case: “We have also found local churches to be either indifferent or openly hostile to the idea of starting radically different churches in their own backyard.”¹⁰

Lack of Kingdom Vision

By far the most problematic reason that most churches are not involved in church planting is a lack of Kingdom vision. It could be argued that the prevalent turfism that exists throughout North America is in reality related to this reason.¹¹ Many churches have a myopic view of church growth. Growth has become limited to the expansion of one body, their local congregation. Note the numerous times this lack of vision is mentioned in the following emails that I received from the field.

“The number one issue that we face is pastors and churches that are unwilling to partner with a new church start. We need churches to provide not only some financial resources, but also churches that are willing to provide a core group of leaders either temporarily or permanently. We need more pastors with a Kingdom Vision, than we currently have.”

-- Church Planter from Georgia

“We have a shortage of churches with the vision to plant churches. In my eight years as a planter, it’s taken this long to get the small number of churches in my association even to consider the possibility. This is both a pastor and church related problem. I’m not alone in this assessment. Our churches 40 years ago had a vision to plant and reproduce. Churches now are in either survival mode or ‘ya’ll come here’ mode.”

-- Church Planter from Indiana

“First and foremost is the apathy and lack of understanding about church planting from existing churches. Most existing churches have a very poor understanding of the Kingdom of God, and His desire to see the Kingdom grow through the

multiplication of churches. Most existing churches (and pastors) are in a survival mindset and therefore have little interest for church planting.”

-- Church Planter from Kansas

“Most of the parish ministry professionals I know have no vision for leading their congregations to see the worth of church planting. Either they have prostituted themselves to the big-is-best philosophy of church growth (i.e., to the exclusion of planting), or are too timid and fearful of personal loss and pain to fight the tide of corporate-minded laypersons. We need some model visionaries to take the heat, to make the way plain, and give permission to these guys to take risks and put money into missions/church planting.”

-- Church Planter from Kentucky

Theological and Missiological Reflections

How do the Scriptures address this critical issue? The most common biblical example of a church involved in planting other churches was that of the Antioch church (c.f. Acts 13-28). In his popular work, *Planting Growing Churches for the Twenty-first Century*, Aubrey Malphurs, wrote:

Perhaps the best example of a church that reproduced itself through planting daughter churches was the church located in the city of Antioch in Syria. The missionary journeys described in the Book of Acts were vital to the spread of Christianity. However, these were largely church-planting ventures that came out of the church at Antioch.

Malphurs continued to note that this congregation was only following Jesus’ commands.

What’s important to observe here is how the early churches such as the one at Antioch understood the Great Commission mandate. Jesus said, “Make disciples!” The Antioch church accomplished this through sending out two missionary church planters who started a number of daughter churches in Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Achaia. What better way to spread the gospel than to plant a number of significant churches in the areas targeted for evangelism.¹²

It is because of the faithfulness of those first believers that the Church even exists in North America! Talmadge R. Amberson wrote, “The New Testament Christians went everywhere preaching the gospel and extending the call of God to the entire scope of human society, both the Jews and the Gentiles, the rich and the poor, the classes and the masses. As they did so, men and women responded, the kingdom of God grew, and local churches came into existence.”¹³ We are followers of Christ because of churches planting churches.

Earlier I mentioned that many churches have a myopic view of church growth.

Ralph Moore illustrated this fact when he stated:

Every mature organism is capable of reproducing itself. Some do it many times. But most congregations will never do this in their lifetimes. The reason is that pastors think the fruit of their ministry stops with making converts. Most think of multiplying the number of Christians in their community. But we reproduce in kind. Christians should multiply converts. Churches should multiply churches.¹⁴

Since the 1970s when the Church Growth Movement began to impact North American churches, the emphasis has been on growth that continues to enlarge one’s own congregation and has failed to stress the importance of church multiplication.¹⁵ In light of this understanding of church growth theory, we must remember that the roots of the Movement originated in the mission field outside of North America with an emphasis on multiplying congregations in the various people groups throughout the world. We need to return to our roots and recapture the vision for church multiplication in North America.

Church growth theorists understand that there are four types of growth. The first type is expansion growth. A congregation experiences this type whenever they lead people to Christ (conversion growth), see believers transfer their church membership

from one congregation to their congregation (transfer growth), and whenever children are born to members of the church (biological growth).

The second type of growth is internal growth. This type of growth comes from overall spiritual growth (maturity) among a church's members. Another variation of internal growth is related to expanding the campus and/or facilities of the church. Building an educational space or adding on to a parking lot is a type of internal growth. It is usually these two types of growth (expansion and internal) that most North American churches consider when they hear the words "church growth."

The remaining two types of church growth are directly related to church planting. The first type is extension growth. This growth is church planting that occurs among a similar culture as that of the mother church. For example, a younger, middle class, African-American congregation experiences extension growth when they decide to plant a church among other young, middle class, African-Americans.

The second type is bridging growth. This growth is church planting that occurs among a slightly or even radically different culture as that of the mother church. A middle-class Anglo congregation participates in bridging growth when they plant a church among migrant Hispanics or lower income, first generation Asians.

These latter two types of growth are just as legitimate as expansion growth, however many churches and denominations do not reward or recognize those who practice them. The words of a church planter from Kansas support this statement.

The biggest obstacle to new work many times is the existing pastors in the area. Everyone wants to grow a big church and feels threatened by new works that might take prospects or members. We as a denomination lift up, write up, and light up the big church pastor to the point that many of our best wouldn't consider starting a new work. And existing pastors keep striving to get to the top for the limelight.¹⁶

One Evangelical Free church planter echoed similar thoughts. He wrote, “I believe many church leaders are living in the ‘bigger is better’ syndrome. This affects the willingness of a church sending off 25, 50, or 100 or more people to be a great starting core of a successful church plant.”¹⁷ Until church leaders are convinced that the greatest need of the hour is both extension growth and bridging growth, churches will always have a limited Kingdom vision.

Responses to the Issue

Responding to this critical issue requires first knowledge of the objections to church planting. At this point, it is necessary to deviate from these three perceived reasons why many church planters believe that most churches are not involved in church planting. Numerous excuses abound as to why we currently observe few churches involved in church planting. The purpose of this section is to address many of those objections and to offer at least brief rebuttals.

In their notebook, *The Dynamic Daughter Church Planting Handbook*, Paul Becker, Mark Williams, and Jim Carpenter have developed by far the most extensive discussion regarding how to respond to objections related to an established church planting another church.¹⁸ These men compiled the objections listed below.

We’ll lose our church fellowship.

Many churches are concerned about the loss of intimacy among themselves that could occur if they plant another church. For years, brothers and sisters have sat beside one another during worship services and Bible studies. They have laughed, played, and

cried together. Their children are friends. Strong relationships exist among the believers. Though the church should consist of strong relationships, biblical fellowship does not allow for the church to become inwardly focused. Healthy community is always missional, and advocates the sending of missionaries to plant churches. It would have been easy for the church at Antioch to be so passionate about the relationships that existed between the entire church and the Apostle Paul and Barnabas that they could have said that the team should not be sent out because the fellowship would have been lost. They obviously had a healthy understanding of church life, which included the sending of the team (Acts 13:1-3).

It will cost too much.

This statement is probably one of the most common objections to church planting. Obviously, church planting can be expensive, but does not have to be that way. This objection depends on one factor: the church's definition of what is a church. If church planting entails salaries, budgets, buildings, sound systems, mailings, etc., then there may be a significant dollar investment required. Even if a church planting strategy calls for a substantial amount of finances, there are many avenues where funding can be found. For example:

Denominational resources

Mission Agencies

A bivocational church planter

Special Offerings

The core group

We're too small.

The majority of the churches in North America are under one hundred in membership. In a day and age when the megachurch is still seen as a status for every church to achieve, many churches are constantly waiting until they are larger before they begin another work.

Recently, a church planting pastor approached me for help with his work. Upon investigation, his work was no longer a church planting ministry, but an established church of three years. Thinking that his congregation was considering planting another church, I inquired about what plans they already made for the new work. His hesitancy to my inquiry quickly revealed that no immediate mission plans were in the works. After gathering his thoughts, he responded that the church was not ready to plant another church, but needed workers in a variety of areas. Knowing that this brother was trained in a denominational program that attempted to instill church multiplication within the heart of church planters, I then inquired as to when they would begin their next church plant. His response was that he did not know, but that they were still too small to begin another work.

Few churches believe they are large enough to be involved in church planting. Again, this excuse raises the question, “How large does a church need to be to begin another work?” Clearly, there is no definite answer to this question. In practice, however, many congregations believe that the answer is always just a little larger than they are presently.

We must remember that God has proven Himself to do immeasurably more than we can imagine, even with the small (Eph 3:20). The stories of David, Gideon, the

widow's mite, the Twelve Apostles all reveal His ability to do great things with the few, as long as we are faithful.

We Can't Afford to Lose the Leadership and Workers.

Though this objection is more prevalent in smaller churches, it is a real possibility. The irony involved in sending out the best leaders and workers is that the vacancies left behind with the mother church usually will be filled by those members who have been waiting to get involved. C. Peter Wagner commented on this fact when he wrote, "For the most part existing churches have unconsciously placed a ceiling on both clergy and lay leadership, and as a result upward mobility of new people into positions of ministry is difficult. But new churches open wide the doors of leadership and ministry challenges and the entire Body of Christ subsequently benefits."¹⁹ Though mother churches give away their most faithful givers, leaders, attenders, and supporters, the Lord can raise up others to fill the empty positions.

On the other hand, those who are unable to use their gifts and talents to build up the mother church because there are little to no opportunities for them, sometimes become outstanding leaders in a new work. In one church where I served as a pastor there was a couple who had a passion for leading believers in congregational singing and worship. There were few opportunities for them in the mother church, however, in the church plant in which we were involved, the opportunities were limitless. They were sent out from the congregation, and became very important leaders on the church planting team.

It will destroy our growth momentum.

Becker and Williams' words respond well to this objection:

Too often pastors and churches are more concerned with the growth of their own corner of the kingdom, rather than the growth of the kingdom as a whole. It's true that daughtering a church may affect growth momentum of the mother church: it might decrease or it might increase. But the more important question is: How will daughtering affect the growth of the Jesus Kingdom? The answer is clear: Christ's Kingdom will grow. The right thing then is to work for the building of His Kingdom, and trust the Lord for what will happen in your own corner of the Kingdom. Not, "My kingdom come, my will be done" but, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done."²⁰

What more can be said?

What's in it for us?

This objection reveals a selfish attitude that must be dismissed before any healthy church planting will occur. Unfortunately, many churches have adopted a capitalistic mentality toward the church. The church is seen as a business in which investments must be made and at the end of the year the company cannot be in the red.

Again, a Kingdom vision is required to overcome this objection. There are many joys and blessings that come from church planting. The church will be involved in seeing people come to Christ. The church will be involved in participating in a form of ministry in which few churches are involved. The church will see new leaders developed. The church will experience blessings from the Lord, as they are faithful to His mission. The list of personal benefits goes on and on.

What if the daughter grows larger than the mother?

There is a real possibility that the daughter church can grow larger than the mother. It is almost a guarantee that for the first few years the new church will exceed

the mother church in the number of baptisms. Usually, newer churches grow faster than older established churches.

Like many other objections, this one reveals a deeply rooted selfish attitude and insecurity. The simple answer to this objection is, “Let’s hope the daughter church does indeed grow larger than the mother!” In humanistic terms, do not parents desire that their children exceed them in everything in life?

Those holding to this objection may not voice this question aloud, but within their hearts it may be hidden. It is my fear that this objection can be found within the hearts of many pastors. May the Lord heal us of this evil, and may we gain a Kingdom perspective especially when it comes to church planting.

Our church won’t go for it.

Those holding to this objection may be right, but the church needs to change if this situation is truly the case. The leaders of the church, including lay leaders, will be the ones who will help lead the church over this objection. If the church leaders are not supportive of church planting, then the likelihood of the church being involved is rare.

There are several things that pastors can do to help move the churches to be involved in church planting. Preach a series of messages related to church planting. Bring in church planters to share testimonies related to their work. Pastors can get involved in small tasks related to church planting, and can then share those with the congregation. Get the church involved in a lower level of commitment. There are a variety of small tasks in which a church can participate.

We’ll be in competition with the daughter.

It has been said that it takes different kinds of churches to reach different kinds of people. Two churches can co-exist within the same community and both reach different segments of that community. Competition is not found in the Kingdom of God. Our struggle is with the evil one (Eph 6:12).

But pastors get kudos for bigger churches, not daughter churches.

Unfortunately, this statement is true. The North American Church is in an environment that fosters the belief that bigger is better. Becker and Williams believe that this objection may be one of the biggest barriers for mother churches.²¹ Many church leaders will have to spend time in prayer overcoming this objection that may be hidden within their hearts. Denominational leaders need to begin rewarding those who are doing an excellent job planting other churches. They need to constantly tell the stories of the churches involved in church planting.

One such example of rewarding and encouraging churches is The Charles H. Spurgeon Awards Ceremony that is sponsored by the Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism, and Church Growth of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Every year we host an awards banquet for Southern Baptist churches that are doing an exceptional job in evangelism and overall church health. There are a variety of categories in which churches receive rewards, including a church planting category.

In 2002, First Baptist Concord of Knoxville (Knoxville, TN) received the award in church planting. At the time, they had four church plants occurring and were partnering with another church planter in Knoxville and with a church in New York to plant other churches. In 2003, Eastwood Baptist Church in Haughton, Louisiana received the award. At the time of the award ceremony, they had made a commitment to start one

to two works each year, and had already planted four churches and were involve in two other works, one Hispanic and one Vietnamese.

Why should I?

The simple answer is for the glory of God. The Bible establishes the example. Also, there are many lost people living in North America. Newer churches tend to reach more people with the gospel than established churches. Wagner even goes so far as to say, “*The single most effective evangelistic methodology under heaven is planting new churches?*”²²

But we already give generously to missions.

This objection assumes three things about church planting. First, that missions is something we can do by proxy. Second, this objection usually makes missions to be something that happens overseas and not here in North America. Finally, it assumes that being involved in church planting means that a church has to give money.

Just because a church gives money to international missionary work, does not mean that the church can neglect her responsibilities for mission here in North America. North America is also an enormous mission field. Though sometimes it is good for a church to give money to church planting, this is not always necessary and is not always the healthiest situation.

I'd like to but I just don't have the time.

There will never be enough time to plant churches if this is one's objection. If church planting is a priority for us, then we will be intentional about making the time to be involved in missions.

Since so many existing churches are struggling, shouldn't we concentrate on revitalizing them?

This question represents another very common objection toward church planting. Though revitalization is a much needed ministry, it can be very difficult, time consuming, and expensive, as compared to church planting. In fact, someone once said in a poignant jest, "It is easier to have babies, than raise the dead." More churches reach more people with the gospel. In general, newer churches reach more people with the Gospel than older churches.

We tried it before and it didn't work.

Ministry in general is difficult, and church planting in particular is extremely difficult. This objection cannot be one that hinders us from church planting. What if churches decided to stop doing evangelism just because they were unable to reach someone with the Gospel? Think of Thomas Edison. It took him a multitude of attempts to finally get the light bulb to work effectively. An unsuccessful attempt should not be an excuse to hinder future work.

The leadership just isn't available.

Response to this objection is based on one's definition of leadership. If someone believes that the only type of leadership which can be involved in church planting is someone of the "professional, well-educated clergy" type, then it may be difficult finding available leadership. If we look to the Scriptures, rather than our culture, to determine our definitions of available leaders, then the number of leaders will increase. Regardless

of one's definition of available leaders, we must ask the Lord for the workers (Matt 9:37-38), believing that He will make the provision.

This is a bad time for us to daughter a church.

This objection is similar to not having enough time. There obviously will be seasons in which it would not be wise for a church to enter into the ministry of church planting, however, for many churches, a "bad time" is a bad excuse. There will never be a perfect moment. It is amazing that throughout the world in areas where the Church is persecuted and having "bad times," the Church is multiplying.

We'll daughter when our church grows to "X" size.

This excuse is similar to being too small. What happens if the church never grows to "X" size? Churches of all sizes can be involved in church planting.

Our vision is to grow a large church.

If indeed the vision is to grow one local congregation larger and larger, then extension and bridging growth must also be a part of this vision. Saddleback Church in Southern California has grown to megachurch status, but it has also been involved in planting numerous churches.

I don't know how.

The simple response to this objection is, "learn." There are numerous resources (e.g., books, conferences, web sites) available to those interested in church planting. Many evangelical denominations are starting to embrace church planting as a healthy approach to church growth. Some have a resource person or department focused on the

area of church planting. This objection is not as legitimate as it might have been fifteen to twenty years ago.

There are numerous objections to church planting, but none are sufficient to exclude a congregation from being involved in this wonderful way to advance the Kingdom. The next section will attempt to explain the role of the Mother Church in this ministry.

The Role of the Mother Church in Church Planting

Levels of Involvement

The first thing churches should understand is that there are a multitude of levels of involvement in church planting. The following discussion is a suggestion of different levels, but probably not an exhaustive list. Many churches do not consider themselves capable of being involved in church planting because they sometimes tend to think of involvement at one level, usually a level believed to be out of reach. When it comes to a local church being involved in church planting, something is better than nothing. My recommendation to churches considering involvement in church planting is that they should begin somewhere, anywhere, anytime.

One level of involvement is for a church to partner with another church to plant a church. This type of partnership can allow for a varying degree of involvement. I have heard of some partnerships in which one of the churches agreed to carry most of the weight in the partnership agreement.

Some churches are becoming involved in church planting by using an outside church planter, one who is not originally from the congregation. Sometimes the congregation or maybe a denominational source will financially support this individual so the church planter can work full time. Sometimes the mother church will send out a few people or even several people to work with the church planter in the mission work.

Some churches will get involved by sending out their own church planting team with their own leaders. This type of involvement requires a deeper level of commitment. This level of involvement is clearly a biblical route. Regardless of the church's level of involvement, the following are ten different activities, along with practical application points, in which mother churches can participate in church planting.

Calling Out the Missionaries

It was within the context of the local church, that Paul and Barnabas were set aside for missionary work. Luke wrote:

Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers. . . . And while they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away" (Acts 13:1, 2, NASB).

Established churches need to recognize the significance of this passage. There is a direct connection between the responsibility of the local church and the sending out of the missionaries.

Practical Helps. There are numerous ways that local churches can be involved in calling out missionaries, however, the leadership of the church *must* take the initiative. An atmosphere needs to be created that says, "Our church expects members of this congregation to be sent out as missionaries, in our Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the

ends of the earth!” The leaders of the church need to pray regularly for a healthy atmosphere that fosters the biblical understanding of calling out and sending out church planters. Staff members need to talk about and teach on the calling out and sending out church planters. Church periodicals need to reflect this church planting enthusiasm. For example, in creating an atmosphere, the church could add to their newsletter or worship bulletin a brief story profiling a church planting team working within the geographical proximity. A local director of missions or church planter could come and speak to the congregation about the significance of sending out church planters.

One of the most important and most practical means to create a healthy atmosphere among the believers is the use of the pulpit. The pastors, which regularly minister from the pulpit with the Scriptures, bear the majority of the responsibility for creating a healthy atmosphere. For a church to have a church planting mindset, knowledge of the Scriptures related to this topic must be present. The people need to know that the Scriptures clearly teach that church planting is a healthy and natural expression of a missional church. Ed Stetzer noted the following about the significance of the pastor in creating this atmosphere:

This vision must come from the *pulpit*, from the words and heart of the *pastor*. This vision must come from the pastor because God has uniquely anointed him to present God’s vision to the congregation.

Furthermore, the vision must come from the *pulpit*, because presenting the vision through preaching signals to the church that, of all the many important matters the pastor could have preached, the church planting vision has taken precedence. This vision for a new church is not to be mentioned casually like idle hallway conversation. The vision must be cast to the entire body.²³

In conjunction with the teaching and vision casting as related to church planting in general and calling out missionaries for church planting in particular, the invitation time found at the conclusion of most worship services could be an excellent time to

create a healthy atmosphere. The pastor could begin to challenge the individual members of the body to consider being sent out as church planters, either across the city or across the globe.

The following are some tools to help in this particular area:

- *Multiplying Church Network*. Tool from the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention to help representatives from different churches come together to strategize how to lead their congregations to planting other congregations.
- *Calling Out the Called*. Another resource from the North American Mission Board related to creating a atmosphere conducive to raising up church planters.
- Paul Becker and Mark Williams, *The Dynamic Daughter Church Planting Handbook* (Dynamic Church Planting International, 1999). Available from www.dcp.org. Excellent resource for mother churches.
- Bob Logan, *Churches Planting Churches*. A video resource for mother churches.

Prayer Support

One of the most important things a church can do for her church planters is to pray for them on a regular basis. The Apostle Paul recognized the importance of having other churches to pray for him. He wrote: “and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak” (Eph 6:19-20). Bob Logan and Jeanette Buller stated, “One of the first things that every church planter needs is a committed intercessory prayer team.”²⁴ They also noted “Prayer is not preparation for the ministry; it is the work of the ministry. The planting of a new church is the supernatural work of the Spirit of God. Dependence on God at every stage is essential.”²⁵

Practical Helps. Churches should consider devoting a portion of the worship service to a time of prayer for the church planting team. Different Sunday School classes or groups within the church could pray for different needs of the team. Groups could gather for a meal in someone's home and conclude with a time of prayer for specific concerns offered by the team. A Wednesday night prayer meeting could revolve around a time of prayer for the work. Instead of meeting in a building for a prayer meeting, churches could prayerwalk different communities in which the team is working; or, they could meet in the home(s) of one of the church planters for a night of prayer. Church leaders should encourage and allow the church planting team to recruit intercessors for the ministry.

The following are some resources to help in this particular area:

- http://www.namb.net/root/cp/Mentoring/dev_inter_pray.asp. Resource from the North American Mission Board discussing a strategy for developing intercessory teams.
- <http://www.imb.org/CompassionNet/prayerwalking.asp>. Resource from the International Mission Board discussing prayer walking and noting resources to help your church in prayerwalking.
- Charles E. Lawless, Jr., *Serving in Your Church Prayer Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003). Small but practical book to assist churches in their prayer lives.

Encouragement and a Body of Identity

Church planting can be lonely endeavor, especially when the church planting team is working in a pioneer area where few strong relationships with other believers exist. Many times the church planting team consists of one family that was very active in

their local church, had numerous relationships with other believers, and was sent by the Lord to an area where they are miles from home.

Established churches need to offer encouragement to church planters and their families on a regular basis. Church planting can be some of the most discouraging and frustrating work in the ministry. Churches need to remind their church planters that they are available for them and will minister to them and support them in both good times and bad times. Unfortunately, many churches do not “have the time” for ministering to church planters.

On different occasions, the Apostle Paul returned from his missionary journeys to the church in Antioch, from where he was originally sent out (e.g., Acts 14:26; 18:22). Church planters need a place to call home; they need an established body with which to identify. When asked by people in the community, “Are you with a church?” the team should be able to respond in the affirmative with a specific congregation. In many contexts, this affirmation will lend credibility to the ministry. Sometimes the team will need to be ministered to by other believers. Church planters are not spiritual giants, or an island unto themselves. They are human beings, a part of the body of Christ, and need to be edified as well. They are on the frontlines of the battlefield. If anyone needs encouragement and the opportunity to connect with other believers, it is the church planter.

Practical Helps. Understand that your ministry, as well as the church’s ministry, to church planters is an extension of that ministry, not a distraction or a hindrance to the ministry. As both you and the church encourages, supports, and identifies with church planters, not only is it a benefit for the Kingdom, but it is a part of multiplying the

ministry of the congregation. Consider some of the following ideas for encouraging and connecting with church planters:

- Encourage church members to have a meal or coffee with the church planting team/family every couple of weeks.
- Allow the church planters to preach for you and have a significant role in leading the congregation in worship and/or study.
- Encourage members to “adopt” the church planting family(ies), and begin to help them adjust to a new life and new location.

Pastoral Mentoring and Accountability

Closely related to providing encouragement and a Body with which to identify is the need for church planters to be mentored and held accountable for their lives and ministries. Just as the church planting team needs to have close connections with a local congregation, they also need pastoring.

Who pastors the church planters? Usually we fail to ask ourselves this question, assuming that “ministers” are not in need of pastoral ministry. This belief is a poor assumption, and leads us to believe that church planters are on a spiritual plane uncommon to other church members.

Church planters need someone who will walk with them during both the good and bad days of their ministries. They need a mentor who can serve as a compassionate encourager, while remaining a firm challenger. They need individuals with whom they can share ideas, evangelistic strategies, family concerns, and frustrations.

Church planting teams need to be held accountable for their stewardship with the opportunities the Lord has provided. Whenever a team is in a new location, miles from

close friends, temptations abound. For example, unless the church planters are making wise use of their time each day, it is easy to be busy doing good “stuff,” but actually accomplishing very little. They need to be held accountable for maintaining proper time with their families. They need to be held accountable for having a daily devotion time. They need to be held accountable for implementing their church planting strategy, and accomplishing the milestones they have established.

Practical Helps. Pastors, consider making it a priority to be a pastor to the missionaries. Offer your ministry to them. Be a Barnabas! Have your secretary, or another individual, to remind you to send a weekly email to the church planters just asking how they are doing. Consider having a bi-monthly lunch meeting with the church planters. Ask the church planters to send you a monthly email summarizing their work that month. Ask them to include information such as how well the strategy is being fulfilled, evangelistic activity, and what they are doing to raise up leaders from the harvest.

- Consider the following tools to help:
- Contact the Mentoring Team of the Church Planting Group of the North American Mission Board (phone 770-410-6217, or visit www.namb.net . They are able to provide specific guidance in this area.
- See the brief article by Joe Hernandez, “Mentoring: A Church Planter’s Friend” at http://www.namb.net/cp/Mentoring/Mcp_friend.asp
- See the article by Dann Pantoja, “Questions I’m Learning While Mentoring Postmodern Church Planters: A Modernist’s Experience” at http://www.next-wave.org/feb00/Mentoring_postmoderns.htm
- Another excellent resource to consider can be found at the “Mentor and Multiply” web site. This parachurch ministry developed by Dr. George Patterson and others provides assistance in the mentoring process. See their site at <http://www.homestead.com/mentorandmultiply/index.html>

- A free downloadable resource by Robert W. Martin can be found at <http://www.alliancescp.org/resources/mentoringmanual.html>

Provide Training

Like most ministers, church planters desire ongoing training. Though you may not be able to directly provide the desired training for church planters, within most denominations there are individuals who are skilled in various areas of ministry in general, and church planting in particular. Contact individuals in your area to see what can be provided for the church planters with whom you are working. Also, there are many parachurch organizations that provide on-going training for church planters. Church planters need times of refreshing. Being on the frontlines is draining, and opportunities for practical training can sometimes serve as a breath of fresh air.

Practical Helps. Consider inviting church planters (and paying their expenses) to attend conferences and training events that you attend. Though the material covered may not be directly applicable to the present missionary work, nevertheless, it may provide training that will be useful in the future.

Another idea is to start a monthly book club with the church planters. Take turns each month selecting a book to be read and discussed during your meetings together. Try to anticipate the concerns of the church planters, and when it is your turn to select a book, select one that will appeal to the planters.

Consider the following idea:

- Conduct a search at google.com using the keywords “training for church planters” for a multitude of training resources, events, and groups that will work with you in training church planters.

Provide Resources and Financial Support

Many churches do not believe that they can become involved in church planting because they do not “have” any resources or money to support the work. I believe this situation is a rare exception, rather than the norm the excuse has become in our churches.

I was recently conducting a seminar on becoming a church planting church when I asked the participants how much money was needed to plant a church. After taking a moment to think one gentleman responded, “About \$110,000 if you want to do it right.” Following his response, many of the participants remained silent, others raised their eyebrows in shock. I responded with the following question: “What is your definition of ‘right’?” He did not have a clear answer.

Our understanding of the church will affect our thoughts concerning the use of resources and finances in church planting. Most churches do not believe they can help in the area of resources and finances because the church herself owns a very costly piece of property and building, and after ten years is still paying off the debt. The reasoning follows: “Since we have all this ‘stuff,’ and we are a church, therefore, to be involved in church planting means that other churches must have the same ‘stuff,’ and we obviously can barely afford our possessions.” Churches should not assume that what they own is necessary for a church plant.

Practical Helps. Churches have a multitude of resources to use for church planting. Consider the following:

- Be willing to allow a church planting team to use your photocopier, office space, computer, and office supplies.
- Share your building space with the church plant. Allow them to use the worship areas, classrooms, nursery, and even storage space.

- Assist them in obtaining bulk mail permits and tax exempt numbers.
- Send members from your church to serve as temporary workers to help out until the church is planted. Encourage these members to make a time commitment (e.g., one year) to serve on the team. Following their commitment, they will return to the mother.
- Send members to help plant the church and remain with the new church indefinitely.
- Send youth groups to do short-term mission trips with the church planters.
- Consider a special quarterly offering for the church planting work.
- Give a percentage of your overall missions/evangelism budget to the church planting work.
- Enlist certain Sunday School classes to sponsor the church planting work. The classes can participate in hands-on work with the church planters, and they can give special offerings to the work.

Constant Recognition of the Missionaries

People are quick to forget. Rick Warren in his book *The Purpose Driven Church* commented that he has to recast the church's vision and purpose every twenty-six days because people forget even the important things.²⁶ The church planting team needs to be constantly brought to the minds of the church members. I have been in several situations in which the leadership was in agreement with a particular ministry, but because they failed to communicate regularly the significance of the ministry, the rest of the church soon forgot the ministry even existed. Even if the church leaders are supportive of the church planting work, the rest of the church needs to be supportive of the work. One of the ways to keep up their support is simply, on a regular basis, to remind the church of the church planting ministry in which they are participating.

Practical Helps. Be creative in finding ways to keep the faces of the church planters and the overall progress of the work before the church. The following are some suggestions that you may desire to implement in your situation:

- Do a “Church Planting Update” section in your newsletter.
- Have the church planters regularly post information regarding the work on your church’s web site. You could even create a special link on your site entitled “A Day in the Trenches,” and allow each of the church planters to post daily a synopsis of what they did that particular day.
- Allow the church planters on a periodic basis to assist in leading in the church’s worship time or Bible study time. Numerous opportunities are available such as: preaching, leading in prayer, sharing a testimony of what took place the previous week.
- Have a regular time of prayer for the church planters during the worship service.
- Periodically create and show a video shadowing the church planters as they go through any given week.
- Host special, yet informal, dinners for the church having the families of the church planters as the guests of honor.

Allow for Much Flexibility—Understanding that the Missionaries Will Do ‘Strange’ Things

Church planting by definition is cross-cultural work. Even if the church planters are working among folks of a similar ethnicity, because of the unregenerate natures present in the receptive group, church planters are crossing cultures (e.g., world views). Along with cross-cultural ministry comes the necessity to contextualize the gospel message for the new culture.

Contextualization is a process that is easier said than done. In conjunction with the work of the Holy Spirit, church planters are required to use many creative methods to

communicate the truth of Christ. Due to the diversity of cultures in North America, the chances are very likely that the methods used by you to reach the people now present in your congregation, are not the methods that will work among the unbelievers to whom the church planters are working.

Church planters will sometimes do “strange” things, as viewed from the perspective of established churches. We must hold church planters accountable. However, as long as they are not using methodologies contrary to the Scriptures and conveying a shallow understanding of what it mean to be a disciple of Christ, we should allow them much flexibility to do what *they* understand to be what is required to reach their people.

Remember, the church planters are the ones in the trenches and have a first hand grasp of reality. Many times it is easy for folks, not in their contexts, to tell and demand the church planters to follow particular methodologies. This extracted guidance easily results in frustration on behalf of the church planting team as well and little or no church growth. Several years ago, Jack Redford commented:

[M]any times the sponsoring church wants to force the issues for the mission, making decisions and demanding action before the mission is ready. Rather than force these issues, the sponsor should provide opportunities for the new chapel to develop the issues on its own. This, however, takes time, effort, and patience. Again, like the parent and child, the sponsor should allow the “child” to express its feelings and then deal realistically and honestly with them rather than squelching creativity and maturation.²⁷

Practical Helps. Allowing the church planting team much flexibility does not mean that you do not offer them guidance, accountability, encouragement, or support. Providing a healthy environment, in which the church planting team, guided by the Holy Spirit, can be creative in their methods, not only helps the team, but also can reveal to

declining or plateaued churches the need to change methodologies when necessary. If the leadership of the church is supportive of the “strange” ways of the church planting team, the potential increases for the “strangeness” to be removed from the eyes of the church as a whole. The chances are good that if the leadership is excited about what the church planters are doing the church will catch that excitement.

Work with the Missionaries to Establish Clear Expectations

“Whenever there are two or three gathered in His name, there is bound to be a disagreement,” so says the old adage. Misunderstandings will come; it is a fact. What is important is how we address those misunderstandings whenever they arise. Mother churches and church planting teams need to have clear expectations for the relationship. Leaders from both parties should meet to discuss the details of the partnership. This meeting should not be conducted with suspicion toward one another, but rather each one must think more highly of the others, than himself or herself.

Though there are many areas of the partnership that need to be addressed, the following are extremely important to discuss with church planters: 1) roles of the mother church and the team; 2) use of mother church’s facilities and office supplies; 3) finances; and 4) involvement of the members of the mother church. Each of these areas can quickly become points of tension and frustration if they are not discussed early in the church planting work.

Practical Helps

- *Mother or Partner: Church Commitment Profile*. This small booklet written by Paul Becker attempts to answer the following two questions: “What are we going to do for the church planter and the new church?” and “What are we not going to do for the church planter and the new church?” This resource can be ordered from www.dcp.org or 800-255.0431

- If it is appropriate in your culture, write out the overall agreement. Put things in writing so that both parties can have an objective resource to help explain the details of the partnership. If an official written document is inappropriate, then communicate by email so a record of the dialogue will be in existence.

Recognize the Legitimate Nature of the Team and the Newly Planted Church

We must remember that the church planters and the newly planted churches are extremely significant to the Kingdom. We cannot make them out to be less than what they are. They are legitimate and not some sub par group of believers who just do not have everything together as of yet.

Throughout the Scriptures, those planting the churches were seen as a vital component to the fulfillment of the Great Commission. The teams, who were willing to give up the comfort of familiarity to venture into unknown territory to plant churches, were held in high esteem among the brothers and sisters. We cannot afford to belittle our church planters, but rather, we need to hold them in high regard before our congregations. We need to snuff out talk that refers to the church planters as one day “arriving” to a point of significant ministry.

One of the worst things we can do is refer to a newly planted church as a “mission.” Historically speaking, this terminology has been very popular. Whenever a mother church was involved in the planting of another congregation, the daughter church, at least for a season, was labeled as “our mission.” The problem is that if the daughter church is a church, then we need to make sure we label it as a “church.” Regardless, of what the government, denominational, or cultural policies are defining when a church is

considered “official,” we must be willing to return to the Scriptures to find out when the church becomes the church.

Practical Helps. Prepare your church by walking them through a study of the book of Acts, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians, and 1 Thessalonians while attempting to address two questions:

- When did the church plants become “fully” churches?
- What were the attitudes of the existing churches toward those who planted churches?
- Also, consider leading your church in a study of Elmer Towns and Douglas Porter’s book, *Churches That Multiply: A Bible Study on Church Planting* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2003).
- Also, read the book *Creating Communities of the Kingdom: New Testament Models of Church Planting* (Scottsdale, PA; Waterloo ON: Herald Press, 1988), by David W. Shenk and Ervin R. Stutzman.

A Word to Church Leaders

Pastors you are the most important individuals in the process of churches planting churches. If you have not caught the vision to plant other churches, then the chances are very good that your congregation will never plant other churches. The following are some things to consider related to you as an individual.

First, a vision from God is a must. This vision must be received, embraced, and owned by the pastoral leadership. Second, a healthy understanding of “church” is a must. You need to have a biblical, understanding of the nature and purpose of the local church, not necessary a North American cultural understanding of the church. Third, a healthy understanding of the Holy Spirit is a must. You must believe that the Spirit is able to

regenerate individuals and sanctify congregations. Remember, the Apostle Paul was able to entrust newly planted churches to the Holy Spirit and indigenous leadership.

The fourth item for consideration is related to your security in who you are as a pastor. If you are insecure in your ministry, it will be difficult to become a church planting church. Insecurity breeds turfism and fear of losing control (Remember, for God to be in control, we must be out of control.). Church planting is messy work and you should expect the unexpected to occur. Insecurity creates a dependency mentality on behalf of one's congregants and hinders church multiplication. Insecurity creates a mentality that says, "What if the church planting team/church planter does a better "job" than what I have done?" Insecurity creates a selfish mentality that says, "If we send out people, there will be less (i.e., money, leaders, programs, "excitement" and "fun-stuff") for us. Insecurity results in a myopic Kingdom vision. Only repentance and God's grace can heal us of the sin of insecurity.

Conclusion

The lack of established churches involved in church planting should be a major concern for the North American Church. On this continent, the Church is not growing. In my own denomination, the vast majority of our churches are either plateaued or declining in their growth rates.

For most churches being "on mission" is just rhetoric. Until leaders, and ultimately churches, overcome ignorance, turfism, and a lack of a Kingdom vision, few churches will become involved in church planting. Though there are many ways a church can be involved in this ministry, many objections currently exist. This article has attempted to respond to many of those objections and to list some very important issues

that need to be a part of church planting ministries. Church planters are in need of our support on a variety of levels. It is time for more churches to become mothers, instead of remaining on birth control.

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¹Jack Redford, *Planting New Churches* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1978), 23.

²North American Mission Board, *New Churches Needed: A Step-By-Step Handbook for Planting New Churches* (Alpharetta, GA: North American Mission Board, 2001), iii.

³Based on an open-ended, informal, email survey of 190 church planters and various parachurch and denominational leaders representing thirteen parachurch organizations and denominations from thirty-nine states and four Canadian provinces, who listed the following as the most critical issues in North American church planting (in order of importance): 1) finances; 2) leadership development; 3) unsupportive churches; 4) contextualization issues; and 5) family pressures.

⁴Email sent to author.

⁵Email sent to author.

⁶Email sent to author.

⁷Email sent to author.

⁸Email sent to author.

⁹Email sent to author.

¹⁰Email sent to author. One exception to this situation is when established churches are involved in planting churches among different ethnic populations. For example, church planting tends to become more palatable to many Anglo congregations if the mission work is among a different people group.

¹¹I have included turfism as a separate category because it is a perceived reason as to why most churches are not involved in church planting. Though a lack of a Kingdom Vision may be the true reason why many churches are turfism, nevertheless, many church planters attribute the critical issue of discussion to turfism.

¹²Aubrey Malphurs, *Planting Growing Churches for the Twenty-first Century*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 380.

¹³Talmadge R. Amberson, compiler, *The Birth of Churches* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1979), 45.

¹⁴Ralph Moore, *Starting a New Church* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2002), 255-56.

¹⁵For example, a simple examination of North American church growth literature from the past thirty years quickly reveals that the common notion of church growth is that which is related to expanding and maintaining the membership, leadership, and property of the local congregation.

¹⁶Email sent to author.

¹⁷Email sent to author.

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- ¹⁸ Paul Becker and Mark Williams, Jim Carpenter, eds., *The Dynamic Daughter Church Planting Handbook* (n.p.: Dynamic Church Planting International, 1999), 16-28.
- ¹⁹ C. Peter Wagner, *Church Planting for a Greater Harvest* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1990), 20.
- ²⁰ Becker and Williams, 20.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 23.
- ²² Wagner, 11.
- ²³ Stetzer, 320-21.
- ²⁴ Robert E. Logan and Jeannette Buller, *Cell Church Planter's Guide*, I-26
- ²⁵ *Ibid.* I-9.
- ²⁶ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 111.
- ²⁷ Jack Redford, *Planting New Churches* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1978), 79-80.