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## Sending Out Planters Who Succeed

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# SENDING OUT PLANTERS WHO SUCCEED

Dave Earley

How do you measure a successful church plant? The ideal church plant would have high probability of becoming a high potency church – one able to not merely survive, but grow, and multiply.

The biggest, ground-breaking discoveries in the field of North American church planting that have occurred in the past fifteen years involve the need for developing **a church planting process**. The challenge of trying to launch successful churches in the postmodern culture of the twenty-first century has necessitated the shift in emphasis toward a systematic process for church planting by nurturing and supporting church planters using a well-defined process. This process enhances the odds of sending out high probability, high potency planters. I see ten ideal factors that need to be considered in any church planter training process.

## 1. HIGH PROBABILITY CHURCH PLANTERS ARE CALLED BY GOD

- The single most important factor in the success or failure of a church plant is the church planter. “As I will reiterate time and again, the leader is the principle key to a successful church plant.”<sup>1</sup> Peter Wagner
- Church planting is hard enough when you know that you are called of God. It is virtually impossible when you are not. Knowing you are called is not just a good idea. It is absolutely crucial.”<sup>2</sup> Becker, Carpenter and Williams
- “Without God’s calling, you’re wasting your time . . . . The first question I ask Church Starters is, “Has God called you to start a church? Is this God’s idea or your idea? . . . Don’t underestimate the power of your calling.”<sup>3</sup> Ron Sylvia

## 2. HIGH PROBABILITY CHURCH PLANTERS ARE ADEQUATELY ASSESSED

### The value of assessment

- ✓ Providing objective confirmation to the planter of his calling, strengths, and weaknesses.
- ✓ Helps the coach know how to best help the church planter.
- ✓ Provides confirmation to the mother-church that the church planter is worth heavily supporting. Assessment can range anywhere from a few hours to a few days. They can combine personality testing, interviews, interactive exercises, individual and group presentations, and written evaluations by peers, assessors, and the candidates themselves. Good assessments not only assess the candidate, but also their spouse. The experience usually culminates in a written report with recommendations on the suitability of a candidate to lead or participate in a church plant.
- **“Church planters that go through the Ridley assessment interview lead churches that are larger in attendance than those that do not.”**<sup>4</sup> Ed Stetzer
- **At each year, the church planters who were assessed lead churches that were approximately 20 percent larger than those who were not assessed** (averaged over a four year period). The third year was the most substantial with a 27 percent difference in church size.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Wagner, 81.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Becker, Jim Carpenter, and Mark Williams, *Dynamic Church Planting Handbook* (Vista, CA: Multiplication Ministries, 1992), 17.

<sup>3</sup> Sylvia, 31.

<sup>4</sup> Stetzer, *Planting New Churches*, 79.

<sup>5</sup> Stetzer, “Analysis,” 2.

### 3. HIGH PROBABILITY CHURCH PLANTERS ARE SUFFICIENTLY TRAINED

Trained planters do noticeably better than untrained ones.<sup>6</sup> Every planter needs at least a few days of specific training in planting a church. At Liberty we offer an MA in Church Planting and an MDiv with specifically designed to help church planters be successful.

### 4. HIGH PROBABILITY CHURCH PLANTERS PLANT WITH A “STAFF” TEAM

- **Two are better than one**, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken (Eccl. 4:9-12).
- “A student of mine works for United Parcel Service (UPS). His job is loading the brown trucks – a grueling task that involves much lifting. A prerequisite to employment is the ability to lift 70 pounds by one’s self, or 150 pounds with a partner. Now in grade school I learned that 70 and 70 totaled 140, not 150. Can it be that UPS understands the scriptural truth behind Eccl. 4:9 better than many church leaders?”<sup>7</sup> Tom Cheney
- “The essence of successful partnership is **synergy** – the theory that **the outcome of the whole is greater than the sum of the parts**. Two people working together can accomplish more than the total of each does individually. So partnership is the effective leveraging of assets, abilities, and strengths.”<sup>8</sup> Bob Reccord
- Attendance [in new churches] was demonstrably higher in plants with more than one church planting pastor on staff.”<sup>9</sup> **Of 600 churches surveyed, those with solo pastor had 70 in attendance after four years, while those with multiple pastors had 140.**<sup>10</sup> Stetzer

### 5. HIGH PROBABILITY CHURCH PLANTERS PLANT WITH A LAY-LAUNCH TEAM

- “One is too small a number to achieve greatness.”<sup>11</sup> John Maxwell
- “The best way to plant a church is with **a team**.”<sup>12</sup> Audrey Malpurs
- A Launch Team is the group team of lay persons who meet with the church planting pastor(s) prior to launch to give, pray, and invite friends, and who will be the primary workers and leaders in the new church. In most church planting models, at least some, if not all, of these people/positions are needed to launch an effective public worship service: set-up supervisor; 2) audio/video overseer; 3) preschool children’s ministry leader; 4) nursery overseer; 5) first impressions overseer of greeters, ushers, information table, coffee/donuts; 6) worship leader.
- Those who use a “large first meeting” to start their church evidence a larger attendance in the second through fourth years.<sup>13</sup>
- The larger the “birth weight,” the healthier the “baby.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Stetzer, “Analysis,” 3.

<sup>7</sup> Bob Reccord, cited in *Seven Steps for Planting Churches*, ed. Tom Cheney, J. David Putnam, Van Sanders (Alpharetta, Georgia, North American Mission Board, 2004) 21.

<sup>8</sup> Cited in *Seven Steps for Planting Churches*, 21

<sup>9</sup> Stetzer, *Planting New Churches*, 68.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> John Maxwell, *The 17 Laws of Team Work* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, #####), 1.

<sup>12</sup> Malpurs, 97.

<sup>13</sup> Stetzer, “Analysis,” 6.

<sup>14</sup> Summerfield, informal interview with author, July 2002.

## 6. HIGH PROBABILITY CHURCH PLANTERS ARE ADEQUATELY FUNDED

There is never enough funding for a church planter. Start-up costs, salary, benefits, staff, etc. all cost money. The research is clear: **full-time church planters lead churches that are larger than those who are not full-time.**<sup>15</sup> Through the Liberty Baptist Fellowship we can help fund all of our approved church planters. We also have strategic connections with several denominations, including the Southern Baptist convention.

## 7. HIGH PROBABILITY CHURCH PLANTERS RECEIVE INTERNSHIP TRAINING

There are several types of internships that especially help church planters. One is to serve for a summer or a semester as a launch team member for a church plant. A second type of internship involves serving on staff of the mother church for several months to a year.

Being a launch team member gives the church planter an up-close and personal look at the church planting process. It provides them with hands-on experience with the rigors of reaching, gathering, and churching non-churched people, the frustrations of setting up in rented facilities, the challenge of working with volunteer workers. It also gives them greater empathy for the people who will one day serve on their church plant team.

When a church planter serves on the staff of the mother church, they can have a platform for gathering a sufficiently large launch team, doing demographic studies, scouting facilities, and getting used to the culture. **An ideal situation would be if a church planter could be funded by a mother church six months prior to launch and could use the church office as a base of operation.**

## 8. HIGH PROBABILITY CHURCH PLANTERS RECEIVE IN-THE-FIELD COACHING

- Repeatedly church planters complain of the isolation of being on the field all alone.
- **Research indicates that there is a noticeable attendance increase among church planters meeting with mentors.** In year one, the gap is 12%. In year two, that gap is 16%. Year three is 13%. Finally, year four evidences a 25% gap. Supervision has similar positive results. Churches led by church planters involved in weekly supervision meetings lead churches that are substantially larger than those who are not. Similar to mentoring, a weekly supervision meeting makes it the best stewardship. Supervision does matter, but meeting weekly makes more of a difference. Meeting with a supervisor may indicate a heavy involvement by the sponsoring entity—the planter would probably have a close relationship with the supervisor.<sup>16</sup>

## 9. High Probability Church Planters Gather with Other Church Planters

Meeting with other church planters does increase the effectiveness of the church planter, especially during the earliest years.<sup>17</sup> Gathering church planters together monthly is greatly appreciated by the church planters and considered quite helpful. The monthly gathering is hosted by a different church planter each month. They may have the group gather at a restaurant in their area or if office facilities are available, the meeting is held there. The planters eat, and then take turn sharing about their church and personal walk with God. The result is always encouragement. Church planting is an often lonely enterprise. There is something uplifting about gathering with others who truly understand what one is experiencing.

## 10. High Probability Church Planters Plant as a Daughter Church of a

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<sup>15</sup>Stetzer, “Analysis,” 21.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 5.

## Healthy Church

Mother daughter church planting involves more than merely sending some money to a church planter. A church can serve as an effective mother church, even if little funding is provided to the planter, if the planter is allowed to gather a launch team. In a sense, the mother-church is giving funding because the money launch team members were giving to the mother-church is given to the new church. When done most effectively, the mother daughter church plant allows the church planter to gain the element they may need most – willing and able workers. Stetzer found that **if the mother church sends a core group, the impact is significant and consistent.**<sup>18</sup>

Beginning in 1999, the author led his church in the process of intentionally and consistently sending out healthy daughter churches. As of the time of this writing, four have been planted and another three are in the womb. **The author found that serving as a sending church multiplies the ministry of the home churches into places it would never reach because of either geographical or cultural limitations.** One of the daughter churches is one the campus of the Ohio State University. This unique church ministers to students who would never have been impacted by the Mother church. Another church humorously defines the target audience in their neighborhood as “Ho’s, Homo’s, and Hobo’s” describing the diverse clientele of prostitutes, homeless people, gay men and lesbian women that they attempt to reach. The mother church had little, in any impact with these groups prior to the launch of the new church.

Planting churches not only spreads impact, it increases the number of people reached for Christ. In 1999 the author’s church had an average weekly attendance of 1071. From 1999 to the fall of 2005, the church gave away well over 200 people to serve as members of four church planting teams. However, the combined attendance of the four new churches and the mother church during the fall of 2005 exceeded 2,600 people!<sup>19</sup>

Some churches are reluctant to plant daughter churches because of a fear that doing so will negatively impact the attendance of the mother church. The author’s experience points to the opposite. The five years prior to planting daughter church the author’s church grew at a rate of 33%. However, during the five years that the church was involved in sending out daughter churches, the church grew 45%! From 1998 to 2003 the church sent out three new churches, yet grew by an average weekly attendance of 730 a week. Clearly, it is impossible to out give God.<sup>20</sup>

Year	Celebration attendance weekly average	Number increase	Percent increase
1993	599		
1998	900	399	33%
2003	1630	730	45%

Choosing to become a mother church helps keep the mother church on mission. Too often churches in their second and third decade plateau and decline because of lost vision and urgency of mission. But when new churches are being planted every few years the mother church is consistently reminded that she also exists to win the lost to Christ. This is sense of urgency translates easily into increased outreach. In 1999, the year before the author’s church began to plant churches, the church baptized 60 people. Six years and four church plants later, the church baptized 125 people in the year 2005.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 9-10.

<sup>19</sup>“Attendance Comparison Report,” New Life Center, from author’s notes, Gahanna, Ohio.

<sup>20</sup>“Celebration Comparison Report,” New Life Church, from author’s notes, Gahanna, Ohio.

<sup>21</sup>“20 Year Overview Report,” New Life Church, from author’s notes, Gahanna, Ohio.