

A Revolution in 21 st Century Church Planting/ Michael B. Knight

The issue of planting new churches simply is an issue of the salvation of the un-churched. When planting new churches becomes about splits, music, numbers, egos, territorial advancements, or reaping a disgruntled believer, it loses its luster. It marks the spot where we begin to lose the favor of God. He isn't interested in saving or preserving our traditions for the sake of tradition. He doesn't consider church growth as simply biological or transfer ingenuity. He is concerned with the subject of church planting because of one central issue. Un-churched people must meet a real, relevant savior within the time period for which they live. If Dr. C. Peter Wagner is correct that church planting is the single most effective method of evangelism in the church, then maybe its time for a revolution in our church planting thinking.

Any attempt to shift a paradigm or develop a new model for church planting that does not have the single focus of reaching an un-churched post-modern generation with a culturally relevant message of the gospel of Jesus Christ is a waste of time and resources. Why build a new nest for a dinosaur? Church planting is about God reaching the harvest in front of us - not the harvested fields behind us.

Church planting is complicated and complex. There are many models, but only one New Testament pattern to engage. Issues of how and where are debatable, but understanding the times that we live in and knowing what to do about them are not. It is with this understanding that we focus not on methods or models but on three central issues to building New Testament driven churches.

The Case for Culturally Relevant New Church Plants:

2000 years ago a man came to this world and adapted to a specific culture. He called Himself the incarnation and asked twelve friends in a small group to go and do likewise. He told them to go to the un-churched and take His incarnation to every specific culture on earth. He did this so that people everywhere would perceive that the Triune God of the Christian faith was for people just like them.

Each mission field is different with its own indigenous people. What Pentecostal church planters in North America must come to understand is

that America is no different. What attracted your grandmother will not attract this generation of un-churched people. It was Bonhoeffer's words that stated this clearly: "The rusty swords of the old world are powerless to combat the evils of today and tomorrow."

In America there are traditionally two types of churches that predominate and usually stagnate across North America. The first being the traditional evangelical church that perpetuates the forms of evangelicalism that flourished in the nineteenth century. The second being the one that perpetuates the traditional liberal church that early twentieth century patterned their lives after and thus thrived as late as the 1950's.

The Enlightenment period impacted Europe and swirled America into a colossal confidence of human reasoning. America found itself seeing reality not by Scriptures but by what the Enlightenment period taught. Human beings are basically good and rational. This produced the intellectual foundations for Western society for the next two centuries. The American church grew and flourished in this reign of secularization. Then secularization started accelerating in this country after World War II. Through many historical events that triggered a North American synergy, we became thus not only secular but modern. Our views shaped through the eyeglass of these events distorted our understanding of reality. When people are basically good, the doctrine of original sin must find itself on the defensive. Sir Isaac Newton's discovery of gravity and the development of orderly, predictable machine operating model of the universe caused a culture to have trouble perceiving miracles. The supernatural become optional. In other words, deism began to reign. In a world where morality and leadership could be based on reasoning, we thought that science and education would liberate humanity from its problems of crime and poverty. Problems are solvable and progress is inevitable. All religions lead to God and are essentially the same. That is a world that has come and gone. Yet the church's style, structures, and procedures have all come directly from this time period.

Today in a post-modern world, modernity has not kept its promises while the Enlightenment thought process or worldview has become vulnerable. Traditional churches usually assume that they are required to perpetuate the cultural forms that God has blessed in the past. When the Church of God builds a new church it must understand this principle. The plant must employ the language, music, style, architecture, and art forms of the targeted population - the un-churched in a post-modern area. We stand a great chance to become contagious within their ranks when doing so. When we communicate in forms that are alien to the host population,

they will inevitably assume that the God we offer is not for people like them.

Indigenous Christianity engages the population of the mission field they want to reach. In recent survey after survey the un-churched has spoken loud and clear. The primary reason three out of four people reject a North American approach to Christianity is sub-cultural barriers that they encounter when they come in contact with us. They listed such things as 19th century language, dress, pious jargon, revival talk, antiquated or even foreign taste in music. Donald McGavran's observation "the barriers that keep most people from faith and discipleship are more cultural and sociological than theological or religious" is found to be true in a post-modern era. New church plants must not enter a 2004 North American mission field requiring people to "become like us." The early church in Jerusalem struggled with this in Acts 15. If we do, we are telling new converts that you must find a way to live in a culture that no longer exists in everyday life. New church planters must understand that there is a difference in the Gospel and the cultural forms in which we express it. Truth is not negotiable, but the outer forms through which the Truth is communicated are negotiable. Each indigenous culture is the natural medium of God's revelation to them. New Church of God church planters must not fall into the trap that we are supposed to perpetuate and extend the Gospel in the cultural forms in which we first received it. New Pentecostal Post-Modern church planters have been called to rewrap it in the cultural forms of the target population. We cannot afford to send the Gospel message to Americans with the cultural forms that were employed in the past when the movement was most successful. Targeted populations will not respond to our inherited cultural forms. And the lost responding is what this whole issue is really about, isn't it?

Church planters need to understand that the culture is the silent language. Unconsciously through symbols, customs, music, art, and communication patterns, we are programmed and thus enculturation takes place. This one step completed with precision must be understood by all new church planters. Don't build a new church plant that is not culturally relevant to the target group you seek to reach.

Accountability first will ensure a bright future.

The Church of God must change its procedures of church planting in North America. When we understand the post-modern harvests, our goals can no longer be fifty chairs, a pulpit and a preacher to count on a monthly report somewhere. There was a day when this worked; we don't live in that day any longer. We must identify the best we have to offer

God on the fields of this country and resource them and mentor them well. A mentoring process must be developed that leads individual church planters through each stage of church planting. The best talent should be resourced and monitored consistently.

Why accountability? First, we only have so many resources to extend. In a world that spent 388,000,000,000 man hours proclaiming the Gospel last year. We took in 12,300 billion dollars in income within the body of Christ. Yet we netted in our efforts to harvest the un-churched only a 1% growth rate? There are some things seriously wrong with how we are spending our money on trying to reach the un-churched through new church plants. They come back to church because of the moral education of their children. We spend 70% of our evangelistic dollars on adult conversion. All of this in a world where 90% of all salvations take place before the age of 14? The end results is that our choir sings with three thousand dollar microphones while our children sit in a room and watch paint peel off the walls as their teachers struggle with no resources. The un-churched come, they look, and then they leave. Church of God church planters must understand this and be equipped financially in the right areas.

Only one percent of the church's annual income goes to reaching the un-churched. If church planting is the number one way we reach this harvest, then we need to take a hard cold look at our budgets. If we are working off of one percent of the income, we certainly don't need to be spending our money in the wrong places or investing it into people who will not work or be accountable with our investment. Jesus made this crystal clear. The harvest has never been the problem. It is the quality of the workers in the field. We must design a system that locates and mentors each and every church planter along the way of progress. Then an apostolic anointing must take place where one seed gives birth to another seed of like kind.

We can train until Jesus comes home but without accountability, the instruction of discipline is quickly forgotten. Its ability to influence and shape future behavior is lost. Accountability evokes negative feelings from most people. Real accountability is not about a person dominating or controlling. It is supportive and protective. According to Dr. Owen Weston, the professor of Church Growth at Regent University and ORU, church planters feel detached as they fight on the front lines. They feel alone. Real accountability is actually submission to an individual or small group based on a relationship of love and care. This is precisely the type of relationship we need to mentor our new church planters.

We are stewards and will be held accountable for the money we invest, but we are also care takers of these church planters and must rise to the hour and mentor them through a clear accountability process. It is my belief that this process should contain the following elements to be effective at the beginning of their mission. Because of space and time, an exhaustive list is impossible.

1. Biographical: The success of a church plant depends on the person planting the new church. There is only one identifiable characteristic of successful church planters in mega churches. They were mostly highly successful youth pastors. The Church of God's greatest harvest field for new church planters will not be found in our seminaries or our universities. They will be found at Winterfest or on the grass roots level of urban ministries.

2. Demographical: This identifies the church planter's harvest. His/Her needs and identity. This is a must to establish a targeted harvest group.

3. Historical and Spiritual Background: Church planting is undeniable spiritual warfare. Knowing the make up of the community and the religious history will help in the church planters understanding of several issues. It will help us to identify what the spiritual needs are and what we can learn from past religious experiences of the community. It also helps us to identify current demonic strongholds.

4. Philosophy: A purpose and mission statement defined from the starting point should be a non-negotiable.

a. Core values are needed to establish why the new church will exist. Focus thinking here will remove future distractions that might mentally clutter a vision later on.

David Belasco says " if you can't write your idea on the back of my business card, you don't have a clear idea." No one can go to the highest level and remain a generalist. Church planters must learn to focus their convictions. This clear focus happens through the development of their philosophy and will bring energy and power to their vision. Somewhere the church planter must take their vision from being expansive in their thinking to being selective. This is a crucial area for successful post-modern church planters because it gives the church planter the ability to concentrate on the real issues and to think with clarity about the mission.

b. According to George Barna and Dr. Rainer, a well laid out philosophy and vision was a large attraction to the un-churched because they reason if we sweated the small stuff then we will also take good care of them and their families. Most importantly, new believers or members can not practice the churches priorities if they don't know it. Max DePree, the chairman of the board for the Herman Miller Company said, "The 1st responsibility of a leader is to define reality."

5. Team Established:

Starting new effective church plants in a post-modern world without a team concept is extremely difficult. The cultural pressure to choose and pick a church according to the ministries they offer or according to their own felt needs all play a significant role. In recent church planting surveys from a PhD dissertation of Dr. Ed Stetzer, team planted churches are found to be highly successful. Attendance is almost doubled. The issue of full time or volunteer staff was not addressed. In a world where specialized ministry is a premium and where children's pastors and nurseries are crucial to the success in reaching the un-churched, the need for a team in a church plant becomes clear. This too would alleviate the problem of aloneness within our church planters.

6. Intercessors:

No new church plant should start without being able to identify five highly committed intercessors. Christ's mandate to be a house of prayer and the power of intercessors while leadership is in the trenches cannot be overstated.

7. Called

Nothing will hold you to a dream like a call from God. This is really another reason for a lengthy application process and philosophy development. If God has called them, it will be determined with the details in which they can describe that call. Everything starts as a seed, and all revelation comes in its infant stage. However what doesn't grow into maturity is considered unhealthy. A vision that cannot be fleshed out is a vision whose time has not yet come.

8. Evangelism process:

This is one of the most crucial steps and questions. Any good fisherman understands that catfish won't bite off of bass bait. We must understand the characteristics, likes and dislikes of the un-churched harvest, and then

respond appropriately. Then a few questions must be resolved. How will the church reach the unsaved and by what means will they attempt to do so? What plan has been developed to teach the beginning members to share their faith within the context of the culture?

9. Discipleship

How will the church make a disciple and what does your biblical idea of discipleship look like? Do you have a clear discipleship plan to assimilate new believers into small groups? 67% of all adults who profess Christ reported desiring a mentor and wanting a small group setting.

10. Small Groups

Small groups are essential to new post-modern church planters. The need of the un-churched is relational. Secondly, transformation into Christ-likeness cannot take place within a large corporate structure. It takes place within the New Testament principles of true Christian community. The beginning issue of a new church plant is not facilities. The old idea "If you build it, they will come" is a lie. This culture of un-churched people comes because of a relationship that has already been established. Small groups will meet those needs well.

The Case for Apostolic Ethos in 2004

Christendom is largely dissolved. The Enlightenment era is now a spent force. We are now, once again in an apostolic age much like the age that the early church engaged.

New Church of God church planters must see themselves as God called and apostolically sent missionaries. Not professional clergymen. There must be this understanding that we are the people of God, and this is our assigned destiny. The term "apostolic" comes from the root word *apostles*. The experience of the New Testament church and their personal understanding that they the leaders and the church are "called" and "sent" by God to reach the un-churched pre-Christian population is a key characteristic to any church plant.

In America today there is a new apostolic ethos being birthed. Churches that are thriving (this would mean the twenty percent of those 400,000

churches in which 80% of them are stagnate and in decline) have modern culturally relevant wrap but underneath they are really new churches that resemble the early churches model of church planting. Recently, Dr. George Hunter III listed ten features of “apostolic congregations” that characterize these growing new churches. I believe they will be found in all healthy new church plants.

1. They take a redundant approach to rooting believers and seekers into Scriptures.
2. They are disciplined and earnest in prayer, and they expect to experience God’s actions and response.
3. Compassion for the lost and un-churched is non-negotiable.
4. They actually obey the Great Commission—more as a warrant or privilege than mere duty. Their main business is to make faith possible for the un-reached people in their community. Evangelism of the un-churched is not merely one of many more or less equally important ministries of the church.
5. They have a motivationally sufficient vision for what people as disciples can become.
6. They are congregations that adapt to the language, music, style of the target population’s culture.
7. They are congregations that labor to involve everyone into small groups.
8. They prioritize the involvement of all Christians in lay ministry for which they are gifted.
9. They receive regular pastoral care from specific people who are gifted at shepherding ministry.
10. They engage into many ministries specifically designed to the un-churched.

These types of churches produce an apostolic laity. The Church of God needs to understand that building ten culturally relevant churches in the next two years with an evident strategy will in turn light the single most effective fire for other new church plants. In Genesis we are told that like seed reproduces after its kind. In science we are told that life begins with

a cell that splits. In the New Testament the church grew from new church plants planted by existing churches and mothered by a movement. We have the structure. We have the resources. We have the men. Will we have the courage?

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