

# BECOMING A CHURCH PLANTING CHURCH

Issues Pastors Address when Leading a Church to Birth a Network of New Churches

*by Sherri Brown*

## **Article Summary**

Some churches seem to be “baby making machines” when it comes to church planting, while other churches appear to be on permanent birth-control. Experienced church planters share their ideas on the issues pastors address as they lead a church to birth a network of new churches.

## **Further Reading**

[Models for Raising Up Church Planters](#) by Glenn Smith

**Grace Fellowship** in Brooklyn Park, MN, (<http://www.grace2you.org>) has followed a progression that is happening in a surprising number of corners around the country. It is becoming a church-starting church, with the goal of developing its offspring into an entire network of new churches.

Grace Fellowship, begun in 1987, started talking about church planting a few years after its launch. But, it took seven years of talking before the congregation—with about 500 in average attendance by then—actually started its first church.

“They took their time starting that first church, but it was such a win for them, they went almost immediately into a second church start. Then they went right into the attitude, ‘We’ll start a church whenever we find a pastor,’” says J.D. Pearring, director of **Growing Healthy Churches Network** (<http://www.growinghealthychurches.org>).

Since that first church start, Grace Fellowship has helped start ten churches. The following report looks at churches like Grace Fellowship—churches that could have remained “childless”

but chose not to. Instead, each church chose to plant a new church, with dreams of birthing an entire network of new churches that would also, in turn, reproduce multiple times.

J.D. compares these church-planting churches to couples planning for a family. Some churches, like some families, just “aren’t ready” to start reproducing.

“They think they’re not strong enough, don’t have enough resources or they’re just not ready,” says J.D.

Then there are churches that are in the “aunt and uncle stage,” willing to provide some resources and encouragement to new church starts, but not willing to make the commitment to birth their own “child.” And, of course, some churches are on birth control, he notes. “They’re never going to start a church—ever.”

Other churches, however, are comfortable with the parenting role and enjoy it so much, they become baby-making machines—the churches that love to plant churches, help them grow and help those churches start more churches.

Taking a church to the reproducing stage can be a challenge, but there are five questions that church-planting pastors usually address as they plan to reach the “baby-making” stage—becoming not only parent churches, but also grandparent and great-grandparent churches. These questions come from interviewing experienced church planters who have each multiplied individual church plants into entire networks of new churches. They are questions applicable to any church planning to start a new congregation and developing a network of new churches.

## 1. Why do you want to launch a series of churches?

Pastors who lead their churches to plant new works typically decide they are called to minister to their surrounding city, not just to pastor a particular church.

Chris Hodges, pastor of **Church of the Highlands**, Birmingham, AL, (<http://www.churchofthehighlands.com>) felt called to a city. He and his wife went on a tour of several cities where they were considering a church plant. They decided on Birmingham. They, along with their children, moved from Baton Rouge, LA, to Birmingham desiring to build a life-giving church focused on the simplicity of the gospel and the power of an intimate relationship with a loving God.

Chris began to ask people that he knew if they might like to help launch a church, and then he set up meetings in a local coffee shop with those people. Over dozens of cups of coffee, he shared his vision for a new church and he eventually formed a “dream team” with 34 people. The first service was held in 2001 and even though it still meets in a high school, the church has grown to an average of 4,000 people worshipping each weekend.

But Chris and his leadership team didn't stop there. Church of the Highlands almost immediately began planning on planting other churches. They helped start five more. Even then, they kept dreaming.

While Chris and his wife planted a church in Birmingham, his friend Rick Bezet started a church a few states away in Conway, AR. Both had successful church plants and both had dreams of helping other churches begin. They pooled their resources and started the **Association of Related Churches** (<http://www.relatedchurches.com>), an organization designed to train and provide resources for church planting projects. Since its beginning in 2001, the Association of Related Churches has helped start 51 churches so far.

## 2. How can you speak the target group's heart language?

When pastors decide that God has called them to reach an entire city, the next step is often to identify the heart language of the people. Jim Slack, a missiologist and ethnographer who has done extensive research on church planting and church planting movements in the United States and worldwide for the **International Mission Board** of the Southern Baptist Convention (<http://www.imb.org>), has discovered that church planting movements which survive—and thrive—have always been churches that speak in the “heart language” of the people of the church.

“When our Lord inspired those to write the New Testament, it was in ‘street’ Greek, not classical Greek. Every church planting movement that continues to thrive expresses itself in the heart language of the people targeted by the church,” Jim says.

The heart language of a people includes not only the language that is common to them, but it also includes their worldview.

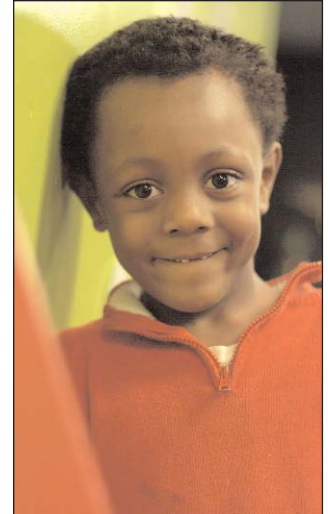
“Every church planting movement we have studied addressed the people's worldview issues up front. They answered their religious questions, not necessarily our academic questions that we've learned to preach about,” says Jim, who has researched and studied 42 church planting movements.

By the time a child is five years old, about 50 percent of his or her worldview is formed. By the time that child is 12 years old, 80 percent of his or her worldview is formed. In 1986, U.S. high schools graduated the first class of non-biblically exposed children, due to the Supreme Court ruling that outlawed the reading of the Bible in public schools.

“This was the first group that had a worldview that came from family and MTV. The worldview forms during the growing up years. The teenage years are not the years to lay down a worldview, it's already there,” he says.

Church planters realize that it's important to identify and understand the worldview they are trying to evangelize. In Russian societies, Christian missionaries unwittingly used a frightening example to try to explain Christ's desire for a relationship with all people. Missionaries showed Russian children a picture of Jesus standing at a door and knocking. In Russia, however, children are to hide under beds or in closets when a stranger knocks on a door.

“That phrase strikes fear in their hearts. Knocking is not a good experience for Russian children,” Jim says. Because they recognized the heart language of the people they were ministering to, missionaries stopped using that picture in their lessons.



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"I won't say you can't minister cross-culturally, but the more mixture you have in a congregation, the more difficult it will be. You just can't deal effectively with that many worldviews at one time," Jim says.

Rickie Bradshaw has discovered the heart language of the 48 million people his organization is trying to touch for Christ. Rickie is a church planting consultant for **Project Fresh Start**, and the senior pastor of **First Southwest Baptist Church**, Alief, TX, a predominantly African American congregation in a Houston suburb that boasts more than 50 language groups attending a nearby high school. Project Fresh Start has targeted the Hip Hop culture for church planting.

"We've been hearing about the 10/40 window for a long time, but now we're targeting the 13/30 window," Rickie says.

Missiologists created the term 10/40 window to describe the geographical region between 10° and 40° latitude, which many consider to be the least evangelized region in the world. The 13/30 window refers to people between the ages of 13 and 30, the largest unreached group of people in the world today.



First Southwest Baptist Church has targeted the Hip Hop culture in planting several churches.

The number one music genre in that age group, worldwide, is Hip Hop, with countries such as Kazakhstan, Indonesia, India and even Tibet embracing Hip Hop music.

But Hip Hop isn't just a style of music; it's also a cultural style. Coming out of the Bronx in the early 1980s, Hip Hop was seen as a "spiritual movement, identifying self as the ultimate expression of God," Rickie explains. "Many hip hop artists grew up in church, a lot of them being raised by their grandparents."

But the traditional church of their grandparents often rejected the Hip Hop culture. Some even branded Hip Hop as evil and burned the music.

"They were told to keep that junk out of the church. There was no place for them in the traditional church. Add to that a lack of a father image and no respect for authority and you have a movement where the church is irrelevant. You are your own boss and the world is yours.

"In fact, the world owes you," he says.

Leaders of the Hip Hop movement often will say, "I love God, but I hate the church." It's a world of pain where many in the culture have been abused and neglected—or both. Many rappers of today have become "pastors" to members of the Hip Hop culture, with a message promoting self, not an omniscient God.

"This is the second and third generation of children who have had to take care of themselves even in childhood. Dad's not there—in fact they may not even know who Dad is—and mom's at work. They feed themselves, they get themselves to school. They are their own authority, they control their own destiny. At five or six years old, a boy is told 'you're the man.' They learn to be tough. They learn not to take any crap from anybody," Rickie says.

Project Fresh Start has started 16 Hip Hop churches with the goal of creating an environment for a generation to see God as the "ultimate player." They are simple



Project Fresh Start has created 16 churches with a goal for the Hip Hop generation to see God as the “ultimate player.”

churches with no building and no money. Small group meetings take place at malls, on college campuses, and even inside hip hop nightclubs. Pastors are called “players” and small group leaders are “coaches.”

The term “rap” is an acronym for rhythm and poetry. Coaches teach that the Bible is full of rhythm and poetry. Taking it a step further, Project Fresh Start has developed its own media arm, with Houston television programs and even full-length movies targeted to the Hip Hop generation.

“You have to allow them to encounter Jesus Christ in their own culture,” Rickie says.

### 3. Are you willing to export your health to another church?

Healthy churches reproduce healthy churches, but unhealthy churches pass on unhealthy traits to new church starts. Pastors and leaders of healthy churches have the opportunity to pass on those healthy characteristics to new church starts.

Marcus Bigelow, president of **Stadia: New Church Strategies**, Irvine, CA (<http://www.stadia.cc>), a nationwide ministry that assists in starting new churches across the United States, learned this lesson the hard way—by making mistakes.

“In my own case, I started a church and ordained elders way too soon. I knew that

every church had to have elders, so that’s what I did. It was a decision that came to haunt me for a long period of time as I worked through challenges of people with different visions. Ultimately we had to say goodbye to people who could not get on board with the vision of the church. They were good people, but they were just on a different page. That created huge amounts of pain for me, for the church and for everybody involved,” recalls Marcus, whose organization has helped start 72 churches in the last three years.

Many people coming into a new church plant bring preconceived notions about how to “do church.” Sometimes competing ideas can cause conflict, something that can be devastating to a fragile new church.



Ventura Christian Church was started in Murrieta CA on July 1 2003. With 200 in attendance, Ventura has already seen over 18 people baptized.

“I see churches taking on the personalities of the church planter. If the planter is healthy, that’s good, but if the planter is unhealthy, it causes problems,” Marcus says.

Marcus admits he is a leader who is outgoing, but not one to pay attention to details. “So I had a church that was very outgoing, but that let the details slip. I attracted people who felt comfortable with my personality, but people who didn’t stayed away in droves,” he says.

Likewise, he’s seen mother churches send leaders with strong ideas on running a church. “They would come



The Epic Church plant, led by Jeff Myal opened its doors on February 27th 2005.

from a church where elders controlled everything and the pastor was the hired hand. They thought the new church should be that way, too. When that wasn't the case, it caused all kinds of grief and trouble. People tend to bring with them whatever was right in their old situation into the new situation."

It's similar to the story of the newlywed who cut off the end of the roast before she put it in the oven to cook. Her husband asked her why she did it that way and she said it was because her mother had always cut the end off the roast. When she asked her mother the reason, her mother replied that she did it that way because her mother had always done it that way. So the young wife went to her grandmother to ask why she had always cut the end of the roast off. The grandmother's response was simply because the pan she owned was too small to hold the entire roast!

"Churches can be a lot like cutting off the end of that roast. We learned it that way and so we revert to doing it that way in a crisis. If a church has bad patterns of being ingrown and only taking care of themselves or if there is something sick in the church, they ought not to export that," he says.

He saw the downside of it all as a child when his family church split.

"It was my family church—including my grandparents' and I saw it split. They split off for the right reasons—the church wasn't believing in the word of God anymore. But even though it was for the all the right reasons, they still had a fighting mentality for multiple generations. In fact, I'm not sure they're over it today," he says.

For Marcus, it boils down to "the way a church starts is the way a church ultimately finishes. Of course, that's not a hard and fast rule, but more often than not, the DNA of a church plant is a long-term factor. What people bring to it stays with that church a long time."

To help both new churches and the members who help start them, Marcus' organization, Stadia, has developed a seminar for people

who move from an existing church to a new church plant.

"We teach them how to be an effective church member," he explains. In that seminar, leaders present four "rules" to be an effective church member of a new church plant. They are:

- **You don't come in with seniority.** Every member comes in just like everybody else—as a seeker that is following Jesus Christ.
- **You are going to follow the pastor.** "Agenda harmony" is a priority for a new church and the church planter sets the agenda. "We believe God has called the pastor and given him a vision. There is not room in a new church for competing visions. It's just too fragile. A tug of war over values and vision can kill a new church," Marcus says.
- **A new church plant is not the place to "get well."** If someone wants to join a launch team, it needs to be someone who is spiritually and emotionally healthy. "This is not the place to get well. A new church plant needs leaders who have togetherness in their lives," Marcus says.
- **A new church plant is not the place to sit back and watch.** Effective launch team members have a servant attitude of "all hands on deck."

While mother churches can effectively pass on healthy traits to new church plants, it's also necessary not to give away all the strong leaders. Marcus tells the story of one of his mentors, Ralph Moore, senior pastor of **Hope Chapel Kaneohe Bay**, Kaneohe Bay, HI (<http://www.hopechapel.com>) and founder of the Hope Chapel in Hermosa Beach, California. The Hope Chapel movement has planted more than 200 churches around the world.

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“Ralph gave me some good advice. You have to be sure that the mother church doesn’t give away too much leadership too soon, especially if you’re planting multiple churches. Your best people tend to be pioneers. They hear there’s a new church plant and they’re ready to go. But you have to be careful not to give away all your healthy leaders. At one point [in Ralph’s church] they gave away so many members that the mother church was left weak. Your most innovative, bright, energetic people are attracted to church planting. It’s worthwhile to start new churches, no question about it, but you don’t want to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs, so to speak,” he says.

But giving away *some* healthy members can improve the chances of a new church start’s success.

When **The Rock**, in Lathrop, CA (<http://www.betherock.org>), began, the mother church, **First Baptist Church**, Stockton, CA (<http://www.fbcstockton.org>), with average worship attendance at about 2,000, asked members to commit to helping start the new plant. Within the mother church, 25 people committed to leaving First Baptist and helping with The Rock, 75 people committed financial support and 200 provided prayer support. But they didn’t stop there.

First Baptist’s sports director helped staff and lead a sports camp for The Rock. Children’s



Children’s workers at First Baptist Church helped The Rock get their children’s program running by staffing their sport’s camp.

workers worked to help get the children’s program off to a strong beginning.

It made a huge difference to The Rock’s Pastor Kyle Hedwall.

“It makes it so much easier to have strong leaders working with you,” Kyle says. “A lot of pastors won’t do that because they don’t always see church planting as kingdom growth.”

Although many church-planting churches are large, it’s not about size, says Marcus Bigelow. “Think about how healthy you are. That’s more important than size. Healthy churches of 100 can plant churches while unhealthy churches of 1,500 shouldn’t plant a church because they will replicate their unhealthiness,” Marcus says.

Having an evangelistic heart is another of the primary characteristics of a church that plants a new work, says Dale Locke, who heads up new church development in the Atlantic Central District in the **Florida Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church** (<http://www.flumc.org>).

“Our goal is to find a pool of pastors that we can work with to plant new congregations. Once we identify the hot demographic areas in the state, then we find churches with healthy DNA who could be possible mother churches. The first thing we look for is an evangelistic heart. We want a leadership team from the mother church that expresses that passion because we want to see it worked out in the DNA of the new plant,” says Dale, who started **Community of Hope** in Royal Palm Beach, FL (<http://www.communityofhope.org>) in 1997.

Community of Hope has that evangelistic spirit and was on target to start a new work in 2004 until two years of devastating hurricanes came close to destroying the area. About a third of the congregation packed up and moved away from the area, so Community of Hope is rebuilding itself as it looks toward a new work in the future. It’s that evangelistic heart that will make the difference, Dale believes.

#### 4. What resources are you willing to lose?

Pastors who lead churches to plant other churches are willing to “lose” in an individual church in order to gain for the kingdom of God. Starting a new church can mean releasing people, staff members, money and resources who are playing a vital role in an existing church. In the long run, however, it can result in a stronger stand for the kingdom of God.

**Adventure Christian Church**, Roseville, CA (<http://www.adventurechristian.org>), has been “losing” for ten years, sending strong tithing members, leadership and even staff members to help start new churches. The church even said no to a bigger budget when they asked members to “tithes” to new church plants. But in ten years, the church has started four new churches, resulting in more growth for the kingdom than they could have ever done as one church.

**Doxa Church**, Seattle, WA, is also a “losing” church. They planned to lose from the beginning. The church started six years ago during the Advent season. On the third Sunday 80 people attended the worship service. That day 20 of those people were commissioned to plant another church.

The church also “embedded” a church planter. When an elder team was formed to lead the church, one elder was designated the “elder-in-leaving.” From the start, he was the elder designated to start the next church plant.

“We called him on our team, but everyone knew he would be leaving,” says Bill Clem, the church planter for Doxa and now a network coach for **Acts 29 Network** (<http://www.acts29network.org>), an organization that encourages the launch of new churches.

“If we wait until it’s convenient to start a church, we’ll never plant. You have to be willing to lose people, resources and leadership.”

“The big deal is that you’re not giving away your ‘B’ players. You’ve got to be willing to give away the good donors, the behind-the-scenes servants. Then you’ve got to raise up another group of that,” he says.

At **Summit Church**, Bonita Springs, FL (<http://www.summitlife.com>) members have sacrificially given financial resources to help church plants.

Henry Oursler, director of training for **Grace Global Network**, (<http://www.graceglobalnetwork.org>) an organization that develops creative church planting ministry, recounts this story about Summit Church.

While preaching a series of sermons on stewardship, the executive pastor at Summit decided the church should give away the weekly offering to new churches. He wanted to give \$15,000—\$5,000 each to three church plants. But, the average weekly offering at the church was only about \$11,000 at that time. The next Sunday, when the pastor announced his intentions, the offering was \$15,006 and it was all given away.

The most recent church plant is Summit Church, Naples, FL, which launched in February 2007. The church is about 20 miles south of the mother church.

“We have sent huge amounts of money, four staff members and a number of families,” Henry says. Among the staff members that left the mother church were a worship leader and a community groups pastor.

“At the first preview service there were 321 people, the vast majority of those were Summit members. The second preview service had 285 people. Again, most were from Summit. We believe that in the end, more than 200 of our people will go with the church plant. Summit (the mother church) is averaging about 1,000, so that’s one-fifth of the congregation. But we are committed to blessing them and seeing them succeed.”

A commitment to pursuing the best church plant possible is often seen in successful church planting churches.

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“There really needs to be a commitment to make sure that other churches succeed, that you don’t see your church as competition with other churches. A healthy church holds things loosely,” Henry says.

That kind of attitude still shines at **Tate Springs Baptist Church** in Arlington, TX (<http://www.tatespringsbaptist.org>), a congregation that began starting churches in the late 1980s. Terry Coy, now a senior church planting strategist with **Southern Baptists of Texas Convention**, Grapevine, TX (<http://www.sbtexas.com>) watched it all happen through the early years of Tate Springs’ church planting undertaking.

Tate Springs’ pastor, Charles Clary believed in giving away not only financial resources and people resources, but also staff members. One of the first churches that came from Tate Springs Baptist was **Walnut Ridge Baptist Church** in nearby Mansfield (<http://www.wrbc-theridge.org>). The associate pastor at Tate Springs Baptist was Randy Weeks. He left the church to be pastor of the new plant, where he remains. Randy started the church with a launch team of about 100 members from Tate Springs. Today the church has an average attendance of about 1,000 each weekend.

Another church that was planted by Tate Springs Baptist was **Church on Rush Creek**, Arlington, TX (<http://www.rushcreek.org>). That church has grown to serve about 1,000 people on two campuses. Nearby **Cornerstone Baptist Church** (<http://www.cbcarlington.org>), another plant out of Tate Springs Baptist, is an African-American congregation that has about 2,000 worshippers each weekend.

“These are some of the most influential churches in the area. They exist only because one church was willing to give up people and finances and even staff members. I’m sure it hurt them, but in the end, Tate Springs made an eternal difference,” Terry says.

Healthy characteristics of a church-planting church include being a secure leader able to let people go, according to Greg Kappas, director of church planting at Grace Global Network.

“A lot of guys want to reproduce, but they can’t release their kids (to go to another church work),” Greg says. “One thing that kills a new church start is insecurity of the leader.”

## 5. Are you willing to let other people exceed you?

Bill Clem, of the Acts 29 Network, emphasizes that leaders of a church plant must be secure enough to enable new leaders to outshine them. “A strong church-planting pastor must be a servant leader. The guy called to plant the new church just might be far more successful than you. You have to be able to delight in someone else’s success,” Bill says.

Along with that, pastors must be willing to acknowledge that some groups of people can be reached more successfully by someone else. “If your church can reach them, then do so and grow your church. But if someone else can reach them better, then start another church to do so,” Bill says.

Bill recalls speaking at a worship service at **Imago Dei**, Portland, OR (<http://www.imagodeicommunity.com>). At 51, he was one of the oldest people in the congregation.

The church has about 1,600 people and the average age is 27 years old. “The lead pastor is about 35 years old. He’s seen as a ‘big brother.’ When I spoke at a worship service, they saw me in a different way. I’m their dad. They can hear me, but they’re not coming to my church,” Bill says.

In 2002, Bill started Doxa Church in Seattle, a church plant out of the mother church, **Mars Hill Church** in Seattle, WA (<http://www.marshillchurch.org>). The church held a four-week launch during the Advent season and called an elder-in-leaving at the beginning.

“It was the third week when we called him up front and prayed over him. We had about 20 of the 80 people commit to going with him.

He shepherded a home community for about a year, but we all knew we were posturing him to be a planter. He started working on his strategy almost immediately, which was a little different,” Bill recalls.

Before long, the group planning a new church found a six-story warehouse in downtown Tacoma near a place where the University of Washington had just announced it was building new campus housing during the next ten years.

“It was the perfect place to be,” Bill says.

The owner of the warehouse sold it to investors to be used as the new church site. The church began in 2004 and just two years later is averaging 300 in attendance.

In the meantime, Doxa Church continued to grow, although not at the same rate that the plant grew. When a family crisis occurred in Bill’s life—his wife was diagnosed with cancer—he knew he couldn’t give the time and energy to Doxa Church that he needed to give. It was a time he needed to be with his family.

“We looked at options, including calling another pastor and we prayed about it. We decided to merge with Mars Hill Church, since we felt that it would be a similar expression of our church. We became **Mars Hill West** (<http://www.marshillchurch.org/westseattle>). The average attendance is now about 600, so it was the right decision,” he says.

## Beginning the Journey

Strong leaders often look around and recognize that no single church can reach all the unchurched. There are different worldviews, different “heart languages,” different styles of worship, and different cultures. Planting new churches can be one of the most effective tools to speak to generations of unchurched people.

The church planting movement today has close ties to the early church, when the first Christians asked themselves, “How do we go to the world to which Jesus has sent us?” The “mother

churches” in Jerusalem and Antioch sent out missionaries to start local churches. Their resources as “parents” flowed outward, resulting in the spread of the Gospel.

Effective church planting does involve planning and organization. Even Paul set out on a journey back through churches he had started, establishing elders over each congregation.

Addressing these five issues can help shape the organization and harness the energy and missionary spirit of a new church start:

1. Why do you want to launch a series of churches?
2. How can you speak the target group’s heart language?
3. Are you willing to export your health to another church?
4. What resource are you willing to loose?
5. Are you willing to let other people exceed you?

Bill Clem, of Acts 29 Network, has heard the metaphor of being a parent church and birthing a child. But he likens church planting to a marriage.

“It’s like a marriage in that you invite the new church to leave and cleave. You’re excited for their future, but it has brought emptiness to your house. It’s the ultimate empty nest syndrome. And you’re proud.”

## Foundations of a Church Planting Movement

Gary Rohrmayer's children have grown up thinking that churches meet in school buildings—or in their own family room. In the past 25 years, the Rohrmayers have attended church in a church building for a total of about three years. It's not that they aren't attending worship services, it's just that Rohrmayer has planted three churches, then helped plant 17 more while working part-time for his denomination.

"Every time a church builds a building we leave and start another church," says Gary, church planting director for the **Midwest Baptist (General) Conference**, Park Ridge, IL (<http://www.midwestbap.org>).

Out of his experiences with starting churches, Gary has developed eight systems designed to create a movement of church planting. In coaching others to follow these principles, he's helped plant 34 churches in his region in the last five years. Of those, 32 have continued to be successful. Some of those churches have already begun starting new works.

"The question I ask comes from the 'Experiencing God' paradigm written by Henry Blackaby. I ask, 'How can we be involved in what God is doing?' And, 'How can a group of churches be involved in what God is doing?' One of the best ways is through planting new churches," Gary says.

Here are Gary's eight steps to create a church planting movement.

1. **Spiritual dynamics.** The first step is creating a spiritual dynamic where there is a church with a healthy dependence on God. In that situation, church members actively pray for workers for the harvest.

"I spent a year going to different churches, talking about the church planting movement. In that year I recruited 100 people who committed to pray specifically for our church planting movement. I send out a weekly e-mail that gives them updates on church planters," he says. Keeping his prayer warriors informed is a key to effective prayer support.

2. **Recruiting.** As an outgrowth of praying for God to raise up workers, Gary works to identify those workers whom God has called. But it's not recruiting, he says, as much as it is "spotting" the workers and church planters.

"If God's raised them up, I've got to find them. There are qualities that I look for in a church planter—and in people who will help start a church. I look for people with a burden for a community, passion for evangelism, an entrepreneurial spirit and the ability to gather people," he says.

He also looks for people who have a burden for a community. "A pastor is called to a church, but a church planter is called to a group of people. For the church planter, there is no church. There are no people already there for them. They have to have that burden for the people. This is evidenced by their willingness to sacrifice to reach that community."

3. **Assessment.** Gary assesses both the church planter and the spouse.

"We assess their call, their spiritual and relational health. We do a four-day assessment process to see if they have the qualifications of being a church planter."

4. **Funding.** The Midwest Baptist Conference recommends that a church planter raises three years of salary and the initial start-up funds before starting a new church plant.

5. **Training.** The denomination provides an intensive initial training for the church planter on the "nuts and bolts of how to plant a church."

6. **Coaching.** A trained and experienced church planting coach meets monthly with the new

church planter for the first three years. The two also talk weekly.

“We feel like coaching is the glue that holds this together. If you’ve missed something, usually the coaching will help fix it. It’s on-the-job training. And the accountability is very vital to this process.”

7. **Mutual commitment.** This is a system where the church planter and the denomination “hold each other accountable.” At an “expectation interview” the church planter and a denomination representative sit down and make a clear commitment to their responsibilities in the process.

“We tell them this is what we expect out of you and this is what you can expect out of us,” Gary explains.

One of the key things church planters commit to is to multiply their church before they build a building for their own congregation. “Birth before you build” is what Gary calls it.

“If churches don’t get in the multiplication process quickly, they can easily get established and get comfortable and not spend the energy to start a new work,” he says.

8. **Multiplying.** The last system is parenting, and grand parenting. Following this system, the average new church plant reproduces itself in an average of three to four years, although some have reproduced as quickly as within six months.

“Setting up a church planting network from the beginning is the only way a movement can be created through a series of networks,” Gary says.



SHERRI BROWN

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MARGARET SLUSHER

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Leadership Network welcomes your response. The primary writer is **Sherri Brown**. Editorial advisors were **Margaret Slusher**, Director of the Church Planting Leadership Communities for Leadership Network and **Warren Bird**, Director of Research and Intellectual Capital Support for Leadership Network. Contact them via [Margaret.Slusher@leadnet.org](mailto:Margaret.Slusher@leadnet.org)

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