

# THE MULTIPLYING CHURCH

**The New Math for Starting New Churches**

by Bob Roberts Jr (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2008)

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*a book review by Jack De Vries*



**CRCA MINISTRY FORMATION**

*"A Church Reforming To Reach the Lost for Christ"*

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About the author:

**Bob Roberts Jr.**, the founding pastor of the 2,500-member NorthWood Church ([www.northwoodchurch.org](http://www.northwoodchurch.org)) near Fort Worth, Texas, is a leading practitioner and writer on glocal - local and global – transformation of individuals, churches, communities, and nations. Roberts’ unique principles have transformed the people and ministry at NorthWood and its 100 (and counting) church plants and “adopted” nations throughout the world. He is the founder of Glocalnet, a network of leaders who are advancing a glocal church multiplication movement that connects the body of Christ worldwide.

Possessing a DMin with an emphasis in church planting from Fuller Seminary, Roberts is the author of *Transformation: How Glocal Churches Transform Lives and the World* and *Glocalization: How Followers of Jesus Engage a Flat World*.

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I never was that good in math in highschool. English, history, and geography were my preferred subjects. To read a good book, research people from the past, or explore interesting places in the world tweaked my interest; I just was not really concerned how things add up. But the new math for planting churches proposed by Bob Roberts Jr in *Multiplying Churches* made me do a rethink. Perhaps math is where it is at.

Bob Roberts Jr is a passionate church leader and his passion for starting new churches exudes from the pages of this his third book published by Zondervan

Publishers. This is one of the most positive features of this book. If church

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*What better time to be alive? What more exciting faith adventure and movement could you be part of than this one? Welcome to twenty-first century Christianity – alas, a Texas-sized vision! (38)*

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leaders do not have a vision for starting new churches, Roberts’ energy and optimism about the church might just turn things around. As someone noted, “His optimism is Texas-sized.”

This book is not a primer on “how to plant a church.” Rather it describes what a church multiplication movement looks

like, or rather, what Roberts calls “a Jesus’ movement.” He contrasts what happened historically in Jerusalem versus Antioch. Antioch got it right. “The church in Antioch started churches to transform the world.”(27) The focus on transformation is not only indicative of the church Roberts founded, NorthWood church; for Roberts it must be determinative for all

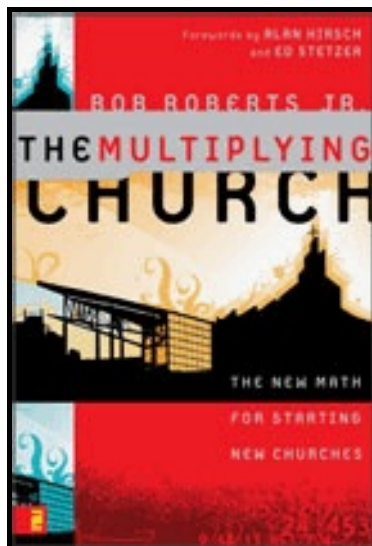
churches: “It’s time for us to start churches that are making a difference, and I think some pastors are beginning to recognize this.” (73)

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*If transformation is taking place ... it is sure sign that the kingdom is present....It will be kingdom churches that bring radical transformation and will fulfill the Great Commission. (73)*

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I appreciate Roberts’ emphasis on Jesus in his discussion about multiplying church movements. There have been many



movements throughout church history, but not all of these have been about Jesus. They have been about persons, churches, denominations, or manifestations of the Spirit. As Roberts underscores: “Jesus movements are about Jesus. They’re not about the church or the ministry or our success in the ministry. No amount of human trivial religious success can come close to comparing to the glory of God and the wonder of Jesus. It is about Jesus living present and at home within us and moving powerfully through us.”(30) This caution is what we need to heed as we pursue intentional ministry formation in the Christian Reformed Churches in Australia(CRCA). Whatever we do, it is not about us; it is not about a church or a denomination; it is all about Jesus! Everything else is secondary.

Roberts makes several other remarks which I found insightful as we in the CRCA seek to implement the goals of the fourfold task, in particular the goal of multiplication: “to expand numerically... and become the mother-churches of as many fellowships and congregations as possible.” For example, in his first chapter on *Jesus Movements*, Roberts posits that “*Jesus movements surge from the young.*”(36) But Roberts is not alone in playing this ecclesiastical tune. Mark Driscoll, in his recent visit to Australia, also stressed the importance of the emerging generation for the future of

the church.<sup>1</sup> Roberts contends that “the most important ministry and focus in our local churches *must* be our youth ministry...Those of us old enough and have gained enough credibility to lead the institutions, handle resources, and become voices in the faith community must not focus merely on building the church for our generation but on

extending the church to future generations. That means we keep our core but release our language, music, and methods. Emerging churches must hold on to truth in their core, but communicate to and be shaped by emerging generations. Failing to do so is why the church has become empty around the world.” (36-37)

Roberts also believes that a church planting movement will only occur when it is *churches planting churches*. Churches need to get into the act. A movement will only occur when we move toward churches led by non-clergy. “Our current focus on the use of ‘professional pastors’ almost ensures that

we will not get to church planting movements. This is what the house church movement has to teach the broader church community....Some of the best church planters have been businessmen, lawyers, and those from a thousand other vocations. Churches have to own church planting, and that means giving it to the people.”(46) We need to ask ourselves in the CRCA if we ever will fulfill the fourfold task if we continue in

### 10 Commandments of Church Planting Movements<sup>1</sup>

1. Immerse your community in prayer.
2. Saturate your community with the gospel.
3. Cling to God’s Word.
4. Fight against denominational aid.
5. Eliminate all nonreproducible elements.
6. Live the vision you wish to fulfill.
7. Build reproduction into every believer and church.
8. Train all believers to evangelize, disciple, and plant churches.
9. Model, assist, watch, leave.
10. Discover what God is doing and join him.

<sup>1</sup>David Garrison, *Church Planting Movements* (Bangalore: WIGtake Resources, 2003), 257

the current direction. We might see a few church plants – but what about a church planting movement – a movement of churches planting hundreds of churches over the next several decades? Roberts helps us see the challenge ... and opportunity!

Roberts' passion for glocalization (church multiplication locally and globally) is evident through the many blogs and stories harvested from all over the globe. He refers to China where they have a saying: "Every believer is a church planter"(105). He continues by asserting how "we have tried to turn everyone into preachers instead of salt and light. The world will be won to Christ not because we have more preachers, but because the whole body is used. For too long we have viewed church members as merely the funders of religious work and the volunteers to make Sunday happen instead of the totally wild spirits they really are."(106) These are prophetic words we need to hear in Australia as well. We need to set the church loose in the world. Roberts, in the spirit of true optimism, sees the roots of these possibilities beginning even now. Dare we hope the same – every member of the church getting out of the saltshaker and into world reaching the lost for Christ through a culture of personal transformation.

There is much to glean from both Roberts passion for church multiplication and his experience in developing a model for a *Jesus movement*. In chapter 10 Roberts unveils how Vision360<sup>2</sup> helps get church planters on their feet. It is a helpful overview of how a local church can begin to be a church planting training center. Systems need to be put into place in the

local church if they in any way will be part of a church planting movement.

I agree with Robert that "it's time for us to start churches that are making a difference."(73) But this will not happen without a cost. As Ed Stetzer writes in the foreword to *The Multiplying Church*, "if we are going to move from missional to exponential, it will be costly. It will cost something financially – giving beyond what we think is reasonable. It will cost something spiritually – praying longer than we feel like praying. It will cost something mentally and emotionally – sending out workers into his harvest fields is hard to do because we have to let go of things and people that are dear to us....It will cost us something physically – being disciplined in every area of life is difficult." (13)

But the cost is worth it! For this reason Jesus came down to the earth and why he was lifted up on the cross: to draw all people to himself(John 12:32). May we have the courage to follow where our Saviour led – and take up our cross and be willing to pay the price. And in our day, may we witness Jesus' fame spread throughout the earth! Is it possible? Well, in *The Multiplying Church*, Roberts shares how it is possible. It seems to add up using this new math for starting churches. He has seen it happen in hundreds of churches locally and globally when the gospel impacts the culture. Just imagine the same happening in our churches, and all over the world.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> 01 September 2008 lecture at St. Andrews Cathedral, Sydney; listen to Driscoll's lecture under the Audio resources at [www.ministryformation.com.au](http://www.ministryformation.com.au)

<sup>2</sup> Vision360 is an evangelical, multi/non-denominational ministry that seeks to serve church planters and church planting agencies with a servant's spirit to help them become more effective: [www.Vision360.org](http://www.Vision360.org)