

YOUR CHURCH CAN MULTIPLY

PRIORITIZING MULTIPLICATION
OVER GROWTH

Clint Clifton



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CONTENTS

Introduction
5

Stage One
Repent
17

Stage Two
Appeal
22

Stage Three
Reveal
27

Stage Four
Invite
36

Stage Five
Replace
42

Stage Six
Equip
46

Stage Seven
Release
50

Stage Eight
Invest
54

Stage Nine
Enjoy
58

Stage Ten
Repeat
62

INTRODUCTION

On Sunday morning, April 23, 1865, Charles Spurgeon, the prince of preachers, stood before his massive congregation at the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London and urged his members to leave the church. He was not angry with them, he was not having an emotional breakdown and he was not trying to rid the church of wolves. He was asking Spirit-filled, born-again Christians to consider devoting themselves to the prosperity of other churches for the advancement of the gospel. Here is a portion of what he said that day:

“We have never sought to hinder the uprising of other Churches from our midst or in our neighborhood. It is with cheerfulness that we dismiss our twelve’s, our twenties, our fifties, to form other Churches. We encourage our members to leave us to found other Churches; nay, we seek to persuade them to do it. We ask them to scatter throughout the land to become the goodly seed, which God shall bless. I believe that so long as we do this we shall prosper. I have marked other Churches that have adopted the other way, and they have not succeeded.”

As children of the Church Growth Movement, this kind of preaching is incomprehensible to us. Our goal is to get people to leave other churches and come to ours, and it is hard for us to believe that the redistribution of Christians from our congregation to another could result in anything positive.

After all, everyone knows that the pastor who dies with the biggest church wins—or so it seems. But Spurgeon, arguably the world’s first megachurch pastor, seemed to have no trouble telling his members to leave in order to form other churches.

MY AUDIENCE

This book is written for pastors, elders and church leaders with a desire to expand the kingdom of God, but who fear they will somehow harm their ministry in the process. This concern is valid. I would not think you to be a very good shepherd if the thought had not, at least, given you pause, but a brief pause is all it should provoke. As soon as we remember the great price that was paid for our souls, and the great Savior who paid that price with His own blood, we should be motivated to press on until Jesus Christ is known and worshiped in every place. Spurgeon again said:

“The Christian Church was designed from the first to be aggressive. It was not intended to remain stationary at any period, but to advance onward until its boundaries became commensurate with those of the world. It was to spread from Jerusalem to all Judea, from Judea to Samaria, and from Samaria until the uttermost parts of the earth. It was not intended to radiate from one central point only, but to form numerous centers from which its influence might spread to the surrounding parts The plan upon which the apostles proceeded was to plant churches in all the great cities and centers of influence in the known world.”

Many of my pastor friends are pretty affirming of my work in church planting. Some pastors I know, even of larger congregations, someday, look toward planting other churches.

“When we have more money and more people, we will get involved in church planting” seems to be a common refrain. Maybe you can identify

with this point of view. Maybe you like the idea of leading your church to reproduce, but imagine having a lot more resources at your disposal when you do. You want to protect your congregation, and, at the same time, plant a church that will be successful. You reason that more time, more money and more people will increase the odds of your success. My aim is to persuade all pastors—even those with budgetary constraints, bad coffee, plumbing problems and cantankerous people—to thrust their energy into kingdom-growth through church multiplication.

My friend, Shane Critser, specializes in helping pastors move from interest to action in church planting at the North American Mission Board. After years of working to get pastors on mission, Shane wrote down the four most common objections he hears from church leaders when considering church planting:

IT COSTS TOO MUCH

I think most people feel this way because when they think of starting a new church, they begin to think about their own church needs, too. Their church may have a building, programs and maintenance that cost money to maintain. They think about the challenges their church faces each day and cannot comprehend starting another church and doubling the same challenges financially. The truth is, not all church planting costs a lot of money. Some church plants may not cost any money, depending on the model and the context. And even if the church wanted to be a part of something requiring high financial costs, partnering with other small churches can spread the burden of resources.

WE CAN'T AFFORD TO LOSE OUR BEST LEADERS

I believe you can't afford not to! I think God is just as concerned, if not more, with how many we send as He is with how many we seat in our Sunday morning services. Yes. You may “lose” your best, but don't minimize the awesome fact that another church is receiving your best. And by sending—not losing—your best, you open up spots for other

leaders to become your “new” best! A church is meant to be a launching pad for God’s kingdom and a place for people to join in on what He’s doing. This is actually a great leadership development strategy. By sending them out, you are forced to make new leaders! Jack Welch, former CEO of GE, said, “If the best person to take over as CEO is an outsider, your company has failed. You send the message: ‘You are not good enough, you stink and I have to go outside to shape you guys up.’” When we don’t develop our lay people to do big things and be our churches’ best, what are we communicating to them?

IT WILL DESTROY OUR GROWTH MOMENTUM

I’ve actually seen the opposite effect. When people visit your church and they see you celebrating people’s leadership capabilities and sending them out to do great things, this inspires new people to join in. People are drawn to churches where big things are happening. There are plenty of clubs people can join to have their preferences and expectations met. A church is meant to be a launching pad for God’s kingdom and a place for people to join in on what He’s doing. And don’t ignore the simple truth that God often blesses you with more people when you send them out. I know this was true for the church I was a part of most recently. Every time we sent 50 out to help plant a church, God would send us new people. Our momentum never slowed. It actually increased and allowed us more seats for all the new people who came to watch God move. Sending out is also a great solution to overcrowded services.

WE’RE TOO SMALL

This objection stems from a misunderstanding of church planting. When most people hear their pastor discuss a possible church plant, their mind immediately goes to what their church looks and acts like now. They think about buildings, programs, staff, maintenance and the budget it takes to do all those things. But in reality, most new churches will not, and may never, need those things. We have to lead our church to under-

stand that the new church may not look like us. So we can't think of it as duplication; it's multiplication. While a new church will contain aspects of your DNA, it will not be a mirror image of your established church. Pastors must lead their church to understand the new church may not look like us. If you need an illustration, consider my two daughters. Thank the Lord they don't look just like me. They would be ugly girls if they did! My wife gave birth to daughters, not duplicates. Help your church members understand that when you start a new church, you are birthing a daughter, not a duplicate.

MY STORY

In 2004, at 24 years old, I started working to plant a church near Marine Corps Base Quantico in Northern Virginia. Prior to planting, I was a church musician serving at a medium-sized church. Like most church planters, I thought I would be pastoring hundreds, if not thousands, within a few years. That is not what happened. The church I planted, Pillar Church, grew much slower than I expected. I still wanted to lead my church to do our part to fulfill the Great Commission, but giving away resources did not seem advisable in our young, vulnerable state. Our church was broke. I was broke. Yet every time I read my Bible, there it was, in black and white, the New Testament call to advance the gospel.

My aim from the beginning, like a lot of church planters, was to plant a church that would multiply, but the work was more difficult than I had anticipated. I found out the learning curve between being a professional musician and a missionary to Marines is pretty steep. The church's growth was painfully slow and I was faced with this decision: Forget about multiplication and focus on growth, or attempt to multiply as a very small, poor church.

I chose to multiply. Everything in me was urging me to focus on growth and delay my plans to multiply. Here are three reasons why I chose to prioritize multiplication over growth.

NO EXCEPTIONS IN THE GREAT COMMISSION

The Great Commission does not contain any exceptions for small, young and poor churches. In fact, there is a case to be made that the New Testament churches which gave most generously for the advancement of the gospel were the poorest. Consider Paul's description of the churches of Macedonia: "We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part." (2 Cor. 8:1-2) As American Christians, we are left without excuse from the Scripture or our circumstances. Our churches are larger and more stable, by far, than churches worldwide. Our financial accessibility is unmatched, and pastors are better educated than anywhere else in the world.

CULTURE IS TOUGH TO CHANGE

The culture of a church is difficult to change. Imagine spending years working to help your church become established in your community. You get a facility, bring the church to a good place financially, staff all of the programs and ministries and have a vibrant worship service every weekend. By the time all of this is accomplished, you've spent years teaching that the growth and stability of your own congregation is a higher priority than the growth of the kingdom of God in your city and world. Then once you have reached a point of stability, you begin teaching the congregation that the growth of the kingdom is a greater priority than the growth of your own congregation. Large organizations do not change easily or quickly. Transitioning a self-focused church to a kingdom-focused church will be a long and difficult process, even for the best of leaders. Church planters, on the other hand, have the opportunity to "build into the beginning what you want in the end." If you are starting a new church, let me encourage you to build kingdom-priority into the church's focus from the earliest stages. Even those starting a new role at an established church have an opportunity to shape your

church's culture toward kingdom growth.

EVERYTHING I NEED TO MULTIPLY, I ALREADY HAVE

As I started to consider what I actually needed in order to lead my congregation to plant new churches, I noticed the fundamental needs for me to send church planting teams were already at my immediate disposal. What do we need to plant new churches?

- **Do we need money?** Money would be helpful, but churches all over the world get started with little to no money. So, money is not necessary. Besides, money follows vision. Limitless resources are available by casting a clearly articulated vision for reaching the lost. Vision does not follow money, and assets in the hands of a church with no vision for using them are of no value. Churches with a clear and compelling vision will gather assets over time.
- **Do we need a large team?** It would be ideal to be able to send 50 or 100 Christians to start a new church—but it seems that New Testament churches were started on a whole lot less than that. In my observation, three or four highly committed Christians can get the job done.
- **Do we need a place to meet?** Yes, but there are plenty of free or cheap public spaces and private homes we could use until we can afford something better. We all know that the Church is not about the building. A place to meet matters, but not as much as the spread of the gospel.
- **Do we need leaders?** Yes, we do need leaders. There is no way to get around that one! In my observation, only one resource is really necessary for a church to begin planting another church, and it has nothing to do with buildings or budgets. The one necessary resource is a capable leader. Churches are planted by missionary-pastors sent by kingdom-building churches. So, if you are wondering about the

church planting “silver bullet,” here it is: The only thing you absolutely must have in order to plant a new church is a scripturally qualified, missionary-pastor to send.

Though my first instinct was to invest every resource I could to work toward the growth and prosperity of my own congregation, I made the decision to do all I could to develop new leaders. That decision has been incredibly difficult at times, but exhilarating in the long run. To date, our church is almost 12 years old, and today we are just shy of 20 churches in our family tree. The church that felt so fragile and vulnerable in the beginning is now a vibrant family of faith.

YOUR CHURCH WILL NOT REACH YOUR CITY

There’s a good chance the vision statement for your church has something to do with reaching your community for Christ. Although the impulse is admirable, there is virtually no chance that will actually happen. The largest church in my city has about 13,000 attendees on a given weekend. That is 0.2% of the population. The average church is about 75 people, meaning that each church is gathering about .00125% of the city. The most generous estimates guess only about 12% of people in my city go to a Bible-believing church on a given weekend. The idea that my church could reach my city just is not realistic. I know this is not a popular idea, but I have the facts of Church history on my side. No church has ever reached its entire city. That is not to say your church is not great. It is not to say you are not a wonderful pastor. It is just an acknowledgement that God seems to find pleasure in using many churches to make Himself known—even churches in the same city.

Luke records a little interaction the disciples had with Jesus that gives us a glimpse into Jesus’ thinking on this subject, John says, “Master, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he does not follow with us” (Luke 9:49).

It seems that John and the rest of the disciples assumed Jesus would be proud of them for trying to stop this unruly demon-caster. “But Jesus said to him, ‘Do not stop him, for the one who is not against you is for you’” (Luke 9:50).

John’s impulse to stop this man lives in me, too. Somewhere tucked deep in me is the sense that my church can handle the problem of lostness in my city. We can evangelize everyone; we just need to grow a bit more. We can serve all of the needs in our community; we just need a few more hands on deck. This is ludicrous. Communities are diverse and in need of many types of churches; churches with the same gospel but different leaders, passions, initiatives and approaches.

MANY CHURCHES ARE NEEDED

I am a bit of a “foodie,” and I live in a city full of world-class restaurants. If you visit Washington, D.C., and ask me for a culinary suggestion, I will give you a half-dozen ideas in less than a minute. Even so, my favorite restaurant (as good as it is) is not so good that I believe it should be the only restaurant in the city. One restaurant cannot serve an entire city, and neither can one church. There are many different reasons why I choose one restaurant over another: cleanliness, aesthetics, taste, service, price and location are just a few. More restaurants mean more people eating out. The same is true for churches. Many different types of churches are needed in your community because many different types of people live there. No matter how good your church is at ministering to the various people groups that make up your city, you will not serve everyone.

More than ever before, our world is ethnically, religiously, linguistically, socially and economically diverse. If we hope to reach our cities with the gospel, we must send out a diverse batch of missionaries. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of combinations of ethnic, socioeconomic and affinity groups in the cities of the world. The harvest is diverse, and so must the workers be if we hope to make Jesus known. If we are going to make

progress reaching millions in our cities, we would have to plant a mother church, not a megachurch.

WHERE DO I START?

The remainder of this book will guide you through 10 stages in the process of preparing your church to multiply. You should think about the process you are about to go through like you would any other major church project or program. There will be a time of learning, prayer, preparation, teaching and resource gathering before you actually get to the work. Each stage is included to help you multiply your church without harming it. Remember that the first time you do something is always hard. It may be a little clumsy, but becomes more natural as you do it. Here is a snapshot of the process I'm suggesting:

STAGE ONE: REPENT

Change your mind, and the mind of your congregation, about your involvement in kingdom-building in your city.

STAGE TWO: APPEAL

Lead the congregation to appeal to God for His guidance through the process. Learn how to organize a formal, corporate, ongoing strategy for prayer for the new church plant within your congregation.

STAGE THREE: REVEAL

Reveal a specific, thorough plan of action to your congregation. Include who the leaders of this new work will be.

STAGE FOUR: INVITE

It is time to get members involved in the forming of this new church planting team. Get the whole church involved in the different aspects of the process.

STAGE FIVE: REPLACE

Once members have committed to join the new church you will start to worry about the gaps that will be left in your church by their absence. Lead your departing members to work with you to identify and train their replacements.

STAGE SIX: EQUIP

Equip the outgoing team for their roles in the church plant and equip new incoming leaders to fill their shoes.

STAGE SEVEN: RELEASE

Release your missionaries and your new leaders to do the ministry they have been called to. A commissioning service is a great way to celebrate members on mission.

STAGE EIGHT: INVEST

Explore meaningful ways to invest that do not require a lot of cash. What do new churches need much more than money? Thoughtful, loving parents to correct, advise, encourage, support and pray for them.

STAGE NINE: ENJOY

Church planting is the ecclesiastical equivalent of childbirth. It can be one of the most exciting, enjoyable experiences your church will ever have.

STAGE TEN: REPEAT

Set up systems of reproduction in your church to support ongoing church planting efforts and initiatives. Include how to gather resources for church planters, how to coach and train them and how to support them in an ongoing way as they plant.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN...

I love the G.K. Chesterton quote, “Anything worth doing is worth doing poorly at first.” It is more important that you begin leading your church in church planting than it is to do it perfectly from the start. With that in mind, no matter your size, location or budget you can begin preparing to plant a new church.

Each chapter in the book will conclude with some “Questions to consider.” These questions will help you think about the action steps you need to take to move your congregation through the stages outlined in this book. Let me encourage you to take time to consider the questions, and the answers to these questions, with other leaders from your congregation.

Let’s get started!

STAGE ONE

REPENT

Leading your church to plant or revitalize another church is an act of corporate worship. It is a way of saying, “Our church is not the answer to lostness in our city; the gospel our church preaches is the answer.” When you lead your church this way, you are leading them to obey the Great Commission. You are teaching the congregation that the advancement of Jesus’ message is more important than your church’s size or notoriety.

So, how do you know if your church is focused on kingdom growth or church growth? Here is a little quiz that may help you assess how you are doing in this area. Answer the five questions below with a simple “yes” or “no” and give yourself a point for every “yes.”

1. Does our church ever publicly pray for the success of other churches?
2. Do our leaders encourage our members to be sent out to help new or declining churches?
3. Do we give any portion of our financial resources to other churches?
4. Do our pastors spend time mentoring leaders from other churches?
5. Do other churches ever depend on us for help?

IF YOU SCORED 4 OR 5

It sounds like your church has been making sacrifices to advance the gospel already. The step you are about to take to lead your congregation to plant a new church may not be as big a leap as you might think. The congregation may be agreeable to dedicating time, resources and attention to the building of the kingdom in your region. Nevertheless, it is still important that the congregation understand and affirm the direction ahead. The more “buy-in” you have from every strata of the church’s ministry—elders, staff, deacons, ministry leaders, members and attenders—the easier the process will be.

IF YOU SCORED 0 TO 3

Don’t be discouraged; you are not alone. The vast majority of evangelical churches in North America give little to no attention to building the kingdom in their region outside of their local church’s ministry. If your congregation is in this situation, you will need to work to lead your congregation to repent. That may seem like a strong word, but the Greek word used in the New Testament for ‘repentance’ is *metanoēō*, simply meaning, “change of mind.” What would it look like for your church to have a change of mind about church planting?

HOW CHURCHES CHANGE THEIR MINDS

It is not very common that a church goes through a significant philosophical or directional change, but, when it does, the leaders have the task of guiding the congregation through the change—a task that can often be challenging.

I have been in pastoral ministry for about 20 years. In that time, I have seen three basic approaches that church leaders employ to make major philosophical or directional changes.

HASTE AND AGGRESSION

Sometimes, pastoral leaders overestimate their influence and attempt to implement changes too quickly and assertively. Young and inexpe-

rienced pastors can often fall into this trap, mistakenly assuming their position garners enough influence to make the desired change. Young leaders rarely judge this one rightly. In an established church, it takes at least 36 months to even earn the right to lead. In some cases it can even take longer. Shepherding requires patience, and hasty aggression is not suggested.

SECRECY AND DECEPTION

Obviously this is not an approach any good leader would consider, but since I do not know the capacity of your leadership skills, I thought I would mention it. Sometimes when leaders want to implement change they know could be met with resistance, they make changes and simply hope no one notices. Like a game of Jenga, some pastors secretly rearrange aspects of the church's ministry one piece at a time. Maybe you are not explicitly deceiving your congregation, but avoid even the hint of secrecy by getting the whole flock onboard and patiently shepherding them through the change.

HUMILITY AND REPENTANCE

The best and most honest approach to change is humility and repentance. Megachurch pastor Bill Hybels publicly repented of aspects of his leadership at Willow Creek Community Church and sought to redirect his congregation with unique humility and repentance when he published the 2008 Reveal study. A Christianity Today editorial took note of his vulnerability:

“Willow’s study, of course, invites this very exercise in iron sharpening iron. It’s precisely because of Willow’s passion to grow people in Christ, its humility to undertake a self-study, and its vulnerability to publicize the results, that we’re all thinking more deeply about what it means to be the church. Would that more congregation have such passion and humility.”

A few years ago, McLean Bible Church, a Washington, D.C.,-area multisite megachurch, began getting involved in church planting efforts in their city. This was pretty surprising, because at the time I had lived in the Washington, D.C., area for nearly 15 years and knew quite a lot about the McLean Bible Church's ministry and reputation.

McLean Bible was known in the mid-Atlantic region not only for its girth, but for its fiery Jewish pulpiteer, Lon Solomon. The church's campuses, 13,000 attendees, \$32 million annual budget and staff of 300, made it a difficult church to ignore. However, they had earned a reputation for not caring much about other churches, and for their particular disinterest in church planting.

Needless to say, I was skeptical when I began talking with them about the changes they hoped to make. My skepticism quickly melted away when I heard Pastor Lon, and other leaders from his staff, describe their repentance over their lack of concern for the success of other gospel-loving churches in the D.C. area. Lon explains:

“I was convinced that to continue on this trajectory of growth and ministry success, we needed to keep our church family expanding. So when staff approached me with the idea of starting new churches from our otherwise large and healthy congregation, I was vehemently opposed to it. In many ways, being the pastor of a large church became part of my identity, and I was holding on to it for dear life. The last thing I wanted was for members of our congregation to break off and start new churches. I only wanted our church to continue to grow. Looking back, I realize that what I thought was a healthy approach to church growth, was actually sinful.”

Within a few short months, the church's leaders confessed the sin before the congregation and presented a thorough plan for correcting it. The staff and congregation have adjusted their ministry to encourage the growth

of the kingdom of God in Washington, D.C., and not simply the growth of McLean Bible Church.

I am convinced that the humility and repentance that was modeled by the church's senior leaders gave way to the corporate repentance and humility that led to such a significant and speedy change in the body.

The hasty and aggressive approach is more likely to get you fired than it is to get you on mission, and the secretive and deceptive approach is outside the character required for pastoring. Neither of these approaches are likely to get you any closer to leading your church to building the kingdom of God. Your congregation is most likely to respond to humility and repentance from a leader they trust.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Does your congregation need a change of heart about church planting? If so, what specifically needs to change?
2. At this point in your church's life, if you attempted to lead the church to have a change of mind about church planting, how do you think the members would receive it?
3. Who are the two or three people in your ministry you believe would present the greatest resistance to church planting? What do you anticipate their concerns would be?
4. Do you think your church's leaders have enough influence with the congregation to lead them through a philosophical shift of this magnitude?
5. What could you begin doing immediately to start the process of preparing your congregation to have a change of heart about church planting?

STAGE TWO

APPEAL

Once you are through the process of leading members to a change of heart, you will be tempted to dive right into the work of church planting. Before you get too busy making plans for God, take some time (with the congregation) to hear from God. When you pray publicly, you teach the congregation where you believe your help comes from. If all your people hear is your church planting strategy, they will attribute the church's success or failure to the strategy. On the other hand, if you allow the congregation to sense the tension you feel between your love for them and your love for the lost sheep of your city, they will understand why you care so much about church planting.

WHEN YOU PRAY, PRAY LIKE THIS ...

We all know we should pray for direction from the Lord, but not exactly how we should pray. Allow me to give you five specific ways you should seek to pray as your church makes an appeal to God to use you to plant a church. If you pray for these items regularly and publicly, you will enjoy the congregational benefits of witnessing the Lord's answer to these prayers over the course of the church planting process. Of course, there are more things you should be praying for, but these are a few you should not neglect.

LORD, SHOW US A PLACE OR A PEOPLE

Ask the Lord to give you a burden for a place or a people group that are lacking in gospel witness. Sometimes the place will be obvious; other times it will not. While you pray, encourage your congregation to keep their eyes open for places and people in need. I was once part of a church staff that began praying for God to show us where we should begin working to plant a new church. As we were praying, one of the pastors from the staff told us he thought the Lord might be calling us to spread the gospel in Reykjavik, Iceland. When he first brought it up, I thought, “Is that a real place?” In my mind Iceland was in the same category as Candyland or the North Pole. We started praying for the people of Iceland and researching the need for the gospel in the tiny island nation. Eventually, we boarded a plane and headed over to visit for a few days. God did in fact lead us to work in Iceland! Now, nearly a decade later, dozens of our members have visited Iceland, several families have moved there for short or long periods of time and a church is now growing downtown in their capital city!

LORD, RAISE UP LEADERS FROM OUR MIDST

Lead your congregation to pray for God to provide leaders for this new work from within your church. Sometimes churches assume they have no members that could or would be willing to be used by God to plant a church. Instead of praying, they begin their search on the outside, looking for a recent seminary graduate or someone from another church who feels called to church planting. This approach should be a last resort. I did not sign up for pastoral ministry because I wanted to be able to identify qualified leaders who were developed by others. I wanted God to use me to raise up leaders. Look first from within. Pray that God would call men out of your congregation to become pastors and others to join church planting teams.

LORD, PROVIDE WHAT WE NEED

In my observation, the greatest fear churches have when it comes to leading their congregation to multiply is the fear that they will suffer financially for doing so. As a church leader, you will either perpetuate this fear or obliterate it by the way you talk and pray before your congregation. If you are fearful or apprehensive about God's ability to provide for His people on mission, your members will be too. This is a time to express a sense of confidence in the Lord's promise at the end of the Great Commission that He will be "with us always." My four kids never worry about money because my wife, Jennifer, and I are "with them always." If they need or want something, they just ask for it. Sometimes we say yes, sometimes we say no, but the one thing they know is that we are with them and we will take care of them. In the same way, you should lead your church not to worry about the financial aspects of church planting. You should ask in prayer for God to provide for you, but it should not be a point of concern or worry for you.

LORD, SAVE THE LOST

What responsible Christian would walk into an evangelistic encounter without asking for help from God? Likewise, church planting is a corporate, evangelistic endeavor, and we should never walk into it without corporately asking for help from God. The Bible is clear, "Salvation belongs to the Lord," (Ps. 3:8) and "No one comes to the Father unless the Spirit of God draws him," (John 6:44). It is unthinkable that we would ever approach sinners with the gospel apart from prayer. Lead the people to pray for the lost to be found, and celebrate those who repent and believe as answers to prayer.

LORD, REPLACE THOSE WHO GO FOR US

The church is a family. It is natural for the members of your church to be concerned about the shoes that are left to be filled by those leaving to start a new church. Right now in my church, we are forming a team to

plant a church in Washington, D.C., that will depart in about six months. We have been asking the Lord to call members to go with this new church plant. We have been praying that members would be willing to sell their possessions and reorganize their lives for the sake of the gospel. In the past few weeks, God has called one of our elders, our church administrator and our worship leader to go with this new church. Yikes, right?! These are three of the hardest-working, most trustworthy and longest-standing members we have! It is hard to imagine conducting our ministry without them. Nevertheless, we asked the Lord to call out members from our church to go, and He answered that prayer. Who am I to question His call? I can say as Spurgeon did to his members, “If you can do more good elsewhere than you can do here, for God’s sake, go, and happy shalt I be that you have gone.”

Happy? Yes. Sad? Yes. The same sadness a mother feels when she drops her kid off at college and drives away. A happy that hurts. So, how do we pray? “Jesus, would you raise up other leaders in the place of those who go for us?” That is how you pray. That is how you lead your people to pray.

Appeal to God for His guidance through the process and watch Him work. Our intuition tells us that if we send away resources and people to plant a new church, our church will suffer. Ask pastors who regularly multiply their congregations, and you will find the opposite to be true. Those congregations who have an open-handed, gospel-minded view of members and resources experience the provision and blessing of both planting and growing. Every year since the first year of our church, we have sent members and money away to church planting projects, and every year we have grown numerically and financially. Church planting has not hurt our church; it has helped it.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Are there any groups of people or places in your region that you feel a particular burden for? How could you lead the congregation to begin praying for them?
2. Are there any godly men in your church who you think may have the character to become pastors? How could you personally begin praying for them?
3. Are there any ministries, equipment expenses, facilities or programs you are allocating financial resources to that are less important than church planting?
4. Does your church regularly pray publicly for the lost to be saved? Is this an area that could be improved if emphasized and modeled by the church's leaders?
5. What leaders and members in your congregation do you consider irreplaceable?
6. Are there any staff members, leaders or members you perceive to have the character and competency to lead a church planting team? If so, who are they?

STAGE THREE

REVEAL

Once a church's heart has been changed about the necessity of church planting and you have settled on the most important decisions about the project (i.e. where to plant the church, when it should begin, who the church planter will be, etc...), you will have the privilege of revealing the specifics of the plan to your congregation. How well you handle this "reveal" will have a lot to do with how well your congregation receives and supports the plan you share.

DON'T STUMBLE OUT OF THE GATE

Unfortunately, a fair number of churches in North America are not aggressively and sacrificially planting churches. Many are just trying to survive. In an age when 8 out of 10 U.S. churches are declining or have plateaued, it is reasonable that some church members are more interested in protecting their assets than they are deploying them. With this in mind, pastors of existing churches should assume that leading their congregations to embrace a vision for church planting will require some patient instruction.

Perhaps you have heard the euphemisms, "He stumbled out of the gate" or "He started off on the wrong foot." I want to help you avoid stumbling out of the gate as you attempt to lead your church to multiply. Here are five things you can do before revealing a church planting plan to your congrega-

tion that will increase the odds of a sure-footed start:

ASSESS YOUR INFLUENCE

Pastors and church leaders sometimes overestimate the influence and authority they have over their congregations. Do not assume that just because you do not hear any opposing views that there are not any. In fact, sometimes the fact that you have not heard any opposing views can simply mean that you have not yet said or done anything controversial.

Question: How do you measure your influence in a congregation?

Answer: You ask the other influential people in your congregation.

I once worked at a church near a Bible college. The church had had a steady stream of pastors that served bivocationally during their years in school but moved on from the church soon after graduation. Many of the church's members had been attending more than 20 years. In that time, they had about 10 pastors. As a result of the constant turnover, there were a few members who had greater influence over the congregation than the pastors did. One member, Dennis, was particularly influential. Dennis had served the church faithfully for a long time and loved the people very much. It did not take me long to learn that before I shared an idea with the congregation I should run it by Dennis. This was not because Dennis necessarily knew how the congregation would respond, but because Dennis' opinion carried a lot of weight in the church. Sometimes I would ask Dennis, "Do you think people will follow me if I try to lead them to ...?"

Track down some of the individuals in your church who are influential and ask, "Do you think the church would ever consider ...?" It doesn't matter if you are passionate about church planting if you do not have the patience or influence to shepherd the church to share your passion.

TEACH THE BIBLICAL RATIONALE

Christians are persuaded by the Bible. Your best bet is to simply teach Christians the biblical rationale for church planting. Consider starting with a sermon series on the subject or even a class. A resource that you might find helpful to accomplish this is the Send Network's Church Planting Primer. The primer is a four-session video course on the basics of church planting. It covers the biblical rationale for church planting, the need for new churches, how new churches begin and how everyday Christians can get involved in starting new churches.

RECRUIT OTHER LEADERS TO STAND WITH YOU

It is wise to first seek to persuade the leaders of your church before bringing such an important issue to the congregation. I have found that when I stand before my congregation alone with an idea, I am not nearly as successful at implementation as I am when I stand with the other elders in my church.

A church can take bold, unified steps when it takes them together. For example, imagine that you stand before your congregation on Sunday and say, "The Bible commands us to spread the gospel, so I believe our church should take all of the money from our savings account and give it to a missionary." What do you think would happen? You would probably have a few people that have given sacrificially to build the church's cash reserves who would be pretty upset with a decision like that. I suspect they would oppose your position. Does that mean they are selfish people, or that they do not want to see missionaries supported or the gospel spread? Of course not!

Now imagine that all of the church's elders stand shoulder-to-shoulder at the conclusion of a worship service and say, "Our elders have prayed and sought the Lord. We unanimously agree that our church should take all of the money from our savings account and give it to a missionary." Assuming the leaders of your congregation are respected

and trusted, that would be a hard position to oppose.

The step you're about to take to lead your congregation to give away resources will feel counterintuitive, even unwise to some in your congregation. Be patient with them and work with other church leaders to patiently teach and persuade them with the biblical rationale.

CHOOSE A TRUSTED PLANTER

It's important that the church planter selected to lead this effort is willing to work with you to shepherd your congregation. Because of this, it's ideal if the church planter is a trusted staff member or member of your church. Church planters are sometimes so focused on the work of church planting they don't give enough attention to the vacancies created by their calling. Your church will be more patient with those they know and love and more willing to step up and fill in the vacancies.

If you genuinely don't have a leader to send, you can bring in a leader and allow them to serve in your congregation for a year or so with clear plans to send them out to plant. This is sometimes called a "residency" or "apprenticeship." At Pillar Church of Dumfries, we have developed a year-long church planter residency. We divide the year they spend with us into four seasons with specific goals for each season.

Fall – Assimilation

During the assimilation season residents will:

- Become a member.
- Begin a Bible study made up of individuals not currently connected with our church.
- Work to form relationships with as many members and leaders in the church as possible.
- Work through the first five chapters of Church Planting Thresholds.
- Meet weekly for planning, mentorship and accountability with the

pastors of the Sending Church.

- Recruit a pastoral partner.
- Research potential ministry fields and make key decisions such as location, church name, timeline, team size and budget requirements.
- During the assimilation season, residents will spend approximately 75% of their time on matters related to the Sending Church and 25% of their time on matters related to the new church.

Winter – Planning

During the planning season residents will:

- Write a church planting prospectus including a budget, ministry description and strategy.
- Produce a promotional film, a website and other promotional materials.
- Work through the last five chapters of Church Planting Thresholds.
- Meet weekly for planning, mentorship and accountability with the pastors of the Sending Church.
- Schedule speaking engagements in other churches to share the vision.
- During the planning season, residents will spend approximately 50% of their time on matters related to the Sending Church and 50% of their time on matters related to the new church.

Spring – Gathering

During the gathering season residents will:

- Share the vision and plan in other churches.
- Form friendships within the ministry field, including civic authorities and other gospel workers.
- Gather a core team.

- Apply for partnership with associations, networks and denominations.
- Plan preview services and informational meetings.
- Meet weekly for planning, mentorship and accountability with the pastors of the Sending Church.
- During the gathering phase, residents will spend approximately 25% of their time on matters related to the Sending Church and 75% of their time on matters related to the new church.

Summer – Transitioning

During the transition phase residents will:

- Complete the ordination process and be commissioned by the Sending Church.
- Hold informational meetings and preview services.
- Continue gathering support.
- Meet weekly for planning, mentorship and accountability with the pastors of the Sending Church.
- Gain acceptance from associations, networks and denominations.
- Secure housing on the ministry field.
- During the planning phase, residents will spend approximately 25% of their time on matters related to the Sending Church and 75% of their time on matters related to the new church.

These four seasons give us time to properly prepare and assess our church planters. In the event that he is not known by our congregation, it gives them an opportunity to get to know him and his family well. We have found that our ability to get our members on mission depends heavily on how well our members know the church planter and his family.

HAVE A THOUGHT-OUT, WRITTEN-DOWN PLAN

Finally, let me encourage you to have a plan or “roadmap” to give to the congregation when you reveal your intentions. Chapters 4-10 of this book can serve as that roadmap or you can create a custom plan for your congregation, but the members of your church need to know there is a plan in place both for the new church and for the Sending Church’s future progress and fruitfulness. This plan should answer questions like:

- How will we replace the leaders who God calls to go with the new church?
- How will we pay for the costs associated with doing this?
- What church planting experts will we have access to who can guide us through the process?
- Who will keep the church planter accountable financially and otherwise?
- How will we relate to this new church in the future?
- How will we choose what families go and what families stay?
- How will we prepare for the financial hit we will take when members move away?

This list is by no means exhaustive but these are a sampling of the types of questions church members will want to know the answers to when you begin talking about church planting. My goal is always to reassure the saints of my own congregation that 1) what we are doing is good and godly, 2) God will provide everything we need and even more and 3) I have thought through every concern you have and have a satisfactory answer to your concern.

FINAL THOUGHTS ON THE REVEAL

A bad experience will be hard to recover from. If you stumble out of the gate, you will find that the members and attenders of your church will be resistant to church planting initiatives in the future. Periodically, when I'm talking with church leaders about church planting, a pastor will tell me, "Our church tried to plant a church a few years ago and" The undertone in the conversation is often, "We'll never do that again." The truth is, when a church has a bad experience with church planting or anything else, they are not likely to try again. So the first experience, in some ways, is the most important experience. It is my observation that the majority of church planting "train wrecks" would be averted with thoughtful planning, prayer and preparation by the leaders of the Sending Church. With this in mind, before you reveal the specifics of your plan to the congregation, be sure to assess your influence, teach biblical rationale, recruit leaders to stand with you, choose a known and trusted planter and have a plan in writing.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Do you believe you have the influence to lead the church to deploy a successful church planting team?
2. Has your congregation ever been taught about the biblical rationale for church planting?
3. Do you believe the other leaders of your church would stand united with you in leading the church to multiply? What leaders do you have that might need some convincing?
4. Is there a staff member or member of your church that is loved by the congregation and you can imagine successfully planting a new church?
5. Do you think the members of your church would be more likely to support this effort if you present them with a thought-out, written-down plan? If so, what questions do you think the congregation would most want to have answered by this plan?

6. How long do you think it would take for your congregation to be ready to receive and support a church planting plan? What would need to happen to get them ready to take action?
7. Who do you suspect would respond negatively to a plan, no matter how good the plan is and how well it is presented? How could you work with those individuals to help them feel more comfortable with the plan?

STAGE FOUR

INVITE

It is time to get members involved in the forming of this new church planting team. Your goal should be 100% participation from the congregation. That does not mean that every person joins the core team, but it does mean that every member plays some role in helping to establish this new church.

In most churches, there are a few ministries that only a handful of people participate in. Usually, those ministries are driven by one person with a clear passion. I know one church that has a street-preaching ministry. A few members from the church gather each month, pray together and then head out to preach on the high-traffic street corners of their city. Nearly every member of the church knows about it, but very few will ever participate in it. Maybe your church has a ministry to the homeless, widows or people with special needs that only a handful of people participate in. Obviously, there is no problem with this, but this is not what you want the church planting initiative of your church to become. The Great Commission is a call to plant new churches, and is for every Christian and for every church. The last thing you want is for this to simply become a ministry of the church in which only a small percentage of the congregation participates. This communicates that church planting is a “take it or leave it” activity. Your goal should be to get every member involved in church planting in one of the following eight ways.

DEVELOPING LEADERS

What is the goal of your church's music ministry right now? My guess is that it probably has something to do with effectively leading your congregation in worship. What if the primary (or even secondary) goal of the music ministry was to produce new worship leaders? Instead of thinking mainly about the quality of our worship leader, what if we thought about the quantity of our worship leaders? If you did this, and became good at it, your quality might go down slightly but you would probably have a deep bench of leaders itching to lead people in worship. Think about what could happen if every ministry had this goal? Children's ministry leaders raising up new children's ministry leaders, church administrators raising up new church administrators, preachers raising up new preachers, deacons raising up new deacons and elders raising up new elders.

Question: What would it be like if your church was teaming with trained leaders?

Answer: Members would feel greater freedom and responsibility to go serve Christ elsewhere and the church would be less concerned about losing leaders.

The first and most meaningful way that a children's ministry coordinator can become part of the church planting effort of your church is to work to produce new leaders. This is, perhaps, the most meaningful and significant way one church can support another. Sending Churches should do everything they can to support and encourage the church planters and missionaries they send out to start new churches. Good intentions are not enough. You have to make a plan and integrate that plan into the church's normal ministry rhythms.

STARTING A CHURCH PLANTER CARE TEAM

A Church Planter Care Team is specifically responsible for supporting your church planters and their families. Without someone specifically responsible for this task, it will go undone and your planters will feel disconnected and forgotten. Here are a few ideas about how a planter care team can support church planters:

- Have members send encouraging notes to the church planters and their family members.
- Regularly ask your church planters for prayer requests and get those requests into the hands of those who pray publicly in the worship services.
- Use your church's social media accounts to encourage others to support and pray for your planters.
- Celebrate milestones and important successes of the church plant in your worship services and prayer meetings.
- Show pictures and videos from successful outreach events and baptisms.
- Periodically send your church planter and his wife on an overnight getaway.
- Provide babysitting and a gift card for date night.
- Encourage members to visit their worship services to offer encouragement on behalf of the church.

ADVOCATING PRAYER

You know the old saying, “out of sight, out of mind.” It is definitely true for church planting. Once your team is gone and the newness has worn off it will be hard to remember them in prayer. For this reason you should create some “reminders” in the regular rhythms for your church to help you re-

member and pray for those who are sent out by your congregation.

- **Show their faces.** Hang pictures of your planters on the walls of your facility, put them on the back panel of the bulletin, put them on a slide in your announcement rotation or feature them on your website and on social media.
- **Add them to the service order.** Add an element to your worship service called, “Church Planter of the Week.” Simply put up the picture of your church planter on the screen and read one or two prayer requests the church planter has sent to the congregation, and pray publicly for them.
- **Make them a staple in your prayer meeting.** It should be standard practice in your church’s prayer meeting to pray for the needs of your church planters and missionaries. If you can, collect prayer requests and praises ahead of time. Even if you don’t have specific requests, do not neglect to pray for them.
- **Have them fill the pulpit.** Make a plan to have your church planters preach and give updates periodically.

PROVIDING RESOURCES

There are some members of your congregation who have the ability to be extra-generous financially to support the new church. Ask members to consider giving a one-time donation or ask them to pledge a certain amount monthly to support the new church.

JOINING THE TEAM

Before his departure for India, William Carey famously said to his friend Andrew Fuller, “I will go down the well, if you will hold the rope.” That famous quote has done much to inspire men and women to support missionaries and church planters around the world. The truth is though, as good as “holding the rope” is, missionaries need some co-laborers to crawl down

into the well with them. In church planting, Christians have the amazing opportunity to not only support missionaries, but also become missionaries themselves. Encourage members of your church to consider joining the planting team.

SUPPORTING EVENTS

Most church planters want to reach out to their communities with special events and ministries but have a hard time doing it due to a lack of resources and people to accomplish the ministry. Your members can support church planters by organizing themselves to support an outreach event or ministry to benefit the new church.

FILLING VACANCIES

As members and leaders leave to form the core team of the new church, important vacancies will be left in the ministries they were manning and leading. Encourage your members to support the church planting initiative by taking over responsibility or a position previously held by someone going with the church planting team.

LENDING EXPERTISE

Some members of your church have experience in an area that could benefit a church planter and his team. Maybe an accountant could handle the church finances, a musician could lead worship, a graphic designer could design the church's logo and marketing materials, or a web developer could build the new church's website.

The goal is to get every member on mission so church planting does not become an obscure ministry of your church, but a thread woven into the fabric of every aspect of your church's ministry.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How is your church doing in the area of leadership development? Do you have a “deep leadership bench” or is this an area where you could improve?
2. In what ways does your congregation currently encourage pastors, missionaries and church planters?
3. Is your congregation in the regular habit of praying for the success of other churches?
4. What percentage of your weekly attenders do you suspect know the names of the missionaries you support? What could you do to improve this number?
5. If you had to trim the budget from ministries at your church in order to free up money for church planting, what obstacles do you think you might face?
6. How could you encourage members to consider joining a church planting team? What could you do that may cause members to give serious consideration to going?
7. What ministries or outreach events are successful in your context that you may be able to organize for the benefit of another church?
8. What percentage of the attenders in your church are only passive observers of the church’s ministry and not active participants? What do you believe it would take to get more of them involved in mission and ministry?
9. What special skills and abilities do your members have that could be useful to a church planting team?

STAGE FIVE

REPLACE

Generally speaking, the most committed and faithful members of your church are the most likely to leave your church to join a church planting team. When you send out people, the ones most committed to the ministry and mission of your church are the first to be sent. The most generous givers and spiritually mature will be the ones most willing to make the necessary sacrifice to see what they've experienced replicated somewhere else.

Once members of your church have committed to join the new church you will need to start thinking about the “gaps” that will be left when those members leave to plant the new church. Because replacing outgoing members is such a critical part of the overall experience your church will have, as a mother church you should create a timeline that allows ample time to choose, prepare and replace outgoing members. Assess what roles of leadership or service those members play week-to-week.

Let me use the current situation in my church as an example. My church is preparing to start King's Church in northeast Washington, D.C. As the team comes together, we start to get a picture of the vacancies that will be left by those forming the core team of the new church.

- Ben is our church planting resident. He is working hard to recruit a team, but he also is a small group leader in our church and preaches on occasion. (-1 small group leader and -1 preacher)

- Becky is our church administrator and our children’s ministry director. She has just agreed to join the team. (-1 administrator and -1 children’s ministry director)
- Amanda has agreed to join the team, too. She is one of our church’s worship leaders. She also hosts a small group in her home. (-1 worship leader and -1 host for small groups)
- Tim is one of five elders in our church and gives leadership to the setup crews that load our equipment in and out of our rental space each week. (-1 elder and -1 setup manager)
- Gelisa handles check-in for our children’s ministry each Sunday morning. She also is a volunteer in our International Friends ministry on a local community college campus. (-1 children’s check-in volunteer and -1 International Friends volunteer)

The King’s Church team is still coming together, but already we know there are at least 10 vacancies that need to be filled! If we intend to conduct ministry as we have in the past, we will need to be intentional about replacing our outgoing ministry leaders with new capable leaders. Here is how I suggest you get started:

LIST VACANCIES

Just as we have done in the example above, make a list of the vacancies left by the outgoing team members. Again, it is not uncommon for those who join the church planting team to be some of the best servants and leaders you have. This may cause you to second-guess the wisdom in sending out a team like this in the first place but, trust me, a blessing of provision is coming around the corner. Carefully evaluate the role of service and leadership that the person is fulfilling and begin making a list of the positions that need to be replaced.

CONSIDER POSSIBLE REPLACEMENTS

Work with newly committed team members to consider possible replacements for their roles. Often they will have recommendations for replacements in mind when you ask them. You may say to the children's ministry director, "Is there anyone serving in the children's ministry right now that you think may be able to fill your shoes with the right training and encouragement?"

ISSUE DIRECT INVITATIONS

Rather than posting an advertisement in the bulletin or making an announcement from the stage about the need, you should have the outgoing leader ask the potential replacement directly in a private conversation. That conversation could go something like this, "Hey Mike, you know I teach the 3-year-old class every week. I love those kids and it has been so great to see them grow each week. It's important to me that before I am sent out with the church plant, I find someone to replace me as the teacher. I've been thinking, praying and talking with the pastor, and I'd really like you to consider taking the position. I'm not leaving until April, so we have plenty of time to make sure you get a good handle on the class and the curriculum before I leave. Would you be willing to consider taking over the class?"

Issuing a direct invitation like the one above will nearly always produce a better result than a "Craigslist" style advertisement. Often when a church position is vacated it is assumed that the pastor or department head will recruit or appoint a replacement. As a pastor who has had my share of volunteer ministry positions to fill, let me say, I lean heavily on the opinion of outgoing ministry leaders suggesting their replacements. It is more likely that a competent replacement will be found if you rely on the expertise and opinion of your outgoing leader.

MAKE A TRANSITION PLAN

How long will it take for the outgoing ministry leader to prepare a replacement? Make a simple draft of a transition plan and talk through it with the newly recruited replacement until you both agree on an appropriate timeline.

It will be good for your church to see qualified and capable leaders filling the shoes of those who leave before they go. Facing the uncertainty of change is part of the church planting process, and so is witnessing God's provision unfold for every imaginable need along the way.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What member or staff member would be most difficult to replace if they decided to join a church planting team?
2. How do you think the members of your church would react if that member announced they were leaving to join a church planting team?
3. How are leaders typically replaced in your ministry and how does that differ from the approach advocated in this chapter?
4. Are there members with the capacity, character and competency to serve the church who are not serving currently? If so, who are they?
5. Could a transition offer a good opportunity to make improvements to ministries or programs in your context that need improvement?

STAGE SIX

EQUIP

Anyone hoping to multiply churches must first learn to multiply leaders. As pastors, preparing others for ministry is in our job description. Paul instructed Timothy to “equip the saints for the work of ministry” (Eph. 4:12) and to take the lessons he had learned “in the presence of many witnesses,” and “entrust” them to “faithful men” who would be able to “teach others also,” (2 Tim. 2:2). With that in mind:

1. How can we best equip those who have been called to go and spread the gospel with a church planting team?
2. How can we best equip those who are stepping up into new positions to fill the vacancies left by outgoing missionaries?

There is a refreshingly simple answer to both of these questions, and it is a memory tool for discipleship that has produced a great deal of fruit in my ministry. We can develop new leaders by “MAWLing” them (Model, Assist, Watch, Leave). This memory tool was originally designed for developing church planters quickly on the mission field but it works really well to equip anyone with an aspiration for ministry work.

- **Model** – Show them how to do the activity or task by doing it in front of them and explaining what you are doing.
- **Assist** – Let them help you as you complete the task or activity, then switch roles and you become the helper.

- **Watch** – Sit back and watch your replacement work. Be sure not to be critical of them as they work; save your comments for a time of debrief after the activity is over.
- **Leave** – This is an important and underappreciated part of the process. Leave and let your replacement work without feeling scrutinized by your watchful eye.

We live in a day where most instruction happens in the classroom, and where job skills are not required to receive satisfactory scores. This is not how Paul (and Jesus, for that matter) developed leaders for ministry. His approach was to encourage others to imitate him and his activities. Consider these passages:

“Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.” (Phil. 3:17)

“Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.” (1 Cor. 11:1)

“Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone’s bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate.” (2 Thess. 3:6-9)

I know what you are thinking: “That’s really simple. That’s not a strategy. That’s what people do intuitively to help others learn.” Yes! It is! But, somehow, we have slipped into a pattern for discipleship that includes a lot of instruction and virtually no imitation. So, how do we use this simple memory device to develop outgoing and incoming ministry leaders?

APPLICATION FOR MAWL-ING YOUR OUTGOING LEADERS

Outgoing leaders will likely be filling a particular role or roles on the church planting team. The Sending Church can prepare the outgoing leaders for the tasks they face ahead. Maybe someone in your finance department can “MAWL” the volunteer bookkeeper for the new church. Maybe your youth pastor can “MAWL” a member of your core team to help them get some experience ministering to students. If you are an experienced and fruitful preacher, consider MAWL-ing the church planter on sermon preparation and delivery. The possibilities are endless for ways you can leverage the experience of your congregation for the benefit of this church planting team.

APPLICATION FOR MAWL-ING YOUR INCOMING LEADERS

The members of your church planting team should have the expressed goal of replacing themselves before the new church begins. With the help of the Sending Churches leadership new leaders should be selected months before the new church begins and the MAWLing process should begin. If your church does not yet have a culture of reproducing leaders, this is a good time to start. Encourage the new leaders to choose someone else they can teach the skills you are teaching them. There should be an expectation in every aspect of your church’s ministry that God will call from your midst to minister to others nearby and abroad. Because of this, new leaders are always needed.

EVERY TRANSITION IS AN OPPORTUNITY

Every leadership transition your church goes through is an opportunity to improve the overall quality of the work you do. There is no such thing as a perfect leader. As ministries are developed the priorities of a particular lead-

er emerge. When a new leader takes over, new priorities are introduced and can improve the overall quality of the ministry. Maybe you have had a children's ministry director that really valued Scripture memory. As a result, the kids who come to your church have memorized a lot of Scripture. Members often say to you how much they appreciate the focus on Scripture memory. As the former leader moves on and a new leader is installed, the priority of Scripture memory remains and the new leader implements new priorities.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. In what areas of your current ministry is MAWL happening naturally?
2. How could you be more intentional about developing future ministry leaders in your context?
3. Which part of the MAWL process is the most difficult for you personally?
4. Do you agree that churches tend to focus more on instruction than imitation? If so, why do you think that is?
5. What area of your current ministry is most in need of new leaders and how could MAWL be used to meet that need?
6. Would you say that developing ministry leaders is part of the culture of your church? If not, what do you think needs to be done to make it part of the culture?

STAGE SEVEN

RELEASE

Finally, it is time to unleash your team! This is one of the most exciting parts of the process. After months of preparation and prayer, your church planting team will be sent out to do the work God called them to. A commissioning service is a great way to mark the transition and celebrate the sending. In a commissioning service you will get the opportunity to remind those you are sending how significant the work they are doing is to fulfill Jesus' Great Commission. You also will get to reassure the congregation by explaining and introducing the people who will fill the positions of the outgoing leaders.

PLANNING A COMMISSIONING SERVICE

A commissioning service marks a really important milestone; you are sending out members as missionaries. What gets celebrated gets replicated, so you should make the commissioning service memorable and meaningful. Think of this commissioning service like your child's high school graduation: the end of an era, the beginning of a bright future. You want the individuals who are being commissioned to walk away from this worship service knowing they are loved, supported and prayed for by the leaders and members of your church. Here are a few suggestions that may help make the day extra special.

INVITE FAMILY

Make sure you get the word out about the date far enough in advance that the missionaries can invite family and friends to participate in the service. What important event in our lives do we neglect to invite our families? Make sure the entire team knows to invite those they love to participate.

INSPIRE THEM

Make sure you take this opportunity to use the Word of God to build their confidence in His ability to use them for His purposes in the world. The team is probably optimistic and excited, but the church planter is likely feeling some measure of trepidation whether he admits it or not.

PREPARE A MEAL

Food is at the center of every important celebration, so make sure you have a meal to mark the occasion. It does not have to be fancy or expensive; even a potluck meal will provide ample opportunities for the people of your church to wish the outgoing church planting team well.

GIVE A GIFT

In our church, we give a professionally framed copy of the church planter's ordination certificate and ministry license. This is something that will hang on the wall of this new pastor's office for the rest of their ministry as a reminder of our love and support for them. You may be able to come up with something better than that, but giving a gift, even a simple one, is a great way to show you love them and will miss them.

LAY HANDS

Biblically speaking, laying hands on someone is a form of endorsement (Acts 6:6). Even today, when you say something affirming about someone in front of a crowd, you put your hand on their shoulder, your arm around their neck or conclude the talk with a handshake or a hug. It is a sign of endearment and affection. Laying hands also is associated with

prayer. Make sure at some point in the service to publicly pray for the outgoing team and those who are taking their place of service in the body.

MAKING A CLEAN BREAK

Some Sending Churches have made the mistake of asking outgoing members to continue in their role of service even after the team has been commissioned. For example, if the sound guy leaves with a church planting team and the Sending Church is shorthanded in that area they might think it is no big deal to call up their former sound guy and ask him to fill in. The sound guy feels duty-bound to help, so he does. In my observation, this almost always creates problems. It is best for the commissioning service to be the clear date for the beginning of the new leader's service, and the end of the old leader's service. This will force the missionary team to focus completely on work related to the new church, and will force the Sending Church to find more permanent solutions to her staffing problems.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Have you held a commissioning service for members in the past? Are there any expectations carried over from previous commissioning services?
2. What are some ways, not mentioned, to make a commissioning service at your church special?
3. How can you use the commissioning service to help highlight the incoming leaders who will be filling the shoes of those leaving with the church planting team?
4. Is there someone special to the team who would be able to play a meaningful role in the commissioning service?

5. Do you think it is important to make a “clean break” like mentioned above, or do you plan to “share” workers and members for a period of time?
6. What is a meaningful gift your church could pass along to the church planting team at a commissioning service?

STAGE EIGHT

INVEST

What new churches need much more than money are thoughtful, loving parents to correct, advise and encourage, support and pray for them. As I mentioned in the introduction, I planted a church called Pillar Church in the suburbs of Washington, D.C., in 2005. Our church was into our first church planting initiative before our first anniversary service. That's right! We were planting another new church within 12 months of starting ourselves. I firmly believe the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20) is a call to plant new churches and applies to every church regardless of size, age or budget.

I have heard some argue that new churches should not attempt to plant churches until they reach a certain size or maturity, arguing that doing so is an “ecclesiastical teen pregnancy.” That sounds melodramatic to me. The Great Commission is as much for the mini-church of the inner city as it is for the megachurch in the suburbs. It does not read, “Go ye therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as soon as you have the money.” Or “as soon as you have more than 500 people.” The command stands for every New Testament church, period. So, as churches to whom the Great Commission applies, we must discover ways to provide meaningful support with limited resources.

THE MYTH OF MONEYLESSNESS

The most common objection I hear from existing churches regarding church planting is a financial one. Sincere, Jesus-loving pastors who seek to lead their churches to obey the Great Commission sometimes say money is what keeps them from planting another church.

It is true that resources are limited in the modern American church. Many churches are feeling the pinch of declining and aging congregations, exorbitant facility debt or maintenance, not to mention an ever-increasing cost of living that drives up personnel and insurance costs. This all carries the assumption, however, that the aforementioned items are essential for the American church. Is it more important that your church invest in the advance of the church and the spread of the gospel than it is that you own a facility or have full-time staff? Well, when you say it like that, yes, we know it is. Yet, our church budgets do not often reflect our spoken priorities.

I have a son, Noah, who will turn 15 years old this month. I am very proud of him. He is an exceptional young man with a bright future. Now, my family is not very wealthy. We have a house, two cars, a dog and three other kids. We have enough to live a good life, but we do not have stacks of cash lying around. We have not saved for our children to go to college. Three years from now when my son graduates high school, what do you expect I will do? I will send him off to the most affordable college I can find and I will break my back trying to support him in order that he get the education necessary to succeed in his chosen career field.

Here is what I will not do. I will not use my family's limited income as an excuse for not supporting him. It does not mean I am going to sell the house or the dog, but it does mean I will probably limit some of our spending in order to allocate more to support him. Can you imagine, though, what I would be communicating to my son if he wanted to go off to college and I said, "Noah, we just don't have the money to support you; you're on your own"?

The same is true for our churches. If God raises up a church planting team from your midst, you should do everything in your power to support them. If we see the other churches in our communities and in the world as members of our Christian family, then we will see the raising and prospering of those churches as our prosperity, too. We will be able to join the churches of Macedonia, who, because of “their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity” (2 Cor. 8:2).

FINDING RESOURCES UNDER ROCKS

Finding money for church planting is not as difficult as you might think—if you get creative about it. What church planters really need—whether they know it or not—is a Sending Church pastor who is an advocate for them. We supported our first church planter at \$100 per month. It was a measly amount of money, and I knew it. We had 30 people on a good Sunday. Our offering was almost enough to get us a seat at a Justin Bieber concert; our contribution, as measly as it was, still stung a little. The \$100 we gave was not the most important part of our relationship, though. Here are a few other things you can do to help find money for church planters:

ADVOCATE

Everywhere I went, I was encouraging pastors to support this church planter, and bragging about the sacrifices his family was making for the gospel and the importance of the work he was doing. Over time, because of my influence, other pastors supported him and my advocacy for him validated his work and encouraged him when he was feeling weak.

PREPARE A MEAL

Issue a “hunting license” – Give your church planter a “hunting license”—the opportunity to solicit support from the members or your church directly. Encourage them to invite members to join them on mission. The extra offering they will pick up from additional members will

help them reach sustainability more quickly.

SAVE THEM MONEY

Perhaps you can provide the team with equipment that will save the new church from having to purchase equipment of their own. Maybe you can provide workers for children's or music ministry that will save in personnel costs.

Your willingness to think creatively and work hard to support the ministry and mission of this new church will mean more to the church planter and his team than anything else you could do. If you cannot give them money, give them yourselves. Virtually every successful church planter I know has a story of how a pastor, or a church, came beside him and helped in an unusually generous way, and made a world of difference in the work. You can be that type of pastor and your church can be that kind of church.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How could you use your influence to support a church planter financially outside of your own congregation?
2. Does issuing a "hunting license" to a church planter in your congregation make you nervous? If so, why?
3. Can you think of any ways that your congregation could save money for the church you are starting by providing equipment, expertise or services?
4. What would have to change in your congregation for members to be willing to financially support a church planting team?
5. Do you know other pastors and churches that may be willing to work with you to financially support a church planting team?

STAGE NINE

ENJOY

Church planting is truly a lot like parenting. It can be one of the most exciting, enjoyable experiences of your life. It can also be really difficult and painful. The only way to avoid the pain of raising children is to abandon them. Though we would never consider leaving our biological children on a neighbor's doorstep, churches sometimes do abandon their young.

Most parents I know, even those having children with special needs, say the joys of parenting far outweigh the pain of it. Parents are willing to undergo tremendous difficulty, stress and pressure to help their children remain healthy, joyful and fruitful. This is the type of resolve we need when planting new churches.

There's one sure-fire way to never fail at church planting: Never quit. Instead of planting a church in a community and expecting it to grow "naturally" and "organically" in the community, we should go in, like good parents, willing to do whatever it takes to give our daughter church the greatest opportunity for success and fruitfulness. Just as children need help taking care of themselves when they are first born, so do baby churches.

Baby churches need to be corrected, protected, fed and instructed. The mother church, willing to give her time and energy to insure the daughter church grows up healthy and strong, will find blessings waiting at every corner. The apostle John expressed this kind of parental joy when he said about Gaius, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the

truth,” (3 John 4). We can experience this type of enjoyment by leading our churches to multiply churches.

STAYING UPDATED

You will have the privilege of determining how and when to share the joys and successes of your new church plant with your congregation. Let me encourage you to give frequent updates in your primary worship gathering about the problems and progress of the church you are planting. What good parent is disconcerted with news of their child’s life? Even the most mundane of updates is better than no update at all. Our church has made a practice of giving an update about one of our church plants every Sunday. This may seem extreme, but it is just part of the rhythm of our service. People expect it and look forward to it. Besides, what good parents go a whole day without making mention of their children in their prayers or conversations?

Here are a few of the ways you can keep your congregation up-to-date on happenings, even when little is happening:

PUBLISH PRAYER REQUESTS

Make it common to receive and share prayer requests from your church planters and their families in your worship service, on your social media pages and during your prayer meeting.

CELEBRATE BIRTHDAYS

Make sure you celebrate the anniversaries of each of your church planters when they happen. Our church usually tries to send a birthday gift over to our church plants when at all possible. Even a small gesture can go a long way. Just this past month we emailed one of our church planters in another state and said, “Hey, we know your second anniversary is coming up this month. Is there something we could do to help celebrate?” The planter replied back and said that he was hoping to have a fellowship breakfast before the service that morning and asked if we would chip in for some breakfast burritos. Other times, we have done

free things like having our congregation sing “Happy Birthday” to their congregation on video, and sending it over to be played in their worship service. All these small gestures add up to a supporting and loving mother church.

MAKE VIDEOS

Use a video conferencing software like “Zoom” or “GoToMeeting” that allows you to record the conversation, and have a brief update with your church planter. Place that video on the feed with your sermon videos, your social media page or play it before you pray for the team at your prayer meeting.

INVITE PLANTERS TO BAPTIZE

One of the most memorable and powerful worship services I have ever been in was a Sunday evening worship service in the church where I became a Christian. I was probably no more than 17 years old when I attended this service, but remember it vividly at 37! Our church, Peniel Baptist Church in Palatka, Florida, had planted Palm Coast Community Church in Palm Coast, Florida, the previous year. On one particular Sunday evening, the team from Palm Coast came and joined us for a combined worship service. In that worship service, they baptized a few new believers from the Palm Coast community and a handful of people shared personal testimonies about the impact Palm Coast Community Church had made on their lives. After two years of sacrificial giving and praying, who could forget seeing the result standing before us, dripping wet from the baptismal pool?

How you go about the work of keeping your church informed about the joys and pains of church planting is not nearly as important as that you do it at all. If you keep your eyes open you will find ways to celebrate, remember and pray for those you send out to plant churches. If you do this consistently, you will find that your congregation grows to look for and expect great things to happen in the churches you are planting.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How do you think your people would react to the idea of having a joint worship service with a church you have started?
2. Do you think you could make time in your weekly worship service to pray for a church planter and his family?
3. Can you think of some other ways, unique to your context, that you could keep your church informed about the work happening with a church planting team?
4. Have you ever thought about church planting as parenting? Do you think it could be helpful to use this type of language with your congregation about a church planting team?
5. Under what circumstances do you think it would be appropriate to disassociate with a church planter you sent out?
6. Given all of the joys and difficulties associated with church planting, do you think your congregation could find joy in helping to give birth to other new churches in your community?

STAGE TEN

REPEAT

The Great Commission is a call to an ongoing ministry. Everything we are called to do in Matthew 28:18-20 has an element of continuation. Baptism is the front door to the local church, the entry point to an ongoing relationship with the family of God. Disciple making will continue throughout our Christian life, and teaching all that Jesus commanded will take some time too. That is why we need churches, not just evangelistic events. A church is like a disciple making factory, always churning out new disciples. As those disciples mature, they are sent out to places in need of the gospel to form new churches. Every church those disciples form is a new door into the Kingdom of Heaven, bidding sinners to come inside.

CHURCHES MAKE DISCIPLES; DISCIPLES MAKE CHURCHES

As aggressively as we work to build the church, Jesus' enemy is hard at work destroying it. The work you are doing will be opposed at every hand. 1 Peter 5:8 instructs us, "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." Jesus warned His disciples to "stay awake at all times" (Luke 21:36), and the apostle Paul warns: "Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong." These warnings are not just empty rhetoric. Church planting is difficult and dangerous work and church planters should simply not be out in

such a dangerous land without the backup of a Sending Church.

DYING CHURCHES

Churches in America are closing at an alarming pace. The Huffington Post reports that, “Between the years 2010 and 2012, more than half of all churches in America added not one new member. Each year, nearly 3 million more previous churchgoers enter the ranks of the religiously unaffiliated.”

When you head off to church this week, consider the fact that about 170 churches have closed since you went to church last week—that’s 24 churches a day, 750 churches a month and 9,000 churches a year melting under the heat of our increasingly secular society. This number may surprise you since you do not see a drastic reduction in the number of church buildings, but do not be fooled by the optics. The American church is in steep, steady decline.

Western Europe went through a similar season over the course of the 20th century, particularly during the 1960s. Today, the streets of major European cities are lined with church buildings that outlived the congregations that built them. Hundreds of buildings throughout Europe are now being used as restaurants, nightclubs, concert venues, cafés, modern condominiums, museums and even mosques. They stand as a stark picture that Western culture has rejected Christianity.

PLATEAUED AND DECLINING CHURCHES

According to researcher Win Arn, approximately “350,000 churches in America, four out of five are either plateaued or declining.” So, why not just help those churches? Yes! We have to increase the birth rate by planting new churches and decrease the death rate by helping old churches. We should do everything we can to help renew churches in our city that have fallen on hard times, but church renewal is not enough. We must also plant new churches. Arn continues, “Many churches begin a plateau or slow decline about their 15th to 18th year; 80% to 85% are on the downside of this cycle.”

OUR RESPONSE

So, for those who are alive and remain, how do we respond? We make sure that our congregations are not the fruitless branch on Jesus' family tree. We make disciples and then send them to make disciples. As church leaders, many other things will clamor for our attention and the focus of our church's resources and ministry, but nothing will bear lasting fruit like church planting.

“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. Nothing else—not crusades, outreach programs, para-church ministries, growing megachurches, congregational consulting, nor church renewal processes—will have the consistent impact of dynamic, extensive church planting.”

— Tim Keller

There is only one thing worse than being lost, and that is being lost with no one searching for you. Most of the individuals making up our communities and the communities around us do not have any church in pursuit of them. May it be that God would use our churches to carry the gospel to the lost in our communities through preaching and evangelism, then carry the gospel to the rest of the world by planting churches that will do the same.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What do you think stands in the way of your church having an on-going process for training and deploying leaders for gospel ministry?
2. What would have to change in your context to create the margin in your church to allow you to disciple other leaders for gospel ministry?

3. What groups of people in your community is your church simply not reaching, no matter how hard you try? Why do you think that is?
4. Do you think your church could make the changes necessary to reach those people?
5. Do you think a new church could reach them with the right leader?
6. What group of people in your current context is most likely to be willing to go out to plant new churches? (i.e. members, attenders, young adults, staff etc.)
7. If you knew your church would die within the next 10 years, what would you do differently?