

Individually Initiated Project Manual

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New Church Ministry

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Prologue

This manual has been written to provide guidance to clergy and lay leaders in the process of discerning their call to plant a church on their own initiative. Our Church has been called to plant 1000 churches in 1000 ways. One of the most effective methods we have seen is the model where people simply step out in faith and begin their project, confident that the God who called them out of their comfort zones into this faith adventure will be faithful to them and help them see their vision realized. We call this model the "Individually Initiated Model".

We have also heard many sad stories of planters who stepped out in faith but did not see their project grow into a viable, self-sustaining congregation. Who failed? Some might be tempted to explain away the failure by saying that God did not 'reward' the faithfulness of the servant. Others might point an accusing finger at the planter and claim it was the result of a job not done correctly. Such answers are purely speculative. But the truth of the matter is that there needs to be a time of prayer and groundwork before stepping out to heed this sort of calling.

That is what this manual hopes to do: accompany you on your journey. We will share with you some of the insights and lessons learned from the saints on whose shoulders we stand. You will read of the success and failures of planters who have gone before you into the mission field of the U.S. and Canada to plant Disciples congregations.

We write this manual so that you can understand that you are not alone. Although at times we are called to 'stand in the gap alone' (Eze. 22:30) to intercede on behalf of others, you must know that you are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. There are men and women of the Christian Church that are right now praying you along your discernment process.

If you are feeling the call to step out in faith to plant a new church, we want you to know that you need not be alone in this endeavor. God has called the entire Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to this same faith journey. We have acted in faith, and God has blessed us. In the past seven years, we have seen over 550 new Disciples congregations come into being. This represents over 35,000 people in new relationship with Christ, worshipping in many different languages and styles. You can read about these and many other exciting things that are occurring in the life of the Church by logging on to our website: www.disciples.org. You may also want to visit the website of the New Church Ministry: www.newchurchministry.org. We offer you this manual in hope that this process will be one through which you will grow and be empowered to respond to the calling of the Great commission.

New Church Ministry Team
April 2004, rev April 2008

Introduction to the New Church Movement

Dr Richard Hamm in his book *2020 Vision* challenged the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) “ ... to be a church that obeys the prophetic call of Micah to be a faithful, growing church that demonstrates true community, deep Christian spirituality and a passion for justice (Micah 6:8)”. We as a Church are responding to that call by following the vision that states that we will:

- Become and Antiracist, pro-reconciling Church.
- Identify and train the leadership that our Church needs to continue serving.
- Identify and revitalize at least 1000 congregations.
- Start at least 1000 new congregations.

New Church Ministry's particular focus is the fourth goal. The creation of 1000 new congregations will have a great impact on the life of our Church in the following ways:

- 1000 new congregations will change the ethnic profile of the Disciples so that we better reflect the face of the communities we serve.
- These new congregations will be energetic, creative, worship and training centers that will breed new church leaders.
- These congregations can energize existing congregations to re-dedicate themselves to this Great Commission task.
- They will introduce at least 100,000 new people to Jesus Christ through the Disciples movement.

This call to our Church, as challenging and far reaching as it may seem, is not something new. Over the ages, the body of believers has heard this calling time and time again. One of the last verbal exchanges of the disciples with the risen Christ was the Great Commission: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.” (Matthew 28:19) The imperative is undeniable and the receptors of those marching orders were not only the disciples present that day. The call to be faithful in the work of bringing people into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ is for all believers.

If you have not had the chance to read the book, *2020 Vision for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)*, available in English, Spanish and French, I would invite you to do so as part of your discernment process. It is available from the Christian Board of Publications. You may visit their website at www.cbp21.org. You may also log on to the website for the Christian Church at www.disciples.org and access the Christian Board of Publications through one of the links on the home page.

It is important we know where we are coming from if we are to understand with some clarity where we hope to go. As with any vision, this is not a human mandate. Visions are God given. We, as faithful followers, are called to carry out the vision. Faithfulness to the vision, as with any calling, involves sacrifices, change of mindsets, paradigm shifts and other sacrifices. And that is never easy.

As you enter into your discernment about your calling to plant a church using the individually initiated model, we would invite you to refer back to *2020 Vision*. Try to ‘see’ the vision. This will allow the Spirit of God to ignite the passion in you to become part of the effort to plant 1000 new congregations in the next twenty years.

A Church for Today

You probably have heard by now that half of our Disciples congregations are currently located in rural settings where only 25% of the U.S. population lives. That is compounded by the fact that 65% of the U.S. population lives nowhere near a Disciples congregation. Add into the mix that our Church tends to be a white, upper middle class faith community, living in an increasingly diverse ethnic and cultural society. For a time like this, we believe God has granted us the gifts and talents, the passion and burden to rise up to the challenge and opportunity ahead of us. The call to become that faithful, growing church that demonstrates true community, deep Christian spirituality and a passion for justice is ours to respond to. (Micah 6:8) A church that lives out what it means to be a community of the table where all are welcome is the realization of the Kingdom-building task we have been assigned.

We hear sociologists and theologians speak of the postmodern era, the post-Christian era and other recently coined terms. Bill Easum and Tom Bandy in their book, *Growing Spiritual Redwoods* even postulate that we are now living in a pre-Christian era¹. They all refer to the fact that our culture is changing rapidly. We hear of people no longer expressing denominational loyalty. We hear of others that are not seeking membership but rather a sense of belonging. We hear of the spiritual journeys and expressions of spirituality so different from what our grandparents, parents and even some of us grew up with. We must ask ourselves as the Church: what does this mean, and how do we respond?

Jesus said quite clearly in Luke 5:37-38. We must create new wineskins (faith communities) so that people who are different and are seeking a different experience can feel there is a place for them.

That is what Rich McCullen has done in La Jolla, California in reaching out to Generation X. These are the teenagers and young adults turned off by the established church, who see things not in terms of the absolute but of the relativity of what surrounds them. These are the people of today that live by sight and sound and see technology as a means of furthering their spirituality, yet at the same time value some of the trappings and traditions of the church, while relating to them in a different way. The Mission meets at Torrey Pines Christian Church. As described in their website: www.missiongathering.com, “Song prayer, meditation, worship music, multimedia, and symbolic experiences all combine in the Mission worship service to convey God’s promises and love. Mission seeks to provide a worship service that is powerful, personal, significant, and real.”

New wineskins for new wine: that is the call for the Christian Church that fuels our new church movement. The face of America is changing, reflecting the new wave of immigrants similar to the immigrant wave that centuries ago brought new languages, customs and worship styles to this country. Our generations, younger and older, that have been turned off by ‘church’ or have never experienced it before, now start their spiritual journeys. The Christian Church will be in the forefront, with its cadre of willing men and women who make new spaces where the presence of God is felt in new and different ways. This is the new Pentecost experience where they speak in different languages and stand up boldly, empowered by the fresh indwelling of the Spirit of God.

Reality and research point to the fact that our established congregations will not always have and offer what these new generations and immigrants are seeking. As our established congregations seek to remain faithful to their call to ministry, an expression of that faithfulness will consist of releasing others to do ministry of planting new churches. “New churches for new people” is one of the sayings of the New Church Ministry Team. A permission giving spirit on behalf of our established congregations as they recognize and affirm the gifts and calling of clergy and lay leaders to plant new churches, as well as financial commitments to making these projects a reality is part of the new Pentecost we will be experiencing as a church.

1,000 New Churches in a 1,000 New Ways

The motto for the new church movement is ...1000 churches, 1000 ways.

There are more than one effective way to plant a church. The Christian Church in the 80’s and 90’s implemented what was known as CAN (Church Advance Now) and CAN II. The goal was to establish 200 congregations by the year 2000 stating: “As we enter the decade of the 1990s, some 76 million people are still ‘unchurched’ in the United States. What these people continue to seek are congregations that are open to new ways for being community. Jesus said, ‘No one puts new wine in old wineskins.’ Such is the ongoing challenge—to keep developing new wineskins for new wine, new communities of faith with new hopes and new visions, as we strive towards new horizons of the future.”²

These initiatives followed the model of the pastor developer. Under this model a seminary trained pastor was recruited and sent into a target area that had been selected by the region to plant a new church. Success rates and longer-term sustainability of the congregations planted have shown that there were assumptions made that proved to be erroneous in terms of strategy and recruitment.

Although some of our seminary-trained pastors may have the gifts for the ministry of planting new churches, a seminary education does not necessarily prepare you for the challenge of this type of ministry. Access to targeted demographic information helps us today avoid the pitfall in pairing planters with target areas that do not mirror the characteristics of each other.

Many of the lessons learned from former church planting efforts have been the foundation upon which our Church has developed what promises to be a more effective and creative method for church planting.

Regional Efforts

In the 1970's prior to the implementation of the CAN programs, regions started 69 congregations. The CAN initiative of the 1980's resulted in the formation of 130 new congregations. A more aggressive CAN II during the 1990's saw the birth of close to 200 new Disciples congregations. Unfortunately, only about 50% of these congregations are still in existence today. Many are struggling as a result of a plethora of misconceptions and mistakes made along the way during this stage of our church planting initiative. But praise be to God that we also count amongst those churches started through the CAN initiative many vital and powerful witness congregations that remind us that our work in the Lord is never in vain. (I Corinthians 15: 58)

Even with all regions working effectively to reach our goal of 1000 new congregations, our regions could only be expected to produce 300 new churches in twenty years using the planter-developer model. This brings into perspective the fact that as a Church we need to explore other avenues for the planting of new Disciples congregations.

George Bullard in his address to church leaders at the New Church Summit of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), held in Indianapolis in November 2000, stated that for the new church movement to be sustainable, at least 20% of the congregations of the Church need to be actively involved in the planting of new churches. For the Christian Church this means that at least 800 of our congregations need to be actively involved in the church planting effort if we are to reach our goal of 1000 new congregations by the year 2020.

There is no doubt that the Christian Church needs to challenge regions to continue the church planting effort as well as call out congregations to partner or step out on their own to start new churches. The mission will never be completed while there is still one person out there still in need of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Remember the parable of the lost sheep? For one lost sheep, the shepherd was willing to risk the entire flock (Matthew 18:10-14). It seems heaven deems the task of bringing even one person into relationship with Christ as a good excuse for a party! (Luke 15:7)

Models of New Church Starts

At this time you may be in discernment about a calling to plant a church following the individually initiated model. Our Church over the years has used various models to bring new Disciples congregations into being. We want to share with you the other models for church planting that have had varying degrees of success over the years.

Churches starting churches projects

We project that 60-80% of all new congregations will have to be congregationally initiated if we are to reach 1000 new congregations by 2020. That means nearly half our congregations need to be engaged in starting churches! These congregations will not likely volunteer without an invitation to become engaged in this ministry. Therefore the New Church Ministry Team has developed a process for approaching host congregations to invite them into a discernment process about the possibility of hosting or planting a new church.

Congregational strength can help determine which congregations can be effective in starting a new church, but it is not the only determining factor. In selecting host congregations, a region should consider the growth rate of existing churches too. Congregations that have a significant outward focus will be successful in this initiative, regardless of their size.

Generally speaking, congregations that average 200 or more in Average Worship Attendance (AWA) should have the resources to start a new congregation. Congregations between 100-200 AWA can partner to establish churches, while congregations with an AWA of 100 or less should consider triads for developing new churches.

When we refer to congregations with the potential for planting a new church we are referring to faith communities with 200 or more in AWA, but that also have a deep sense of stewardship that allows them not only to meet their budgets, but to be a witness to the community with their involvement in ministry and mission in and beyond their local communities. A strong congregation is also one that has dedicated time to intentional leadership development. These congregations provide outlets for their emerging leaders to grow their leadership skills. At times the outlet may be seeding a group of these leaders to provide direction to a new church plant.

Light of the World Christian Church in Indianapolis, has seeded two groups of leaders to plant two new congregations in other section of the city. Over 30 leaders of the congregation were tithed to these new projects. As an interesting note, in faithfulness to the Biblical concept of giving away to receive, Light of the World has since received in membership a far greater number of people than those that were seeded over to these new projects!

Regional Sponsored Projects

For Regions to be successful in the arena of new church development they must select congregations and challenge them to start a new congregation. The wait and see method does not work.

In 2007, 5% of all new church starts were Regionally Initiated. That means that a Regional committee selected the target area, came up with the vision and funding, called and placed a New Church Planter in the field to develop a congregation.

To accomplish the 2020 goal of establishing 1,000 new congregations, Regions will need to establish about 30% of the new congregations. Regional committees can be effective in planting new congregations when the following elements exist: 1) A highly committed and skilled committee, 2) Established partnerships with the New Church Ministry Team, and 3) Willingness of members to work outside of committee meetings.

Regionally initiated projects are important. They can establish certain kinds of ministries that local congregations may not be interested in forming. For example, in some regions, there is a large need for establishing ethnic congregations. Local congregations may not be interested or have the resources to be successful in those efforts.

Regional committees will also have to continue to monitor individually initiated, and Church initiated projects as well as affiliations. That means an effective regional committee will be engaged in challenging individuals to start churches as well as setting the path by establishing congregations.

1. **REGION SELECTS TARGET.** Sometimes the Region cannot get a local congregation motivated to start a new church in a specific area, or for a specific target. In that case, the Regional committee needs to act as a Visioning committee for a new project. This is especially true for the establishment of ethnic congregations or generational groups.
2. **VISION WORKSHEET COMPLETED.** Just like a Visioning group, the Vision Worksheet can be completed by the regional committee and sent to the NCMT for review.
3. **LEADERSHIP AFFIRMED** In a similar fashion, the Regional committee could seek leadership for the new work utilizing the best search methods of the Region. Like always, the NCMT is available to assist the committee with the selection process. This process involves assessment interviews to explore the gifts and talents of the potential planter and the compatibility of the potential planter with the targeted area.
4. **NCP TRAINING.** From this point on the Ministry plan is like the other models. Once the accountability triangle is in place the Regional committee will no longer have oversight of the project and will rely on the Regional Representative to report progress and funding needs.

The Parachute Drop Model and the Franchise Model

Although not a model in itself in our strategy for church planting, the parachute drop and the franchise model are planting strategies that can be present in any model of a church plant.

Parachute drops refer to a church plant where the planter moves into a new community to start a church from scratch. In the parachute drop model, the planter may need to spend time getting to know the community and plugging him or herself into the life of the community. The challenges faced by the planter in this church-planting model are many, from finding a place to live within the target area to learning their way through the area. These are things any person moving into a new community has to deal with but there is added pressure from the church planting agenda that brought the planter into this new community in the first place. It might be that in this model the planter, who by necessity may be bi-vocational, might need to spend some time: weeks, maybe months building up his or her presence in the community.

Issues of credibility will need to be addressed. Here is a complete stranger that comes into a community to offer a service that is based upon trust. The first item in the agenda of the planter will be to gain the trust of the people he or she is hoping to reach. We will return to this discussion in our section of strategies for growth.

Because many times the planter is eager to move ahead with initiating the project, there will be a tendency to want to start approaching people, who at this stage may be complete strangers, to invite them to small group bible studies or other events. Experience tells us that this can be counterproductive and could close the doors to later engagements with people in the community. In the parachute drop approach, the planter dedicating intentional time to getting to know the community and letting people in the community get to know the planter better serves the project. Joining local clubs or organizations might help the planter network with community leaders and shakers.

Keeping in mind the people the planter hopes to reach for the new church plant, other options such as book clubs, sports teams, volunteer work, etc, might be also viable options for community building.

The lack of an established support system is another element the planter will need to deal with. If the planter has recruited people to be intercessors for the project, there are people from other areas that are committed to praying for the success of the plant and the wellbeing of the planter. Yet, there is a field reality that cannot be denied. A parachute drop plant can be one of the hardest projects to undertake. The sense of loneliness and abandonment that can accompany this faith journey can take its toll on many committed people.

If the planter has a family, the challenge to plug into the community is greater, although the presence of children always opens doors to schools, sports and other activities. One church planter commented how hard it had been for his teenaged children to leave an established church where they had been actively involved with the youth ministries to

follow their parents to a new church plant where they were the only young people. The planter and his wife realized that their children needed to be connected into a youth group that could help them in their spiritual journey. They contacted the pastor of a local congregation with a very vibrant youth ministry and shared their concern with him. The pastor and the youth group received the teenagers with open arms. For a few years this congregation provided an outlet for the spiritual growth of these teenagers. As the new church plant grew, these teenagers were able to rise up to the challenge of leadership and help out with the ministry. Today, this new church has a vibrant ministry and those two teenagers are a vital part of the ministry.

A planter who is single will need to be very intentional about seeking out people who can accompany him or her in meeting the simple socialization needs of any healthy human being. It will be necessary that the person intentionally seek to meet people in the community that could develop into part of his or her support system. Local churches are a good place to start. Visit with pastors of other congregations in the target area or nearby. Share the vision of the calling and be intentional about plugging into the young adults or singles group or any other small group the church may have that can help you meet people. You may also look into joining the local YMCA or a gym. These are also great places to meet people the planter may want to reach out to in later evangelism efforts.

Perhaps one of the most compelling stories of a successful parachute drop is that of Living Faith Christian Church in Orlando, FL. Deborah Thompson, former director of New Church Establishment heeded the call to leave her position with Church Extension and venture into Orlando to plant a new church. Orlando was the place she was called to, although she knew few people in that huge city. After almost two years of intense work, Living Faith had their Charter Sunday. The first person who came to sign the Charter was a young woman Deborah had met and befriended upon her arrival to the city. This young lady was a hairdresser and Deborah had her hair done by her. Through dialogue and care, Deborah earned the trust of this young woman and led her into relationship with Christ. That day she came with tears in her eyes to affirm her belonging to this new faith community.

The story continues because the second person to join was a middle aged woman Deborah had contracted to provide care for her infant daughter, Maia Joy. Through this caregiver relationship, Deborah was also able to establish the rapport that allowed her to help this woman recommit her life to Christ and become part of Living Faith.

Stories like these abound. All around the U.S. and Canada planters are responding to the call like Abraham to leave the comfort of their home cities and to travel to new and unknown places to plant churches that will offer alternatives to the unchurched as well as the dechurched. But as Deborah and Living Faith show, the challenge of a parachute drop requires tenacity and a deep sense of purpose. The foundation of Christian witness and credibility will be essential if a parachute drop church plant is to be successful.

The Franchise Model

If you ever have the opportunity to visit McDonald's in Paris, France, you will get a sense of déjà vu. It might be because the place will remind you of the McDonald's you left back home. There might be some elements that will help you remember you are in France, (like crepes on the menu), but the trappings you so identify with McDonald's are still present. That is because this chain fast food restaurant operates under the franchise model. Every eatery is a cookie cutter of the other; no matter where in the world you are sitting down to have your McNuggets.

This same principle applies to church planting when we feel called to plant a church that mirrors exactly the church we were members of, or the church we have for so long admired and want to see replicated through out church planting efforts.

Of the many models of church planting you will find this is the one that generates most tension and heartaches. Usually in the churches starting churches model local congregations will be willing to fund a new project only if it will be exactly like theirs. Many times church planters who are creative and innovative will find their style cramped and experience great frustration.

When congregations seek to replicate themselves, we usually consider these projects satellite congregations. Under the definition of new churches, which affirms the uniqueness of the congregation in style of worship, vision, mission and values, as well as autonomous governance, these projects are not considered new churches.

Affiliations

Many congregations have been welcomed to the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) through the affiliation process. These congregations often sprang up spontaneously and are often looking for a church building to nest in. That nesting can often lead to affiliation with the denomination.

Painfully, sometimes the congregation is only interested in the nesting arrangement and takes on the denominational name only until they decide to move to another building. A good affiliation process will engage the new congregation into FULL participation with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and assimilate them into the life of the church.

Affiliations are a good thing. They give us the chance to increase our diversity, while often times giving us a chance to work with groups and increase our witness. An affiliation with our first Vietnamese pastor is expected to produce 3 more Vietnamese congregations within 5 years. This obviously got our foot in the door with the 4th largest Asian population in the United States. During the writing of this document, some additional inroads have been made with Indonesian congregations. We could never have done this intentionally. These congregations are truly a gift. There are, however, large groups of people in the growing fabric of American diversity that the Disciples have yet to reach and affiliations will help our church look like the communities we serve.

As a church, we have been called to hospitality towards all people. Great inroads have been made with the Hispanic community through the affiliation process. At a time when the Hispanic population is the largest and fastest growing of the ethnic groups in the U.S., our efforts to reach out to this community have resulted in many new Hispanic Disciples. The challenge the Christian Church now faces is to help our new brothers and sisters to understand and live what it means to be ‘Disciples’.

Our church is a place of the “Welcome Table.” Regional new church committees that recognize their roles in terms of hospitality instead of accountability will be successful with affiliations.

Splits

We don’t make a big deal about this, but a good old-fashioned church fight occasionally leads to a split. Once in awhile the faithful remnant initiates a new congregation. In some ways that congregation is new but it is also important to note that the “new” congregation brings with it traditions, pain, and grief from the past.

Sometimes both congregations remain Disciple. Most often, however, one congregation will go independent. The painful thing is that one group usually winds up with the assets, and the other group has none.

We treat these incidences as “new” congregations because they are often starting with very little. These splits are a frustration to new church committees. We want to praise them for remaining faithful, yet these congregations want to focus on institutional issues, rather than trying to build themselves up as vital mission stations. We are forced with being sensitive to their pain, yet we have to find a way to encourage them to look outward in their focus.

It is like dealing with someone who has gone through a major accident and has some injuries that have changed their lives dramatically. Those who focus on their losses instead of their potential find their lives a dead end. Those who focus on new opportunities, however, can find fulfilling new lives. The task of the New Church Committee is to help the faithful group find themselves as a new creation while acknowledging their losses. We have dealt with three faithful groups in the past few months. One congregation has focused their energy on getting a charter by the Region. This became a consuming act for them, rather than seeking a good temporary setting, or even focusing on their mission potential. The result was a congregation that is stagnant in size, and limited with their resources.

Another congregation focused on getting into a building. They were in a rural area that is poised for rapid growth. One of their first acts was to purchase property, and they are frustrated by the fact that they don’t have the resources to build a building. If they had focused energy on outreach into the community and built their congregation, however, they would not be forced to continue worship in the Funeral home at this time with

worship that emulates the early 60's instead of today.

A third congregation, however, met at a school, slowly building the congregation and focusing on their mission and vision as a new congregation. They buried their past and welcomed the freedom of being out of a hurtful and oppressive situation. The result today is a vibrant, positive worship experience and a growing congregation that is moving into an attractive new facility. The faithful remnant in this case is much larger than the congregation they left.

The NCMT will work with your region on these projects too. Again, quality leadership is essential and the region may wish to make grants to initially supplement the congregation.

Individually Initiated Projects

More than a third of recent new church projects to date have been Individually Initiated Projects. In some cases, an ordained pastor is the trailing spouse to an area without a Disciple congregation and decides to start one. In other cases, some pastors and lay people have been infected with a vision to plant a new church, and that vision won't let them rest until it is done.

A precedent for this kind of call and for what our response should be is found in scripture. The New Church Ministry Team (NCMT) values these explorers of the faith and believes that it is not our place to determine the authenticity of their call. We will work to help them seek funding, to train them, and even to assess them, as long as they work with the Region towards credentialing.

Historically, these projects have been difficult for Regions, as few have any policy for dealing with this type of call. The proposed ministry flow chart addresses some of the issues that have hampered both individuals and regions in the establishment of these exciting new congregations.

Communication between the NCMT and the Region is extremely important in these projects. The NCMT will make contact with the Regional Liaison, who in turn will advise the Regional New Church Committee. In addition, the NCMT assumes that the Region takes responsibility on credentialing candidates and is in conversation with the individuals.

So you feel called?.....

You may be at this time in discernment about your calling to plant a new church. If so then this manual may be a bit ahead in the game for you. If you have already passed this initial step of your discernment and are now seeking to understand and decide under what model you hope to plant your church, after reading the last section, you want to take time to pray about your next steps. The regional and churches starting churches models require a completely different approach from what we will be presenting in the next section. However the later sections are applicable to all church planting models.

Individually Initiated projects are possibly the greatest challenge of all models. Because these starts are the result of a person responding to the calling of God to plant a new church we are talking of a faith venture. This response may at times procure the blessing and guidance of a region, area or local church, but it ultimately is the sole responsibility of the person responding to God's call. She/he is called to provide leadership to the project, not to do it all alone.

Alvin Toffler in his book, *The Third Wave*, speaks of a church tendency that will witness an explosion of the laity; a lay movement, an empowering of the laity which holds an enormous import for the future.³ The Christian Church is seeing this become a reality as more lay leaders from our congregations feel and respond to the call to start new church. Unlike our seminary trained clergy that has had the opportunity to discern their calling and have been equipped with the tools to do ministry, our lay leaders at times find themselves at a loss with how to respond to the calling to new church planting.

Individually initiated projects are born out of the calling of a person, lay or ordained, to establish a new congregation in an area where there is not a Disciples presence in the area the person is called to serve.

Praying your way through this process

Planning a Prayer Ministry

One of the stories told about Dr. Paul Yonggi Cho, pastor of Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, Korea, with over 800,000 members at the time of this story, tells of a young pastor that came to him complaining that he did not have time to pray with all the responsibilities that came with being the pastor of a congregation of over 200 people. Dr Cho looked at him and responded ‘I have a church many times larger that yours because I always have time to pray.

An overview of Barna’s research reports show that on the average Christians spend very little time in prayer. As established churches move away from basic practices of the faith, disciplines such as individual prayer seem to be forgotten.⁴

New Church planters must never forget that church planting is a spiritual exercise. As such there will be obstacles and opposition that will be spiritual in nature. II Corinthians 10:4 tells us that the weapons of our warfare are spiritual not carnal. Discouragement and doubt are great effective tools in the hand of our enemies. At times the sense of abandonment and futility can cause many a good planter to doubt the calling. Even when the research as been done and the planning laid out, there are so many things that can go wrong, so many unexpected roadblocks that are part of the reality of church planting. Prayer is where our reality checks become opportunities for midcourse corrections that keep our projects from going under or our calling from being questioned.

Prayer is where it all begins.....

The need for a personal prayer life

It is an imperative that planters have a solid, deep and meaningful prayer life. In a busy time such as the one we live, it is easy to neglect those things we think nobody will notice. We dress when we go out so nobody will see our nudity. We pay our bills for our utilities so they don’t get cut off. We pay our rent so we won’t get evicted. Yet when we feel pressed for time and are tempted to cut corners, we pass up on that which we think will be ‘less noticeable’. Our prayer lives suffer and so does our entire spiritual well being.

Our prayer life needs to be the product of a deliberative planning and strategizing. Being intentional about taking the time to pray as Jesus did is crucial to a successful ministry. When we work this into the DNA of our own life, we will bring it into the core identity of the church we are planting. The people who come to be a part of the faith community will model their spiritual leader. Unfortunately many times today in the church, spiritual leaders are forced to say “Do as I say, not as I do” when calling their people to a discipline of prayer. Time constraints and the need for multitasking leads them to neglect that aspect of ministry which many mistakenly think is less noticeable: their prayer life.

A new church that understands their leaders' commitment to a disciplined prayer life will always seek to provide the time and space for him or her to get away to pray. These will be the people that will instruct newcomers as to why the leader and leadership of the church take time away from the daily activities of the church to pray.

There are many good books about prayer out there. Others invite you to keep spiritual journals as part of your prayer life. Like everything else, we can add so many extras to what is in essence a simple exercise of faith, that the trappings that accompany the action can become more important or time consuming than the actual time we spend in prayer.

It is not our intent to present a Bible study on prayer, but suffice it to say that Jesus, a great teacher amongst other things taught his disciples in a short passage about how to pray. That passage of Scripture is found in Matthew 6: 5-15. We would invite you to read and reflect on that passage as you affirm your obedience to the calling to a well-grounded prayer life.

This time of prayer will also help us see ourselves in the light of our talents, gifts, capacities and will even help us get in touch with those areas in our life we call growing edges.

Involve others in praying for this calling

People need to know from day one what this new church will be all about. There may be elements that you will need to incorporate into the identity of the project as needs arise, people join or the ministry is expanded. But a corporate prayer life is something you have great difficulty incorporating into the identity of the church later on in its life. Those who come to find out what is happening with this new group coming together need to understand from the first moment that this new church is committed to calling everybody into accountability as far as a having a prayer life is concerned.

As you begin to call people into your core group, they will need to understand and live out their calling to prayer. As people express their desire or intention to become part of the new church, they will need to hear from the leaders about the commitment to prayer.

The program of the church will need to provide times for the group to come together to pray and intercede. This corporate experience will build upon the individual experiences the people are living in their daily personal prayer lives.

Create an intercessory prayer team for your new project

There are people out there who are intercessors as part of living out their faith. Pray about assembling a group of people who can intercede daily for you, the planter and the people that are being reached by this new church. You can invite these people to covenant with you for a specific period of time. Note that these are not necessarily people who will be in prayer about the possibility of becoming part of this new church. You will want to recruit people proven in prayer. These can be people from other churches in the target area, people from your home church, spiritual mentors, fellow clergy or lay ministers and others as you may feel lead by the Spirit. These may also be people who live great distances away. We know of prayer groups that have people living in other countries of the world that are in covenant of prayer for a church plant in the U.S.

During that time, you will keep them informed of the progress of the new church. You will also share non-confidential situations that the group will pray for. Remember to give them follow-ups on the things you ask them to pray for. For the sake of time management, this could be an e-group or people with whom you can communicate via the Internet. Remember to thank and encourage them every so often for this ministry of support.

The planter should communicate with individual members of the intercessory group at the end of the accorded covenant time and explore if the person desires to continue to be involved with the prayer group or if the person desires to be released to other ministry endeavors. Be sure to release this person from the ministry with words of gratitude, and allow space for other members of the group to be able to thank and affirm this person.

As the group communicates with one another, scripture and other meditation materials can be shared. Words of encouragement for the planter and specific passages of Scripture can also be sent via internet to remind the planter that some one is lifting up his or her arms in the midst of the battle. (Exodus 17: 8-16)

Prayers:

- Allow us to discern our motivations
- Help us to clarify the calling and to articulate the vision
- Bring together people as they commit to the calling
- Provide spiritual grounding for the entire process.

Do You Have What It Takes?

How many of you dreamed as a child you'd grow up to be a firefighter or a police officer? Somehow the glamour of that shiny red truck or that flashing light as those cars sped down the street, while everybody else had to wait, just made you want to be the person behind the wheel! For many the excitement of the success of the new church movement in the Christian Church may be a flashback to the days of fantasizing about those shiny red engines and flashing lights.

Be not deceived, church planting is a challenging ministry. The call to this ministry cannot be born merely out of a frustration with the ministry you are currently involved in. The desire to plant a new church needs to born out a passion for the lost, a real desire to bring people into relationship with Christ. Thankfully there are people like that in our established congregations. You know who they are: the kind of people who are always inviting others to church, the person who always has the story about speaking to a stranger about Christ. We need that kind of person in our churches. But we also need God to call some of these people from behind our pulpits and away from our pews to reach out to those who would not normally cross the threshold of our established churches. Do you have what it takes?

It takes a special kind of person to be a successful church planter. Are you that person? You will never know unless you do through the discernment process the New Church Ministry offers to you free of charge!

Charles Ridley, a psychologist with Indiana University has developed a profile of what seem to be the ideal characteristics of a successful church planter. Of course in a perfect world, our planters have all characteristics. We do not seek people who are perfect, but rather people with enough self-awareness to recognize their giftedness and enough humility to own their growing edges.

Charles Ridley's list of 13 Characteristics of an Effective Church Planter is part of the materials the New Church Ministry has used to develop its discernment and assessment tools to help our clergy and laity through the process of discerning and affirming their call to the ministry of new church planting.⁵

13 Characteristics of an Effective church Planter

1. Visioning capacity

- being a person who projects into the future
- developing a theme which highlights the vision and philosophy of ministry
- persuasively selling the vision to the people
- approaching challenges as opportunities rather than obstacles
- coping effectively with non-visioning elements

- not erecting artificial walls or limits either overtly or subconsciously
- establishing a clear church identity related to the theme and vision
- believing in God's capacity to do great things

2. Intrinsically Motivated

- Having a desire to do well and commitment to excellence
- Stick-to-itiveness and persistence
- Having initiative and aggressiveness without the negative connotations
- Having a willingness to work hard and long
- Being a self starter with a willingness to work from nothing
- Having a high energy and vitality level; physical stamina

3. Creating ownership in ministry

- Helping people to 'buy in' and feel responsible for the growth and success of the church
- Gaining commitment from the people to the vision
- Establishing a congregational identity
- Avoiding stereotyping of congregation by imposing unrealistic goals for which it cannot claim ownership

4. Reaching the unchurched

- Communicating in a style that is understood by the unchurched
- Understanding the 'psychology' or mentality of the unchurched
- Moving and functioning in the 'personal space' of the unchurched without fear
- Quickly getting to know the unchurched on a personal level
- Breaking through the barriers erected by the unchurched
- Handling crisis faced by the unchurched

5. Spousal cooperation

- Having an explicit agreement regarding each partner's respective role and involvement in the ministry
- Having explicit rules regarding use of home as an office
- Evaluating the consequences of ministry demands upon the children
- Functioning as a team through individual and collective action
- Having a strategy for dealing with strangers
- Modeling wholesome family life before church and community
- Agreeing upon and sharing ministry vision
- Deliberately planning and protecting private family life

6. Relationship building

- Responding with urgency to expressed needs and concerns of the people
- Displaying Godly love and compassion to people
- Getting to know people on a personal basis
- Making others feel secure and comfortable in one's presence

- Not responding judgmentally or prejudicially to new people
- Appreciating and accepting a variety of people
- Spending quality time with present parishioners without overstepping them for newcomers

7. Commitment to church growth

- Believing in church growth as a theological principle
- Appreciating steady and consistent church growth without preoccupation with the quick success factor
- Committing to numerical growth within the context of spiritual and relational growth (more and better disciples)
- Recognizing that non growth is threatening and self-defeating
- Establishing the goal of becoming a financially self-supporting church within a specific period of time
- Not prematurely falling into a ministry of maintenance
- Seeing the church project within the larger context of God's kingdom

8. Responsiveness to the community

- Understanding the culture of the community
- Identifying and assessing the needs of the community
- Responding to community needs on a priority basis such that resources are most efficiently used
- Determining the success and failures of other organized religions' attempts to respond to community needs
- Not confusing what the community needs with what the church wants to offer
- Acquiring an understanding of the character and 'pulse' of the community
- Adapting the philosophy of ministry to the character of the community

9. Utilizes the giftedness of others

- Releasing and equipping people to do the task of ministry
- Discerning of spiritual gifts of others
- Matching the gifts of the people with ministry needs and opportunities
- Delegating effectively in areas of personal limitations
- Avoiding personal overload by delegating effectively
- Not prematurely assigning ministry assignments before people are adequately equipped
- Not placing unwarranted restrictions on other's spiritual giftedness

10. Flexibility and adaptability

- Coping effectively with ambiguity
- Coping effectively with constant and abrupt change
- Adapting oneself and one's methods to the uniqueness of the particular church planting project

- Shifting priorities and emphasis during the various stages of church growth
- Doing ‘whatever’ is necessary ‘whenever’ necessary

11. Building group cohesiveness

- Developing a nucleus group or groups as a foundation
- Quickly incorporating newcomers into a network of relationships
- Engaging others in meaningful church activity
- Monitoring the morale of people
- Utilizing groups effectively
- Dealing with conflict assertively, constructively and tactfully

12. Resilience

- Experiencing setbacks without defeat
- Riding the ups and downs (i.e. attendance)
- Expecting the unexpected
- Rebounding from loss, disappointments and failure

13. Exercising faith

- Possess a conviction regarding one’s call to church planting ministry
- Believing in God’s action
- Having expectation and hope
- Having a willingness to wait for answers to specific prayer requests

Biblical Models

The success of a church plant depends greatly on the gifts, abilities and calling of the planter. The model we have in the Apostle Paul sheds light on what we seek when we call a planter to a new church.

We invite you to a time of Bible study. Read I Timothy 3: 1-7, Titus 1: 5-9 and I Peter 5: 1-4. William Tinsley draws from these passages to suggest the following characteristics of an effective church planter:

1. Healthy relationships within the family
2. Healthy relationships within the community
3. Hospitality
4. Generosity
5. Self-discipline
6. Sound doctrine.⁶

No matter who of the many authors or evaluators you decide to read, there is no substitute for your own personal spiritual journey of discernment. The call to new church planting needs to evolve from the right motivations, a clear sense of the vision God is calling you to and the commitment that allows you to face obstacles and believe that the One who has called will give you the victory.

Discernment Process

The process of accompaniment begins once the prospective planter contacts the office of the New Church Ministry and requests a discernment packet. This is a 30 to 90 day prayer and scripture experience to help you in the process of discerning and clarifying your calling to the ministry of planting a new church.

The Spiritual Discernment Packet is available for you to download free of charge from our website www.newchurchministry.org. You may contact our office and request a copy of the Discernment packet if you do not have access to the web. This material is currently available in English and Spanish. This packet will be available in French, Vietnamese, and Korean sometime soon.

As you journey through this exercise, you will be encouraged to keep a spiritual journal. Please note that you will be asked to submit parts of this journal as a component of your application process to be assessed prior to your training experience. We invite you to read carefully the scripture passages and reflect on the readings provided. The spiritual exercises and the living experiences the packet invites you to experience are essential to the process.

We have received feedback from many of our planters who witness to the fact that it was this spiritual exercise that helped them affirm their calling to the ministry of new church planting. On the other hand, other prospective new church planters that approached this exercise with humbleness and an open heart were surprised to discover that their calling was not in new church planting. This discovery has released them to continue doing ministry in the setting they were already in and in other cases found the permission giving moment that allowed them to pursue other ministry options they felt called to or discovered as part of this process.

Whatever the result of this discernment process in your life, it will be time well spent. Sometimes we are so busy in the carrying out our ministry, we forget to take time out for ourselves to be in the presence of the God who called us into ministry.

After you have completed this exercise, please follow the instructions provided in the manual to continue into the process of assessment.

Once the prospective planter has completed the spiritual discernment process, he or she needs to contact our Minister of Leader Development (see Appendix C for contact information) to request an assessment interview. This interview is usually conducted over the phone and typically lasts between 45 minutes to an hour. The interview is based on a series of questions that seek to explore with the prospective planter the gifts they bring to the ministry of church planting, as well as to help them understand what their growing edges are and how to work through these challenges.

The planter will receive a feedback report within a few weeks of the assessment interview. Copies of this confidential report will be shared with those whom the planter authorizes.

Laying the groundwork

Part of the discernment process for the planting of a new church involves having the planter doing the groundwork to fully understand to whom and where is God calling him or her to do ministry. Ministry cannot be conducted in a vacuum. God calls people to specific places and tasks. A well-grounded person will take the time to get to know the place where he or she feels Gods call to plant a new church. This is a time for the church planter to do an in-depth analysis of the potential target site.

Target Selection

Target selection refers to the area or group of people with whom the planter feels called to plant the new church. There are four major target areas that we can identify:

- Geographic targets. This refers to a specific area defined by geographical boundaries (i.e. a specific city, the south side of the city, a new subdivision or a sector of a city). Ideally, you would want to identify an area with no Disciples presence. Seek out areas that are in the top 10% growth rate zones and top 10% population density of the state or region. The best-case scenario would be to identify areas that have all three criteria present.
- Affinity targets. This effort seeks to target people that are brought together around specific characteristics i.e. people involved with the arts.
- Ethnic targets. The outreach of this project is with people of specific ethnicities. In many cases it requires that the planter have language skills other than English to be able to reach out to this group.
- Generational targets. This involves an intentional effort to reach out to specific generational groups. Gen X, young families with children, retirees, Millennials, etc.

You will note that in many cases the target will not follow an absolute group definition. Normally targets tend to focus on multiple groups and characteristics. Yet having a clear notion of the target group will be instrumental in articulating the vision, mission and values as well as provide guidance for the development of a ministry plan.

New Church Ministry through a partnership of Church Extension, Disciples Home Missions and the Regions of the Christian Church offer the services of *Percept*, a demographics analysis company that offers demographic data to members and congregations of the Christian Church who register through their website. *Percept* also provides data about religious attitudes, preferences and behavior of the people in the target area. Visit www.link2lead.com where they will require you to register and list the congregation you are associated with. In the case of a new church planter who is not affiliated with a congregation at the time, you may register under the name of the

Disciples congregation in which you have your membership or you may contact the regional office for further instructions.

Link2lead.com provides demographics for individual zip codes. These are very small geographic areas and you may need a collection of several zip codes to accurately reflect a geographic target area. (Most existing congregations have members from 5-7 zip codes in metropolitan congregations).

The regional Percept data (Vista), can give you a 7-mile radius (or 5 in some more compact regions) of a population circle. There are not population circles everywhere. These circles are only present where population density is high enough to note a concentration. If you are considering a new church start outside of a circle, it should be because you know someone is going to plant a city there soon.

Finally, our office, the New Church Ministry can provide a 15-mile radius study at your request. These studies are helpful for us in national strategic work, but may be of limited help to a specific target area.

Other sources of demographic information in your community:

- Chamber of commerce
- Economic Development Offices
- Real Estate Agencies
- School boards
- Local Libraries
- City or county planning commissions
- Public utilities
- Lending institutions
- Radio stations
- Real estate firms
- Newspapers

This data can help in selecting the best targets. In reality, you can plant a new church anywhere. However, some targets are better than others. Currently, we have a tremendous resource with Percept. Our church pays a lot of money to keep current demographics at the fingertips of every congregation through www.link2lead.com and Regional Percept data.

Geographic Targets

A geographic target is an area that is selected for the development of a new congregation. The motivating factor for selecting a geographic target is to establish congregations where there is little or no Disciple witness. That means you will have to take into account the location of current Disciple congregations when reviewing the data.

The best place to start in determining geographic targets is the map entitled “Presence”.

On the left column of the Vista page hit the “people area” button, then select “maps” and download the “M-1” map.

When you review this map, it has circles and colors. There are also little crosses that represent existing congregations. You are looking for the red circles with the lowest number. (Can we make it any easier?) What that circle says is that you have located the area with the largest density of population in which there is no Disciple congregation.

For that target to be a “hot” target, you will want a number in the top 10% of your total geographic circles. For example, if your region has 120 population circles, you will want a red circle numbered 12 or less. The higher the number, the less ideal the site is for a new church plant.

Another reason for selecting a geographic target is rapid growth. Map P-2 will be helpful in this process. Again the red circles on this map indicate areas with the highest growth rate. If you have a red circle on M-1 that matches red on P-2 and has a number in the lower 10%, there is little to think about. You should definitely have a church there. There are other reasons to select certain rapid growth areas that even have an existing congregation in the circle. That existing congregation may not match the demographic of the people moving into the area. For example, you may have a target area in which 50% of the congregation is 50 years of age or higher. Yet the demographics indicate the growth is coming from young families that are in their late 20’s - mid 30’s. It will be difficult for that existing congregation to have an effective witness to that new population.

As you can tell, demographics are tricky and require local knowledge to confirm the data. That is why the NCMT provides Target Site evaluations once targets are selected. These evaluations require a visual inspection.

You are looking for two things basically in selecting a geographic target. 1) Population density, and 2) Population growth (or change). A basic rule of thumb in developing a congregation with an Anglo NCP in a metropolitan or suburban setting seems to be about .1% of the total population can be expected in the worshipping community in 5 years. For rural and small town settings the ratio is higher. If that number can exceed 130, then you have a chance at developing a sustainable ministry in that area provided there is high population change.

When considering an ethnic church plant, these guidelines may not always apply. Ethnic congregations tend to attract people that will travel father distances because the options for worshipping in their own cultural context are much more limited. You must also remember that in the context of many ethnic groups, the church is an extension of the family and the sole support system for many immigrants that are here alone or with very few family members. Thus an ethnic church plant could consider a wider geographic area when looking to plant an ethnic congregation in a specific geographic target.

Once the site is selected, the demographics will give you a clue as to the type of congregation that is most appropriate to establish. Insight into worship style, ministry opportunities, and the type of NCP is apparent from those figures. (Remember, new church planters have affinities with population that are 10 years younger or older). It will also give you a glimpse of the kind of budget you will need to launch a congregation there.

Affinity Targets

Affinity targets are those that relate to specific interest groups. These targets are almost solely in large metropolitan areas and often focus on a specific generation. Other affinity characteristics may be a church plant that reaches out to the people interested in music.

Big Fish Rumba House was a project in Tulsa, Oklahoma that tried to reach the young people involved in the music culture of the city. Through monthly meetings at one of the local Disciples congregations, a coffee house setting allowed those musicians and singers highlight their talent while members of the core group mingled with them and got to know these young people. Unfortunately, the project did not experience long-term success. Many lessons can be learned from this experience. The fact that this project did not succeed does not mean we should discard this model. We know for a fact that there are churches out there that have been planted around specific affinities, biker churches, churches for people who are into the gothic movement, churches that target skaters, etc.

Affinity targets begin with the premise that these groups have some specific ministry needs and are used to taking in information in significantly different ways than the rest of the world. The results are usually worship services that have unique music, rapid fire, multimedia messages, and an energy level that is impressive.

There are other affinity groups as well. These include churches for people who are stimulated by visual arts or churches that are seriously focused on a specific ministry or need (i.e. a congregation for people with recovery issues).

In many cases, demographics can lead you to the best targets for these ministries, depending on the affinity you are seeking.

Generational Targets

Generational targets refer to specific efforts to reach out to people of a specific age group or groups of people that have certain common generational characteristics.

The popular church of this style is known as the Gen-X church (age 25-40). An emerging group today is the Millennials (Age 18-25). These are congregations that target younger people that have turned away from the established churches for various reasons. Usually the planters of these projects will mirror the target group in terms of age and other cultural characteristics. The Mission in La Jolla, California, which we have already talked about, is an example of a generational church.

Chuck and Linda Yarborough present the other side of the spectrum of the generational church plant. After having retired from active ministry, the Yarboroughs went to Florida to enjoy their retirement years. The Wildwood community they moved into is one of the largest planned retirement communities in the United States. The community had everything except a place to worship. At a time when others are hearing the call to tee time and afternoon bliss of sunshine, Chuck and Linda heard the call to establish a church to serve people in their retirement years. This is a church that has no nursery, cry room or children's ministry. The average age is post retirement and parishioners drive their golf carts right up to the door of the community center where they meet to worship. This growing ministry, Continental Christian Church, has already purchased land in the community and will soon be building their first sanctuary.

Ethnic Targets

Anyone who has studied demographics will tell you that the most dramatic change our country is experiencing is the changing ethnicity of our nation. The last decade has had unprecedented growth of many ethnic groups and the addition of many significant new populations.

The most impressive demographic change has been with the Hispanic population. Some regions have experienced nearly 400% growth in Hispanic population in the past 10 years. The growth in ethnic populations is not only a reality in the Hispanic sector. Once again the U. S. is becoming a melting pot for immigrants from many countries of the world. Wars, famine and other catastrophes have brought a great number of immigrants from the African continent to our shores. Wars and other situations are bringing a great number of immigrants from former communist countries seeking religious freedom and a better quality of life.

Those of us who have a heart for reaching the unchurched cannot turn our backs on these rapidly growing groups. However, we must recognize several factors in selecting targets that will be productive.

First of all, demographics will show us where we have the most diversity in our regional populations. This is indicated on map D-2. Unfortunately, the categories are pretty broad. For example, you may show an Asian population of 9% in a specific area, which would indicate the need for an Asian congregation; however, there are at least 48 distinctive Asian groups. Few share the same language, customs or culture. There are at least 33 distinctive Hispanic groups as well. These are realities that present challenges in styles of evangelism, outreach, and even program and fellowship.

The new census data which will be out by 2005 will give us more of a breakdown on ethnic populations so we can make better target decisions in the future. For now, the data only helps us find the areas to explore further.

To explore an area in more detail you will want to go to the potential target areas and go to the many stores that new people are starting. Talking to shop owners will tell you

quickly which populations are living in certain areas. Again, just noting that there is a Spanish sign on a business is really not helpful. Additionally, while in those stores, you can see if the population is large enough to have its own newspaper.

Many regions are making assumptions about ethnic populations that are not helpful. For example, not all Mexican-Americans are Roman Catholic. Not all existing “Presbyterian Korean” congregations are affiliated with the Presbyterian Church (or any denominational body).

Final Note

Once a Region has selected a goal, targeting becomes more important. At any time, a Regional committee should have a list of its top 10 targets and the targets need to be made public on a regular basis. By informing participating congregations of the targets, you may instill some interest in a congregation that has a desire to start a certain kind of congregation.

The Regional New Church committee should also have a discussion about the ethnic distribution of their churches. We have a number of Regions where congregations are placed in nearly every geographic target imaginable, yet they have little ethnic diversity. This indicates a need for the focus of that committee to be on starting more ethnic communities of faith, rather than spending resources on trying to launch more Anglo congregations in areas with a high Disciples presence.

Regions should also reflect on the age profile of their congregations. It may be time to plant new churches to be sure there is a Disciples presence in some communities when the eventual death of an existing congregation is nearing.

In the words of a wise person: “Pick targets...even if they are wrong”. It is better to have a vision that can be refined, than no vision at all.

There are also websites that you can visit to obtain census information that could help you through the discernment process of selecting your target area.

<http://www.census.gov>

<http://www.electronicchurch.org>

Developing a profile of your target area

Once you have accessed this information, you will want to start developing a profile of the target area you are looking to plant a new church. The following guide questions are a modification of Resource G from the Claiming God's Vision material produced by Church Extension and Disciples Home Mission. The complete version of this material will soon be available on the Church Extension website. (www.churchextension.org).

Note that some of the information required for this profile will have you resource people, government and private agencies in your area. This is a great opportunity for the planter an opportunity to begin to get to know people in the community. It will also afford the planter to become familiar with the different government and private agencies that operate in the area and the services they offer.

This document is also an icebreaker as the planter seeks to penetrate the community. Seeking this information will allow the planter to get word out about the possibility of a new church coming to the area. The canvassing of the community will also put the planter in contact with the community leaders and gatekeepers. This is very important especially if the plant follows the parachute drop model and the planter is a stranger to the community.

Resource G from Claiming God's Vision (modified)

Section I: Your target area

1. Geography: Where is your target area and what is it like?

Define the new church plant's area of service, your "neighborhood." How wide an area will your project serve? How wide an area do you want to serve?

Travel time from residence to your gathering space. Location is one method of determining the neighborhood. A rule of thumb is to expect that persons will travel up to 20 minutes from their place of residence. Another guide is to determine the usual travel time in your community from home to work. People will generally also be willing to drive this distance to church. Please note that these are not the same guidelines for ethnic plants.

- a. What streets form the boundaries to your ministry area, or "neighborhood?" List the boundaries, and then take a marker and trace the boundaries of your neighborhood on a map.
- b. How would you describe your setting? Are you in a rural area? A county seat town? An inner city? A suburb? Is the neighborhood in a transition phase? Who are the people that seem to be moving in?
- c. Are there any special features in your neighborhood? (College or university, military base, large apartment complex, major industrial site, jail or detention center, hospital, etc.)

- d. What is the trend of land use in your neighborhood?
 - e. What significant changes (social, economic, and population) have there been in the neighborhood in recent years?
 - f. Describe the traffic flow past your church. How many cars pass by and on what streets?
2. Demographics: Who are the people in your neighborhood? This information may be available through the local school board and the local census office. You may also want to contact governmental and private social service agencies for additional information.
- a. What is the population of your neighborhood? _____
 - b. What was the population 5 years ago? _____ 10 years ago? _____
 - c. What is the projected population growth 5 years from now? _____ 10 years? _____
 - d. What percentage of the population are male: _____ female: _____?
 - e. What percentage is married: _____ single: _____?
 - f. What religious groups or denominations are found in your neighborhood? Is there a preponderance of a particular religious group or denomination?
 - g. What racial/ethnic groups are present in your neighborhood? (List percentages of the total population)
 - African American _____
 - American Asian/Pacific Islander _____
 - Caucasian _____
 - Hispanic _____
 - Native American _____
 - Other _____
 - h. How old are the people in your neighborhood? (List percentages)
 - 17 or younger _____
 - 18–24 _____
 - 25–34 _____
 - 35–44 _____
 - 45–54 _____
 - 55–64 _____
 - 65 or older _____
 - i. Families come in many different configurations. What kinds of families live in your neighborhood?
 - Single adult _____
 - One adult with child(ren) _____
 - Couple _____
 - Couple with child(ren) _____
 - Other _____
 - j. What percentage of people has achieved the following levels of education?
 - Up to 5th grade
 - 6th to 8th grade _____

- High school or GED _____
 - College graduate _____
 - Advanced degree _____
3. Economics: Where do the people in your neighborhood work?
- a. What percentage work in the following types of jobs?
 - Clerical _____
 - Farming _____
 - Homemaking _____
 - Managerial/professional _____
 - Manufacturing _____
 - Trade _____
 - Retired _____
 - Student _____
 - Other _____
 - b. What percentage is unemployed? _____
 - c. What is the state's unemployment rate? _____
 - d. What percentage of people who live in your neighborhood work within 5 miles of their homes? _____
 - e. What percentage of people commutes to work? _____ How many miles? _____
 - f. What percentage of households in your neighborhood earns the following annual gross incomes?
 - Below \$12,000 _____
 - \$12,000–\$20,000 _____
 - \$21,000–\$30,000 _____
 - \$31,000–\$45,000 _____
 - \$46,000–\$60,000 _____
 - \$61,000–\$100,000 _____
 - More than \$100,000 _____
4. Housing: In what kinds of homes do people in your neighborhood live?
- a. What percentage of families own their homes? _____
 - b. What percentage rent their homes? _____
 - c. What percentage lives in the following types of homes?
 - Single unit house _____
 - Duplex _____
 - Condominium _____
 - Apartment _____
 - Mobile home _____
 - Nursing home or group home _____
 - Other _____
 - d. When was most of the housing in your neighborhood constructed?
 - e. How would you describe the general condition of housing in the neighborhood?
5. Neighborhood churches: What other churches also serve your neighborhood?
- a. What other Disciples of Christ congregations are in the service area you identified?

- b. Where are they located? How close are they to your location?
 - c. How many participating members do they have? That information is available from the Year Book and Directory which is the official document of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) that gives statistical information on congregations.
 - d. Would you estimate that they are increasing in membership, decreasing, or remaining static?
 - e. Do you know their ministry focuses? If so, what is it?
 - f. List other churches in your neighborhood, their denominational affiliation, when they were established, what their primary ministry focus is, and your best estimate of whether they are increasing in membership, decreasing, or remaining static:
6. Subgroups: What identifiable groups are in your neighborhood, and what are their needs?
- a. Use the data gathered in question 2 to list all the subgroups you can think of in your neighborhood. (Examples: children, youth, gangs, single parents, recently divorced or widowed persons, business leaders, college students, military personnel, senior citizens) Beside each subgroup, list the needs you think that subgroup might have. Then, beside each identified need, list a church or agency in the community that is ministering to that subgroup.

Windshield tours and Prayer walks

Once you have the demographic information and have obtained the strategic information about the area, plan a windshield tour and prayer walk of the area. This is more of a heart activity. You have done the fact-finding, which is the brain activity, now it is time to listen with the heart and to see what God wants to show you through an onsite visit.

If you already have people in your core group, you may want to bring these people along. If you have already assembled a prayer group for the project, you may want to advise them of your intent to visit the area. Those who are able may want to accompany you on this time of discernment. Ask the members of the prayer group to be in prayer that day for the planter and those who will be accompanying the planter. It is important that you understand that this is not an evangelism blitz into the area. The prayer walkers may come prepared to interact with people they encounter in their walk, but this is not an intentional evangelism outing.

A windshield tour will enable you to explore the natural and artificial boundaries that delimit your target area.

- Observe the area traffic flows and patterns. What are the zones that are avoided by the people who know or live the area?
- Try to coordinate driving by the schools in the area as the children are being let out. Remember many times children of illegal immigrants and their families are not counted in official census tallies. Observe the ethnicities of the children as

they leave the school. Take note of where the children are let off the bus. Are there clusters in the neighborhoods that could indicate a greater concentration of children in a certain area?

- Drive around the commercial sector of the area. Observe the people in the area. Note the times of the day you are driving through these areas.
- Identify cultural organizations and storefront community service organizations.
- Seek out the churches in the area. Do their signs advertise a new church meeting in their facilities? What ministries for the community are they offering through their signage?
- If you are considering an ethnic target, where are the restaurants, the grocery stores, and the shops that cater to this population? Are there churches in the area that indicate through signage that they are serving this ethnic community?

As you are conducting these windshield and walk through tours, pray your way through them. Try to sense and discern what God wants to show you. As you pray, ask the Lord to lead you to “People of Peace”. These are people who are well connected into the community. An example of this is a planter of a Hispanic congregation in one of our Midwest states was lead to speak to a lady who happened to own a video store that served practically the entire Hispanic community of that town. She gave the planter access to the store’s client database and through this the planter was able to contact the Hispanic population of a city he was completely new to.

Other sources of information you can access to better understand your target area include:

- Visits to schools in the area
- Visits to community service centers
- Dialogue with community leaders
- Visit with the police in the area
- Visits to government offices serving the area
- Visits to other churches serving the area
- City or county planning commissions
- Public utilities offices
- Local colleges and universities
- Chamber of commerce
- Public libraries
- Radio Stations
- Newspapers

The information gleaned from these sources will also help you as you seek to establish your ministry plan. Remember that we are not called to be a church for everybody. To be able to maximize your limited resources, you will need to be intentional about focusing on a specific target and work in an intentional manner with that target. As the ministry grows and there are more resources available, the core group and planter can revisit the vision and extend the scope of the ministry’s outreach.

Casting God's Vision.

Where there is no vision, the people perish. Proverbs 28:19

*Write the vision, and make it plain upon tablets,
that he may run that readeth it. Habakkuk 2:2.*

One of the most important issues in church planting is having a clear notion of what God is calling you to do. In the Biblical narratives all visionaries received their vision from God. Sometime the vision was visual and explained (Acts 10, Paul and Cornelius). Other times the vision is part of a supernatural manifestation that leaves no doubt of the purpose of the calling (Exodus 3, Moses and the burning bush). Yet other times the vision is a calling to walk in faith and discernment, seeking to understand how the calling will be manifested. When Abraham left the comfort of Ur, his hometown, there was a vision, a calling, although not complete clarity around what the vision meant and how to carry it out. Abraham made many mistakes along the way. It is our hope that our planters will minimize their mistakes by taking the time to clarify the vision and seek guidance throughout the discernment process of this calling.

If God is calling you to plant a church, he has developed a unique vision for the project you have been entrusted. If every church were birthed under the same vision, all communities of faith would be reaching out to the same people, targeting the same needs and therefore in open competition with each other. We are reminded that being successful in the Kingdom of God is not about numeric growth or accumulation of resources, rather success in the Kingdom comes when all parts of the body learn to work together in a coordinated effort. Our challenge as we seek to discern the vision God has entrusted to us is to find that niche where we will become that faith community 'unlike no other'.

A vision is a clear picture of a desired future which describes what a ministry or church will look like in five or ten years and includes positive mental images and pictures that motivate people. Although many may see a vision in terms of the ability to see God's future, vision is also the ability to assess current changes and take advantage of them. This is also an expression of our God-given capacity to look beyond our immediate reality and see the future fields that will be ready for the harvest. For some, a vision might just be a wild dream!

A vision is a compass mark set for a specific location. Visions produce destinations and during that journey of reaching that destination there will be storms and seasons of no wind and maybe even a mutiny on board! There will be those on board who whoop like small children that ask every other minute 'Are we there yet?' We will seek out the buoys (benchmarks) on the journey that will help us stay on course. These will be constant reminders of how far we have come and how much father we have yet to go. The journey of visioning will bring exciting moments as well as trying moments. There will be challenges and moments of doubt and despair. Visions are the compass points

that will direct the course, even in the midst of the darkest hours. It is a clear vision that will provide direction, a purpose and a reason for moving ahead.

Keep in mind that casting a vision also entails having a keen self-awareness of your abilities, gifts, limitations and desires. God will not call you to fail. There will be hard times along the way and you will experience set backs in your planting experience. But God will not lay upon your heart a vision that will set you up for failure. God's calling to cast visions takes into consideration our capabilities. As you are challenged and begin to see the vision, you must ask yourself with honesty if you are up to the task. Two questions to consider when asking the question are: Should you restate the vision so that it is within the realm of your capabilities, or do you feel so certain this is what God is calling you to do that you need to be very conscientious about recruiting members for your core group that can help you out in those areas of the vision where there are limitation on your part? A vision will never be about self promotion. A vision that seeks to advance your personal agenda, or that responds to desires of power or control certainly are not God given agendas and are surely destined for failure. Hence, the importance of grounding this entire process in a honest and open process of prayer and self-examination.

Laying the groundwork for the visioning process is very important. The adventure of bringing a new church into existence is a process that needs to be built on solid foundations. It cannot be an impulsive or rash enterprise. An intentional planning process will help us avoid the dangers set out by the master parable teller when he spoke of the man who builds and does not take the time to do his research and estimate the cost of the project. Not being able to finish, or failing to do what you set out to do will be a witness to the folly of not taking the time lay a solid foundation for the journey "...and everyone who sees him will ridicule him saying 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish'" (Luke 14: 28-30). There needs to be intentional researching and fact finding as part of this prayer covered process to lay the bases for the articulation of a vision.

The previous section contained recommendations of areas to research as part of your groundwork toward casting a vision relevant to your target. We affirm that the vision is God given, but the planter must be able to articulate it in the context of the place he or she feels called to serve.

Because the vision statement is a God given command, the entire process of bringing the vision into words needs to be centered in prayer. We know there is power in prayer. An effective church planter is one who is willing to stand in the gap for hours of prayer seeking divine guidance for every step of the journey. A powerful prayer will lead to an energizing vision. The story of Nehemiah and his seeking God for the vision may help us put this into context. After a time of weeping, praying and fasting before the Lord, Nehemiah was given the vision. Shown the walls of Jerusalem in ruins, the prophet is lead to cast the vision for the reconstruction not only of the walls, but also the hope of an entire nation. (Neh. 1-2)

This is a good time to engage your intercessory partners in intentional time of prayer as you seek to discern the vision God is calling you to carry out. Discerning and moving into the articulation of a vision is a cyclical process. From the visioning stage you will be compelled to move into the ministry plan (which we will talk about later) to ensure the projects and strategies required to carry out the vision are in place.

Think of the first phase as your intentional prayer time. We introduced earlier the idea of a prayer group. That refers to a group of people entrusted with praying over the entire project. The prayer group will intercede for the planter, the core group and specific joys and concerns the group may have. This prayer activity involves the people who have committed to becoming part of this new church plant and are engaging in intentional time of prayer alongside the planter to seek understanding around the God-given vision entrusted to the planter. The planter and leaders that are involved with the project at this stage will enter into time of prayer and discernment. You may set up time for a retreat where the group can go away for a specific period of time. The group may also covenant to meet once or several times a week for prayer. If distance is a problem, the covenant could be to agree to be in prayer at the same time in different places.

While the planter receives the vision, the prayer time seeks to create ownership of the vision on part of the others who have been in prayer with the planter since the first moment.

The second phase is the creation of the ministry plan that will help achieve the vision. The projects, evangelism efforts, outreach events, organizational structures, resource networks, and people that will make the vision a reality will be identified, contacted, and scheduled as part of that prayerful work time. We will discuss this ministry plan in depth later.

The third phase includes the ongoing implementation required to carry out the vision. Evaluation is ongoing because we seek excellence in all we do. However, a more practical aspect of this phase is the reality that our resources in the beginning are limited so we want to concentrate our efforts where we are getting the best results. As our intercessors are praying us through this stage, our core group members with the gifts in the different areas of program are working on kingdom building. The flexibility of the core members is critically important because the vision is not a mandate chiseled in stone but rather a fluid, dynamic stream that allows for modifications and retooling along the journey. Prayer can help minimize the conflict that can arise when the need for change becomes apparent. The seeking of consensus will always challenge the group. The knowledge that the entire process is grounded in prayer will help the group navigate through those difficult moments.

Your vision statement has the potential to be a very powerful piece of communication. Your vision statement should create a picture, a mental image that instills a sense of desire and generates commitment to achieving the vision. Your vision statement is a strong affirmation that rallies your people into a proactive band of committed "God chasers and life transformers." A clear vision brings together the passion of those called

to the project around the goals dear to the new faith community. A vision is a unifying force that enables the leader to call upon the resources of the group, as limited or plentiful as they may be, to carry the vision to reality.

A vision statement is both an internal and external marketing tool. A vision statement is one of the calling cards for the new church. A short concise paragraph or two to three sentences is a very effective tool when seeking to articulate your vision. The vision statement expresses the desired destination of a congregation within a given time frame. A vision statement tells the newcomer what this church is about and reminds those who have chosen to be part of the church what the job description entails. A vision recognizes what God is calling the group to do and what responsibility God has entrusted to the planter. A vision also calls into accountability those who have claimed ownership of the vision.

From the website of the Teal Trust (www.teal.org.uk) we found the following vision statements and an accompanying discussion:

1. Vision Statement: By planting a new neighborhood church in the north end of our town, a number of families will come to faith, worship in accessible and informal style and demonstrate a practical concern for the community and involvement with it, which will encourage people into the church. A program of nurture and teaching alongside a growing fellowship will lead people into a deeper spiritual experience.
2. Year 2005 Vision: Growth in attendance. 15% per year for the last five years has allowed us to expand our offering of worship styles on a Sunday morning. This growth seemed to stem from the highly successful ecumenical millennium celebrations and the increased prayerfulness of our church, both individually and corporately. It's a great time to see people enjoy spending time with God. Most of the congregation meets weekly in some form of prayer group.

Both statements make choices as to what is included and left out. It is vital that this is the case if the vision statement is not to become a catchall, justifying everything the church would like to do. Both are reasonably specific in outlining one or two key details behind each of the major statements. All vision statements need further expansion, particularly as a church walks towards reaching out for such vision. There will be alternative options and choices to be made; the vision statement can be updated if necessary.

The second statement gives the idea of timing. It may be better to paint a vision somewhere between 3 and 10 years out in order for the vision to represent more than next year's project list. You may not yet have timing, feeling that God has called the church to a specific action but as yet not given the time scale. That is God's prerogative!

The second statement describes what the church is like when the vision has been reached. This can be a powerful way of helping people feel the vision—it doesn't necessarily need to be accurate in every degree, and details can be firmed up later.

Websites like Easum and Bandy's share vision statement from a variety of sources. Bill Easum and Tom Bandy have written extensively on the subject of vision statements. You may visit their website: Easum, Bandy and Associates at www.easumbandy.com for further discussion and articles on this topic. A visit of websites of many other churches will also allow you to view vision statements that are in some cases short and concise and easy to remember. In other cases you may come across long rambling discourses that may leave you confused and at a loss for understanding regarding what the ministry of that congregation is all about. The website for the Christian Church, www.disciples.org, will allow you to link to the websites of Disciples congregations across the U.S. and Canada. You may visit these sites to get a feel for some of the congregation's vision and mission statements.

George Barna recently reissued a book, *The Power of Vision*, where he speaks of vision as a God given command and the importance of living out that vision in all aspects of your ministry. Four brief points from Barna concerning vision:

- Vision connotes a visual reality, a portrait of conditions that do not exist currently
- Vision is never about maintaining the status quo
- Vision concentrates on the future, rather than seeking to replicate the past
- Vision for ministry is a reflection of what God wants to accomplish through us to build his Kingdom.⁷

Passing On The Vision

Articulating the vision and coming up with catchy phrases is not enough to guarantee ownership of the calling especially on behalf of the members of your core group. If the core group you assemble is not able to own the vision and commit their time and efforts to making the project a reality, the planter will carry the load entirely on his or her shoulders. Essential energy and time will be lost dealing with tension and conflict that will inevitably arise from within the core group for lack of understanding and ownership of the God given agenda for the new church plant. Further work will be required. Jim Collins in his book *From Good to Great* states "great visions without the right (great) people in the right places are irrelevant."⁸ The right people with a clear understanding and ownership of the vision are essential ingredients to making the project a reality. A helpful Bible study is included in Appendix A.

Mission Statement

As the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), we have claimed the Great Commission as our mission. We understand that we are called to bring people into relationship with Christ: '...baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.' Yet the cultural and geographical realities in which we carry out our ministry challenge us to articulate our mission statement in a way that responds to the reality of the site we have been called by God to plant a new church. We are no longer in this just to bring people into the membership of the denomination: we are called to proclaim a gospel that causes

people to want to walk in the presence of the Most High. The mission of a faith community is its strategy for taking its beliefs and values into the world.⁹

A mission statement is a concise declaration that describes who you will reach, what their needs are and how you will do ministry. A mission statement keeps us thinking about who we are, why we are here, and where we are going. You must keep in mind that mission statements are time sensitive. As the context of the area we are doing ministry changes, our mission statement must also undergo changes to keep your ministry vibrant and focused. A mission statement provides an answer to the question of “why do we exist?” The mission statement invites us to ponder what should be the ultimate result of our work. When our mission statement becomes a mere informational statement, it loses its capacity to drive the ministry. This action-driven statement helps focus the attention and efforts of the members of the organization on the task at hand; at the same time that it communicates to outsiders what it is that motivates the group.

One problem with many of our older, established congregations that are experiencing decline is that they failed to revisit their mission statement to take into consideration the transitions occurring in their neighborhoods or other elements that rendered their mission statement too general or not focused on a new reality for the community that surrounds the church. A new church will consider carefully the realities of the target area to ensure that the mission statement embodies the realities of the people and place.

Michael Foss, in his book *Power Surge*, shares some insights around the crafting of a mission statement. A mission statement must reflect and be consistent with the beliefs and values of the congregation. Thus a mission statement should be brief, no more than three lines long and able to be summarized in three key words. Mission is proactive engagement, a call to lose ourselves into the world. An effective mission statement that leads to concrete action is the salt that is poured out with a purpose so that the mission field is saturated with what we are called to do. Action words within our mission statement serve as benchmarks for us to hold ourselves accountable to how faithful we have been to our calling.¹⁰

When setting up your website, both your vision and mission statements are items you will want to display prominently. This will give those who visit your website an idea of who you are. Be creative in a way that will grab their attention and will make them want to check out what is going on in your new church!

Affirming Leadership

The Jesus Model

Read Mark 1-3. A Bible Study on this passage is included in Appendix B. Jesus never had the intention of undertaking his ministry alone, even though he was clear that there were aspects of his ministry that he could not delegate. For everything else he recruited a group of collaborators to help him carry out his vision and mission.

The dangers of wanting to do ministry on your own are many. As gifted as we may be, there are always growing edges that challenge us. We need to humbly recognize those areas and allow others who are gifted in those areas to compliment our work. Group collaboration will allow us to share the work in a way that will allow the planter to offer a good stewardship of his or her time, health and other aspects of life.

It is a known fact that the burnout rate in the ministry of new church planting as well as the divorce rate among planters is extremely high. One internet search engines results in over 600 articles when you type in “clergy burnout new church planters”. One that stands out is a series of articles from the John Mark Ministries that offers assessment tools to measure your levels of stress and possibilities of burn out. Throughout the process presented in this manual we will invite planters to explore many areas of his or her life, including spousal and family cooperation. While the planter’s family may be involved in the calling to plant the new congregation, this is not always the case. Planters need to be sensitive to spousal and familial needs and realities as part of the discernment process that accompanies a call to plant a new church.

The greatest challenge a planter will have is to assemble a group of men and women who will accompany him or her on the journey to make this new church happen. We call this group of people the “core group.” A core group is a group of people brought together by the planter to help make the project of the new church a reality. They are gospel passionate people brought together to provide initial leadership and growth for the new church project. As the project continues to grow, these could become part of the pastoral or leadership team of the church.

This group will be the first to hear of the vision, mission and values of the planter. It may be that this group enters into a time of discernment with the planter to fine tune or expand the elements of the vision, mission and values. Regardless of the process followed, it is essential that the core group has ownership of the calling and commit to working alongside the planter to ensure the success of the project.

Strategies for Recruiting Core Group Members

Where do we go to find core group members? How do we identify people who could become part of the pastoral team of our new church? A word of warning: never discount anybody until you have discerned what God may have for that person to do. Ernesto Ramírez pastor of Iglesia del Valle in Van Nuys, California had planted his new church and desperately needed someone to lead in the area of worship. In Hispanic churches good worship is very important. Nobody in his family had the talents needed to lead worship and none of the people he had already recruited for the core group seemed to be a talented musician. Then, Ernesto officiated a wedding for a couple in the community. The wedding singer hired for the occasion was a very talent musician and singer. Ernesto thought to himself, “this is the person I need for my congregation.” After many months of relationship building, Ernesto brought that person into the church to teach music lessons. That was the gateway God used. Today that person is leading the music ministry of Iglesia del Valle.

The visioning capacity of the church planter is needed to see possibilities where others do not. (I Peter 2:4-8) As you enter into this time of seeking out the members for your core group, do not only look amongst people who are already in relationship with Christ. Some of the greatest evangelists of history have been people that have come into relationship with Christ and only then set the world on fire for the gospel. (Doesn't that sound like the story of a man know originally as Saul of Tarsus?)

How do we go about recruiting members for our core group? Unless your project comes with seed members with specific gifts and talents, your core group members will have to come from the first group of people you bring into relationship with Christ. Remember Ernesto Ramirez's story! Of course this means that our challenge will be to disciple and form these new people so we can develop a group of potential leaders for our new church. Thankfully our church planters are people who are able to think outside the box and are not locked into paradigms that could push people away from our congregations.

Doug Roysden was the worship leader of the contemporary service at First Christian Church in Abilene, Texas. His almost waist length hair, streak with white speaks of a former life in the fast lane. His rock and roll guitar along with the music of his band, some of whom would make many cross the street rather than walk by them in a dark alley, was bringing people into the church that would not normally grace the doors of First Christian. With the blessing of his congregation, Doug stepped out in faith to plant Wylie Christian Church. The addicted, the abusers and the abused, the hurt and those others seemed to have forgotten found a place in this new church, alongside people for whom the dark side of life was completely unknown. The God who does not make exceptions of people has brought together an unlikely mob to birth this new church in Abilene. It is from this mass that many had given up on, that Doug is calling leaders; elders and deacons, worship leaders and Sunday School teachers and many others that have come to know Christ and found hope and a new purpose in life.

As your core group is coming together, develop your own checklist for spotting potential leaders. First, trust your instinct. Remember that you have been in spiritual discernment all this time. That instinct may be an expression of that divine prompting. Great leaders are relational, good communicators, networkers, etc. As you interact with your core group you will observe these traits. Second, observe what skills and leadership experience they have outside the church. Not all leaders from the business world make good church leaders, but it is a starting point. Effective teachers could make great resources for your Sunday school; financial administrators could be recruited to use these skills for the emerging congregation, etc. Third, your ideal leaders will demonstrate passion for the vision being put forth. Not all people passionate about the church make great church leaders, but it is almost impossible to have an effective leader in someone who is not passionate about the church. Fourth, observe who are the people in the group that are always open to change and willing to try new things. Note the group members that are always challenging the outer edge of things. Good leaders are rarely satisfied with status quo. Good leaders are always looking for other possibilities.

Something to consider in this discernment for recruiting your core group leaders is the fact that a good leader is a risk taker. These are the people willing to try new things and see failures as learning experiences and not roadblocks. Another sign of an effective leader is that people listen to what they have to say. When natural leaders speak in debates, people listen to what they have to say. The power of persuasion is a gift in many of these natural leaders. Finally, a leader exhibits spiritual maturity that speaks to a well grounded and disciplined spiritual life evidenced in spiritual growth. These leaders “walk the walk and talk the talk.”

A word of caution: there are those who postulate that leaders are made and not born. No doubt there are people with innate leadership characteristics. Identifying capable leadership for a new congregation from those who exhibit these traits is still in itself a challenge. On the other hand, in the order of the Kingdom, we are challenged to see things in a different light. A real challenge for the planter will be to discern leadership possibilities in people that under secular standards may not be considered leadership material. In a society such as ours that values education, a person that has little or no formal education may not at first seem as the ideal candidate for leadership within the new church. There comes a time when leadership is about passion and the training and molding can come later on.

This strategy has been used by some of our planters with great success. Keep in mind that you want to develop relational networks with these potential core group members. In many cases you will need time to develop an initial relationship before there will be enough trust from this person to accept your invitation to come to a Bible study or a small group meeting.

Whatever strategy you decide on, seek the constant guidance of the Spirit. Let me once again share this quote by Jim Collins from his book, *From Good to Great*, “great vision

without the right people is irrelevant.” You need to be sure you have the right people on board in the ideal positions for the vision to become a reality.¹¹

There are many models to illustrate the challenge of resourcing the people from which you will eventually cull your core group. I will call your attention to a resource that Rick Warren in *The Purpose Driven Church* calls “circles of commitment” to illustrate the progression of people from outsiders and strangers to committed core group members and ministers of the new church.¹² Rick speaks of five levels of commitment. The first is **community (unchurched)** which refers to the group of people that live within driving distance of your gathering space. This is what you have designated as you target group taking into consideration that there may be distance factors that will limit the size of the community you will be reaching out to. This is where your evangelism efforts are concentrated. Remember once again depending on your model of church start this is the group you will eventually look to “recruit” and “move” people to other levels of commitment. **Crowd (regular attenders)** refers to the people who show up to your weekly gatherings and attraction events with certain regularity. In this group you have both believers and non believers. Their degree of commitment is minimal. One of the elements at this stage that could move the people to the next level of commitment is relevant worship and teaching that addresses their real life issues. **Congregation (members)** is what Warren calls the next level of commitment. These are the people who have committed to membership in your project. The next level refers to the **committed (maturing members)**. These are the people that are involved in deepening their spiritual experience, seeking to grow in discipleship. They are not yet actively involved in ministries of the church, but somehow see this as a possibility in a near future. The final stage of commitment Warren calls **the core (Lay ministers)**. These are the people of the congregation that are actively involved alongside the planter of the new church, or the pastor of the established congregation in active ministry. Their natural talents and abilities have been enhanced by their discipleship experiences so that they are actively involved in reaching out to the people to the other levels of the circle of commitment to bring others into a closer relationship with Christ.

In cases where the project has seed members from sponsoring congregations, it may be that the core group members come to the new project with defined gifts and roles. The planter and the core group need to be conscious of the ownership aspect of the project. At times, some core members come to a project with the expectation that they will serve a couple of years and then return to their sponsoring congregation. Time has proven that this is not an ideal situation. Tensions may arise in the group if core members seek to replicate styles and practices of the congregation they left and are hoping to return to. The core group member that has in his or her mindset that this is a temporary assignment will not invest his or herself to the same extent as a person who is committed to being part of then project long term. In an ideal situation, core members seeded from a sponsoring congregation will be leaders that feel the calling to be part of this new faith community and are committed to making it work.

For some of you new planters reading this it might seem that this discussion is far beyond the reach of where you are or will be in the initial stages of your church plant. And you are right! Yet you must keep in mind that if you are starting your church from scratch in a community where you do not know anybody, you might need to be a quick study so you can meet some of these outer circle people (community) and work in a very intentional manner so that some of these people in a reasonable time can become part of your **lay core group**.

Home Bible Studies for Core Group Members

A very effective way to get to know people from which to assemble your core group is to offer weekly Bibles studies at a home or facility within the target area. Keep in mind that the fundamental purpose of this outreach is to identify and recruit potential core group members. Some church planting strategist would suggest that in the initial stage of the life of the church, before you start offering Bible studies to the critical mass as a means of growing your church, you first spend intentional time in these bible studies training potential core group leaders.

People who are invited to be part of this group need to understand that there is an expectation that after a period of discernment, if the planter understands there is a calling for that person to be part of the core group, an invitation will be extended. As difficult as it may seem, a weeding out process is also needed. Some people may attend the group for the wrong reasons or motivations. The spiritual discernment that the planter exercises is crucial in this initial stage of the church plant.

Once it has been determined that that person is not called to be a part of the core group, he or she needs to be discouraged from attending these meetings. A pastoral heart is important, as this person could become part of the greater critical mass you may want to reach out to in later stages of the growth of the church. Never close doors to the relationship with the people that are pruned from the group. On the other hand, never make promises of later inclusion. Remember not all people we encounter in the initial stages of our church plant have the calling to be part of the church.

As the group grows and other people are added, prayer, evangelism, fellowship and pastoral care is offered to the group. As potential core group members are identified and invited to be part of the intentional launch team for the new church, a separate time of interaction and training needs to be set up for the specific leadership positions these people are singled out for leadership within the group.

Characteristics of the Core Group

A Core Group:

- Is small; no more than 12 people (remember the Jesus model), so that they can build a sense of community.
- Takes the time to build cohesion and establish rapport with each other, although is careful not to become inwardly focused. (Open vs. closes systems)
- Is heterogeneous in its composition. (Remember your core group will be a reflection of what your eventual congregation will look like)

- Understands the vision of the planter and is committed to carrying it out.
- Shares the vision and will serve the ministry, contribute financially and participate regularly.
- Will be in charge of recruiting, along with the planter, the other members of the expanded group that will eventually become the congregation.
- Has relational experiences that go beyond weekly meetings.
- Roles within the group are clearly defined.
- Learns and trains by on-hands experiences.
- Teaches evangelism by doing personal evangelism.
- Teaches service by serving.
- Teaches prayer by praying.
- Teaches Scripture by going directly to the Word.

Who do we seek to include in our core group?

- People with vision
- People excited about ministry
- People excited about being church
- People with positive attitudes and a spirit of expectation
- People not skeptical about the potential for impacting the community
- People consistent in prayer and outreach, even in face of apparent sterile efforts
- People who are committed to a deep relationship with Jesus Christ and can witness about it to others
- People who are flexible, teachable and risk takers

Once you have assembled your core group, you will start to get a sense for what your future congregation might look like. The identity and ethnicity of the future church will be worked into the idiosyncrasy of the core group. This will also be a time for a reality check for the planter. An effective planter will mirror the typical person in the target area. Ideally the planter will be in the same age range with a variance of ten years. For example, it will be a greater challenge for a retired clergy to plant a new church in an area where the majority of residents are younger families.

The ethnicity of the planter will have a direct bearing on the long-term success of the project. Unless the vision calls for a multicultural church, an African American planter will have limited success trying to plant a congregation in a predominately Hispanic neighborhood, especially if he or she does not speak Spanish. Education levels may have a direct bearing upon the effectiveness of the plant. In areas where education levels are high there will be the expectation that the planter be well educated and have the capacity to challenge the people to a higher level of thought in spiritual matters. Ideally the planter will mirror the characteristics of the typical person in the target area.

Defining and Recruiting Leadership for the New Church

As your core group grows, you will need to recruit leaders with specific gifts to move into the second phase of the new church plant: to grow and sustain the growth of the congregation. The list and description of leadership functions below is by no means exclusive. According to the context, vision, mission and specific characteristics of the church plant, you may need to identify leadership skills in other areas.

Evangelist

A person with a gift for evangelism must be a person of high regard and credibility in the community and with the members of the core group. A person with an evangelistic spirit has the gift of reaching people. This person is able to connect with friends as well as with complete strangers with the same ease. A person with an evangelistic spirit is bold and lives a deep spiritual life that affords him or her many experiences to share with others.

The best way to connect to another person is through life experiences. An evangelist is able to tell his or her life story and explain how having a relationship with Christ was so essential to a positive outcome to the experience in such a way that others desire to have similar experiences. An evangelist is able to present a plan of salvation in a manner that is compelling, yet not threatening. A person with an evangelist's spirit is sensitive to the leading of the Spirit of God so that he or she is able to have a sense for when the moment is right to invite a person into relationship with Christ.

A person with an evangelistic spirit will invite people to church and will not depend exclusively on the planter or pastor to take the lead in inviting a person into a relationship with Christ. A person with an evangelistic spirit feels a burden for the lost and a passion for telling others what Christ has meant in his or her life. Although we expect the planter to exhibit the gift of evangelism, at times the greatest strength of the planter may be in another area that is also important to the well being of a new project. A core group that does not have an evangelist in its midst is going to have a hard time experiencing growth.

It is important to note that the task of growing the church does not lie solely on the shoulders of our evangelists. An effective evangelist will not only evangelize, but also challenge and equip other to do likewise.

Worship Leaders

In a time such as this when people are seeking experiences different from what the traditional church can offer, worship can make or break a new church. A person with the gift of worship is one who understands that the calling is not to entertain but to facilitate an environment that will provoke encounters with the Risen One. Unfortunately, today many churches have fallen into the entertainment mode. Laser and light shows accompany people with good voices that hope one day to make it big in the entertainment

industry. This might be good presentation and delivery, but if what is being presented does not transcend the senses to bore into the souls to provoke transformation, it is just like “...resounding gongs or clashing cymbals”. (I Corinthians 13)

A gifted worship leader plans worship services that are steeped in excellence but at the same time give the Spirit the liberty to move as it pleases. Remember: “the wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit” (John 3:8). A gifted worship leader is able to recognize the gifts of worship in others and seeks to develop these gifts to serve the church. As with any of the roles within the core group, the worship leader is aware that the scope of the responsibility goes beyond the person. Being a worship leader entails stepping into the gap to prepare the way for the moment of encounter. An effective worship leader is able to plan, lead and involve others in a worship experience in a meaningful way.

Children’s Ministry leader and recruiter

One of the most important ministries in a new church is the ministry with children. According to many church growth experts, in a family it is usually the mother who decides where the family will go to church. This means that a younger family will give a hard look at what the congregation has to offer to the children when making their decision about a home church.

Although resources may be limited, the new church plant is well served by channeling a major portion of its funds to providing excellent child care and ministry. At times it may be wise to look outside of the group for this expertise. Visit a childcare center that is recognized for its excellence in service. Seek out the best employee and explore the possibility of hiring that person for the childcare portion of your ministry. Unfortunately, many times new churches allow people they barely know to become involved with this ministry. We know of the many horror stories of children that have been abused by volunteers at these new churches. A person recruited from a licensed day care center will have passed a background check as well as have current health certificates. This provides a safe guard against the possibility of a case of child abuse in your congregation.

If you recruit people from your core group to lead out in this ministry, it is important that you have each person fill out an application. This application should ask specific questions that will give you a sense of gifts and capabilities. The applications should also include a permission to do a criminal background check. There should be no exception to this rule. Without background checks churches off al kind open themselves to serious liability. Sample applications can be found at www.newchurches.com/examples.

A person gifted in the area of children’s ministry is creative, innovative, and a team worker. The task of this ministry is to provide meaningful experiences for the children that will allow them to take their first steps in their faith walk. This is a monumental task that cannot be carried out by one single person. A gifted children’s ministry volunteer is constantly scoping out the people who come into the church to find others to become

involved in this ministry. As with all ministries, a spirit of discernment is constantly needed to make the right decisions as far as the people who are invited into this ministry.

One of the main responsibilities this person will have is to set up the church nursery. We need to think beyond the paradigm that see children's ministry as the baby sitting providing an outlet that allows parents to sit and enjoy the worship experience. People bring their children to church and expect them to get something out of the experience. Nevertheless, the nursery ministry is a very important calling draw, especially for a new church.

Nursery workers need to have some sort of identification. This helps parents know who is working with their children. A smock or apron adds a touch of professionalism that many parents appreciate. These smocks or aprons can be prepared with the logo of the church and it is also a great promotional tool.

The ministry aspect of this service needs to always be in the forefront of all activities. This is why you will want to be careful about staffing the nursery with young teenagers who are very willing to hang out with babies and toddlers, but are certainly ill prepared to deal with mundane chores of baby care and even less prepared to deal with emergencies. According to David Cos; a nursery or preschool worker should be "a Christian growing in his relationship with Christ; a member of the church who demonstrates maturity, tact, and enthusiasm; a committed Christian who will teach, visit and reach out to preschoolers and their families."¹³ In the context of ministry, if you do not have such a person in your core group, you might consider contacting a nearby church that could help you identify someone in that congregation that might be able to help out for some time.

Shepherd or caregiver

People grow in their spiritual walk when they have spiritual mentors to walk with them through their faith journey. A person with the gift to be a shepherd or care giver is a person who takes very seriously his or her walk with God. This is the hand off person after the evangelists have done their work. Because new comers to the congregation or new believers to the faith will tend to want to cling on to the person who brought them into the faith community, it is important we have a few shepherds or caregivers who can walk alongside these babes in the faith and nurture their growth.

A shepherd or caregiver spends time in discipleship with this new believer or newcomer. A shepherd or caregiver is a highly relational person whom has a keen sense of spiritual discernment. This person does not take over the function of the pastor, but in the first phases of the church plant, the planter is busy planting the congregation. It is necessary then that we have 'pastors' that can provide the sustained spiritual care that goes beyond the Sunday morning preaching or the teachings and activities of the weekday's small group experiences.

Organizer Implementer

A person with the gifts of organizing has the capacity to take a vision which can be so ambiguous (think of the analogy of the cloud and the box) and bring it into reality. A truly gifted organizer designs and launches ministry systems to enable visions to become realities. The planter and other members of the core group may be ‘big picture people’. These are the visionaries that see the ‘cloud’ of what they hope to accomplish. An organizer or implementer is able to take that big picture and pencil in the details to make it a reality.

This is also a spiritually grounded person who is able to provide reality checks for the group every so often. An organizer is also a dreamer, but has his or her feet firmly planted on the ground. An organizer will call the group into accountability when resources may be spread too thin and affecting the excellence of the ministries that are offered. An organizer will call into question the motivations and expectations for the proposed project.

An organizer networks with the core group and those who come to be part of the faith community to recruit people according to their gifts and talents so they can become part of the implementation team. It is a known fact that people feel part of a group when they are involved with tasks they can help with according to their capacity. A person with great carpentry skills would better serve the group helping build the stage for the Christmas pageant, then being asked to help with sewing costumes for the children.

Mobilizer

The mobilizer creates opportunities and encourages people to get involved in groups and ministries. A mobilizer is in constant communication with the leaders of other ministries to learn about needs for what the church does. A mobilizer empowers people so they can heed the calling to serve.

Think of the mobilizer as a matchmaker. In the film *Fiddler on the Roof*, Yenta the matchmaker had her work cut out for her with the young girls who did not want to marry older men. This is not the matchmaking we are speaking of when we describe the task of the mobilizer. The mobilizer will present opportunities for newcomers to plug into the life, that is the vision and mission, of the new church. A mobilizer will never seek to force a person to become involved with a ministry for which the person has no talent, or does not feel comfortable with. These are sure ways of showing this person the door. Think of getting someone who is tone deaf to be part of the worship ministry and lead singing during worship services! These, of course, are extreme examples, but our mobilizer must be very sensitive to the degree of willingness of the people to serve.

Financial Administrator

Possibly one of the most sensitive areas in the ministry of planting a new church is the financial aspect of the ministry. The planter who is in this ministry ‘for the money’ is in for a rude awakening. Nevertheless, past scandals of financial matters in ministries, both

large and small have caused many to question the credibility of ministers in general. In the void that accompanies new churches by virtue of its newness, the area of finances is one that needs to be handed off to a person gifted in financial matters as soon as possible. When the core group is small, the tendency is for the planter or spouse to take care of the money matters for some time. This is a dangerous practice that must be avoided at all costs. Issues of credibility and accountability could mar the project from the beginning.

Note we are not talking about needing a CPA or somebody with an MBA degree to take over the finances of the group. Any person with basic bookkeeping skills can help the congregation through the first stages of its financial life. Today, there are so many software programs that are designed specifically for churches, as well as general accounting software programs that are so user friendly, it is impossible to not be able to develop some kind of financial system for the blossoming congregation. As the congregations grows and so does the budget, you may need to recruit people with some more expertise to help design and implement systems that will facilitate the smooth functioning of the church. Simply put, a financial administrator, designs and implements systems for financial matters of the church

Teacher or communicator

An effective teacher for a new church communicates and applies Biblical truth in a variety of settings, engages the group in discipleship training. Possibly one of the most important and challenging gifts needed in the development of the new church are gifted teachers. A church grows through effective evangelism, but sustains its growth when people who respond to the evangelistic efforts are then ‘discipled’ and become committed to doing ministry from within the new faith community.

People today are not interested in hearing Bible stories. They seek to understand how those events and writings found in the Scriptures can be related to their daily struggles. Seekers today want the Bible to become real in a way that affords them an encounter with the Resurrected. A gifted teacher does not lecture, but rather facilitates discussions that allow the people to connect as they share their life stories. A gifted teacher is capable of making him or herself vulnerable to the group by sharing personal life struggles and victories and helping other understand how a deep, meaningful relationship with Christ was key to growth in the midst of it all. A gifted teacher is an eternal student, always reading and evaluating what is available out there that can help students in their faith journey.

Keep in mind that if the church is being faithful to its calling, many of the people coming into the church are new in their faith experience. There are a lot of questions and doubts. The apostle Paul speaks of these new believers as spiritual babes (I Peter 2:2). These people need to be lead along in their first spiritual baby steps. Think of them as blank slates. That ‘first love’ Christian experience in their coming into the faith will lead them to want to read everything that falls into their hands. These are very vulnerable times for them. Teachers need to work alongside the shepherds or caregiver to ensure that they are reading sound materials. Any controversial or doctrinally radical materials could cause

great confusion and even be the cause for these people to turn back on their faith experience. Therefore, the people we affirm into the ministry of teaching need to have the capacity to discern as well as connect with the people they will be helping form spiritually.

Intercessors

The ministry of intercessory prayer is what holds up any ministry. At times people come into our core group with gifts and talents that are duplicate others'. Rather than involve people in a tug of war over the use of gifts and talents, invite these people to become prayer partners. The ministry of intercession helps people along in their personal spiritual journey. A praying church sets the standards and challenges newcomers to develop a disciplined prayer life.

An intercessory prayer ministry keeps the planter in constant prayer, prays for the needs of the congregation, keeps the ministries of the church on their prayer agenda and is readily available to the members of the faith community to pray with them or to take prayer concerns.

Intercessors are constantly providing opportunities for other to experience prayer. Prayer retreats and small weekly prayer circles and experiences are offered and open to all. These are the people the members of the church seek out when there is a specific prayer request or concern. Gifted intercessors know not only to pray for the people but to also challenge these people to develop their own prayer life. These people gifted in prayer are also able to share materials and recommend books on the subject that can help people develop their own discipline of prayer. Intercessors also work with the people in charge of the church program to ensure that prayer experiences are offered as part of the program

Intercessors are also the people who hold the planter and other members of the core group accountable to their personal prayer life. The intercessors will invite the planter and leadership of the new church to time of retreat for intentional prayer. In some congregations, the anointing with oil and laying on of hands will be part of this prayer retreat experiences. As the church grows, a natural place to look for elders for the congregation will be our group of intercessors.

Spiritual Gifts Inventory

As you are seeking to discern the gifts of your core leaders, the spiritual gifts inventory can be a very useful tool. There are a variety of these resources available. A very simple inventory is offered as part of the Spiritual discernment Packet available from the New Church Ministry website (www.newchurchministry.org).

There are also other resources available to churches at little or no cost to help people discover and utilize their spiritual gifts. Saddleback Church provides a resource for small

churches through its Discovering My Ministry class, available through www.purposedriven.com.

There are many other resources you may come across. All these inventories share in common the following;

- They include some teaching tool about the different spiritual gifts, passions, capabilities and personality types
- Provide a measurement instrument of spiritual gifts
- Display a list of ministries that could match each gift
- Recommend a way for one on one meetings by which leaders can help new members find a place for their ministry within the church

Avoiding Temptation of Premature leadership

Many new church plants have failed because leadership positions were given to people who did not have the gifts to carry out the functions of the position, or accepted the responsibility for the wrong reasons. A planter must be very careful when inviting people to assume leadership within the new church. Leaders within the new church need to understand the fluid nature of occupying positions so that there is not mayor resistance when people need to be separated from their positions of leadership for different reasons. Once again the use of spiritual gifts inventories and other useful resources can avoid potentially damaging power struggles with the church.

Strategies for Growth

As we respond to the divine call to plant a new faith community, we need to be aware that the calling is to bring people into relationship with Christ. As people come to the saving knowledge of Jesus, they need to be challenged to grow and to bring others into the same life changing experience. This is what church growth is all about. Many seminars are taught today about church growth. Strategies can be discussed, even programs purchased for the purpose of growing churches. But Solomon was very wise when he said there was nothing new under the sun (Ecc. 1:9). After all has been said and done, the basic truth is that churches grow through evangelism.

When we at New Church Ministry talk of evangelism we refer to two mayor categories: active evangelism and passive evangelism. Active evangelism refers to the sharing the gospel and plan of salvation through various ingenious methods to the unchurched. These are often people who have become totally disenfranchised from the established church. Their reality recognizes that we need to be intentional about offering people the option of becoming involved in a meaningful, life transforming relationship with Jesus Christ.

On the other hand there is another component to this effort that recognizes that there are people out there who at one time were in relationship with a faith community, but for different reasons are no longer in that relationship at the same level. We call these the underchurched. Evangelism is also an intentional effort to reach out to those whom the church has shunned, hurt or for whom the church seems no longer relevant to introduce them to a new faith experience that meets them right where they are.

We will be sharing some evangelism strategies that have been put into practice by some of our church planters in their work to evangelize and grow the church. Keep in mind that there are geographic, cultural and ethnic constraints that could affect the success of the implementation of these strategies in the context in which you are planting your new church. Unfortunately there is not an across the board, foolproof method for evangelism. Part of the challenge for our planters is to experiment with different methods until finding the one that is right for your project.

The second evangelism effort we mentioned we call passive evangelism. Under this general category we include marketing and promotion of the ministry as well as attraction events. These attraction events refer to activities and services offered to the community with the dual purpose of meeting a need in the community at the same time that the name of the church is put on the radar screen of the community. We will be discussing these strategies in depth further along.

Living out the call to be evangelists

By now you should have identified and recruited the core group members that have exhibited the gifts for evangelism. You must be aware that it is not the responsibility of these people to grow the church, just like it is not the sole responsibility of the planter to grow the church. Yet it will be up to the planter and the evangelist of the core group to train and empower all members of the upcoming church to become evangelists.

Of course it would seem much easier to just create a church by siphoning off people from other churches in the area. Be warned! Usually the people you are able to whisk away from established churches are people who are marginally involved or in the worst case scenario, are people the pastor of the congregation has been praying for years that somebody like you would come around and take this person off their backs! I call these churches “Frankenstein communities” because they consist of former independent members of other organism, brought together in an unnatural way, where each part wants to operate independently as if it were still part of the organism from which it was severed. You can imagine the nightmare this can represent for any new church planter!

As you prepare your leaders and core group members to go out into the mission field, to seek out people not in relationship with Christ, people not actively involved with a church, invite them to reflect on the question: what is it about my experience with Jesus that this community cannot live without? In his book *Moving off the Map*, Tom Bandy speaks of the challenge for change in the established church. Some of the ideas presented resonate for the planting and growing of a new faith community. Bandy states that change must be anchored in the experience of the congregation with Jesus. This implies that the focus for change or new results comes from getting people to center on what it means to be in relationship with Christ. He further continues stating that “No enduring change can happen in the church, no matter how large or small, without it being linked to continual spiritual growth in one’s relationship with Jesus”.¹⁴

When we understand that evangelism is not a program, but rather a lifestyle, we can start to develop effective strategies to reach our target population. These strategies involve reaching out to the people, bringing them into relationship with Christ and through effective discipleship, help them grow in their own faith journey. A church with a holistic vision of its calling will also understand that these new believers are also equipped to be sent out into the world to do evangelism and thus bring others into relationship with Christ. The ultimate goal is not to assimilate people into the institution called church, but rather to bring them into relationship with Christ.

The planter and leaders of the core group need to understand that as they begin to be associated with this new church start, you will be seen in a different light. People will begin to wonder: Is there a disconnect between what they preach and how they live? The planter and leaders of the project become the calling cards for the plant. Everything they do in the community will have a direct bearing on the church. They become evangelists 24/7. It is not only the responsibility of those with gifts for evangelism to grow the church. All those related to the church will become evangelists in word as well as in their

daily actions. The planter and the leaders can become facilitators or roadblocks for people to visit the church.

Evangelism needs to be an intentional effort. As times change, so do the methods of evangelism we use need to evolve. The image of the soap box preacher on the busy street corner so popular in the yesteryears today evokes sense of unease and ridicule from those who observe these boisterous preachers today in public places. Yet on the other hand for many others, the idea of evangelism has become so passive, the art of effective evangelism has been lost.

Through an intentional evangelism effort that involves training for the core group members the idea of commitment to bringing people into relationship with Christ becomes the focus of the group activity. We would recommend that as part of the training for your core group members in preparation for their engaging in personal evangelism, you encourage them to share their conversion experience with the group. The Apostle Paul in the book of Acts offers a very simple model for doing personal evangelism. Share with the group who you were before you entered into a life transforming relationship with Christ. Share about that experience, moment or situation where you experienced the joy of receiving Christ into your life and conclude with how your life has changed since your have been in relationship with Christ.

One of my favorite stories is how Cynthia Hale, pastor of Ray of Hope Christian Church trains their leaders and church members to do evangelism. Cynthia is the planter and founder of this congregation that started as a Bible study in her home in Decatur, Georgia and today has grown to be a church of several thousand people. I call Cynthia's method, the Cynthia Hale School of Evangelism. In one of the many experiences of this congregation, the members are bussed to a local mall and have to do personal evangelism with strangers they meet in the mall before they can get back on the bus! Of course this may sound extreme to some of our readers, but the idea is that the best way to learn is to live the experience. Core group members need to be encouraged to write down their story and "practice" sharing it until they feel comfortable about leaving their notes at home and sharing with passion the story of what Christ has done for them. Remember the only guaranteed strategy for church growth is evangelism.

We will be sharing with you some strategies and activities for growing the church through evangelism. Some of these activities have been developed, tested and tried by our planters in the field. Remember to take into consideration your geographic, cultural and ethnic context when trying to adapt these experiences. Many of these activities may need to be tailored to the realities of the context in which you are doing ministry. Ed Stetzer in *Planting New Churches in a Post Modern Age* offers an entire chapter on methodology of evangelism for a postmodern world.

Relational Networking

A good exercise to do with the members of your core group would be to read the book *Where Do We Go From Here?* by Ralph Neighbour. Neighbour speaks to the

sociological reality that human beings tend to cluster in relationship with other people with whom we share characteristics or interests in common.¹⁵ Neighbour calls these relational groups ‘oikos’. Although the book deals specifically with the concept of the cell church, the entire discussion about resourcing your relational groups or ‘oikos’ as your first venue for evangelism is a discussion worth having with the members of your core group. Discuss with the group the importance of establishing and maintaining healthy relational groups that can serve later as prospective mission fields for the growth of the congregation. One of the ways in which churches can grow is through relational networking. Relational networks are the basic building blocks of society.

The following are points to consider derived in part from Neighbour’s discussion of oikos. We have added other considerations derived from the general concept of relational networking in hopes that it can provide the basis for a good discussion with your core group around the subject.

- Relational groups refer to the group of people we are intimate with; those we tend to interact and spend quality time with.
- Relational groups include: members of our immediate family, some relatives, friends from work, recreational and hobby partners, and community people we tend to interact with quite frequently.
- These groups are as large, or as small as we allow them to be. Typically a relational group can include between 20 to 30 people.
- In reaching out beyond our core group, we begin to network our community to grow our church.
- Our relational groups could be one of our first venues for evangelism
- Many Christians tend not to have many non-believers in their relational groups. This could explain why some of our new church starts are sometimes all about stealing members from other churches.
- We need to develop friendship networks with our relational groups before we can attempt active evangelism. That is why passive evangelism is so important in the gathering stage of the new church. These outreach events are not only attraction events, they are also a chance to get to know these people better and develop relations of trust as you present the gospel.

Once the group has participated in a thorough discussion of this concept, consider next steps in light of this discussion. Invite them to think about the implications the concept of relational networks can have for effective evangelism. Ask the members of the core group to prepare a list of at least 15 to 20 people whom they consider to be part of their relational group. Lead the group in time of prayer and then challenge them to think about ways in which they can do evangelism within their relational group.

For some, it may uncover a need to begin to develop stronger ties with these people that may build more credibility before attempting to go to the next level. For others in the group, the evangelism effort may be to start sharing tidbits of their own faith journey. Small gestures such as the gift of a book or spiritual resource may set the tone for later

discussion of spiritual matters. Others may take the opportunity to do something as simple as invite them to an outreach event or an attraction event or a worship experience. For those core group members already plugged into a small group experience, it may be that their initial evangelism strategy may be to invite that person to visit the small group. It is important that the core group dismiss the image of the Bible thumping evangelist on a soapbox threatening hell and damnation. This image needs to be banished from our mindset if we are to be creative and effective in developing strategies for reaching out to the people in our relational groups.

Finding a Person of Peace

As part of our getting to know the community, we need to be very intentional about getting to know the people that can make things happen in the community. A person of peace is a designation for a person in the target area that is very well connected to the people and structures in the area. This is the person that can be a gatekeeper or facilitator for change in the community. A person of peace has recognized authority and credibility in the community. “Pray during your windshield and walkthrough tours that God will lead you to that person of peace in the community. This person may be an organizer in the community, a former office holder, a major employer, a well respected member of a local congregation, a business owner, etc.

Francisco and Rosaura Hernandez left the comfort of a well paying job in Dallas to respond to the call to establish a Hispanic church plant in the city of Enid, Oklahoma. Various Disciples congregations in the area felt it was time to reach out to the growing Hispanic population coming into Enid and asked Francisco to “come out to Enid and help us”. As Francisco and Rosaura went around the city praying about this calling, they were led to a video store that advertised in Spanish. They met the owner and shared with her the vision of what they hoped to accomplish. At the end of their conversation, the owner asked them to wait a moment, going back into her office, she returned moments later with a printed list. She gave Francisco and Rosaura a full copy of her client list. On that list was contact information for all the Hispanics that frequented her store. Through this simple act, the Hernandez were able to make contact with a large number of people in the community. Upon learning where the information had come from, many received the planter couple in their home. This video storeowner was one person of peace this couple encountered in the first stages of their project. Pray that God will lead you to people of peace in the community where you are hoping to plant your church.

You may find people of peace in places where you least expect them. Juan Carlos Hernandez left a good paying job, a nice home and his family back in New Jersey to plant the first Hispanic Disciples church in Charlotte, North Carolina. The ‘person of peace’ he found in the Charlotte Police Department! An officer assigned to serve as the liaison with the Hispanic community of Charlotte provided demographic information that in some cases corrected information that had been obtained from other demographic sources. Through this officer of the law, Juan Carlos met community leaders, people involved with a soccer league that served the Hispanic community in the city and Hispanics in the business community of the city.

Pray that God will lead you to a person of peace. Remember this is not necessarily a church leader or an elected officer in the community. A person of peace will be a great help to your initial work in the community.

Bible Study/Discipleship groups

A very effective way to get a new church started is to start a small group Bible Study in the target area. The group can meet in a home, an office, or a public building. The leader and some members of the group may come from the host church, but it is important to include people who live in the target area from the beginning.

By Bible Study we refer to direct study of biblical passages in a way that allows the participants to see the relevance of the texts to their lives. Discipleship groups usually meet to study a topic from a Christian perspective or a book with a scriptural base. As they finish one series or topic, their group leader provides other material for the group to continue meeting and studying together.

This approach requires long term commitment from the leaders of the effort. Additional time needs to be spent preparing studies and procuring the material for study. The leader faces the challenge of providing cohesiveness to the group, yet at the same time encouraging diversity and openness. Building trust in the group, while keeping the climate of the group welcoming for newcomers is another challenge. These groups need to be evangelistic in nature, with members always inviting new people to be part of the group.

This model is successful because it begins with a layperson-to-layperson approach. The people drawn to the small group studies can feel empathy with the leaders because they are peers. Sometimes the unchurched, or those who have been hurt by the church, find it difficult to relate to clergy. In this model, lay-lead Bible studies allow for greater empathy and avoid some of the pitfalls of clergy-led groups, such as the use of too much theological language.

The group continues to meet on a weekly basis as it grows. Elements of worship may be incorporated into the weekly gathering. Teaching about worship and the Biblical basis for all that is done is important, since many of the group members will have little church background. It is best to wait to hold public, weekly worship services until there are a number of small groups and at least 100 people involved.

This time of study and formation will produce a core group of people committed to the Lord and the new church start. This core group will become the evangelists, bringing others to the Bible study, doing personal evangelism and promoting/advertising within the community about the group. As the attendance grows, new leaders are nurtured so that new groups can be formed, and more lives touched through the ministry of the new church.

Every week a group of people would gather in Bear Cat Café, a small café in Aledo, Texas to study the Bible. Pastors from churches in Fort Worth would come down to offer these weekly studies. Soon the group grew to where they outgrew the café and a planter was called to take the group to the next level. Today Community Christian Church is a thriving congregation lead by Geoff Mitchell, reaching close to 200 people. If that church could start in a café, imagine the possibilities for your project!

Door to Door Evangelism

Your core group has been trained in evangelism and now it is time to take them out into the field to start growing your church. As part of the groundwork in the community, you may have discovered what the city ordinances are in reference to door to door solicitation. If not, it would be wise to look into this before beginning any effort of door to door evangelism.

Many gated communities have specific prohibitions against soliciting or handing out leaflets of any kind. Apartment complexes also have rules and regulations regarding door to door solicitation.

There are factors to consider when making these door to door calls. It is important to try to match, as closely as possible, the person doing the door-to-door calling with the characteristics of the community that is being canvassed. As you help your core group members explore their gifts, those with the evangelistic spirit and people skills are your ideal people to become involved with this effort. Others can help working out logistics, in the preparation of material to be used for the effort, or in intercessory prayer.

In the door to door strategy you might consider several approaches. Active evangelism where your core group member is equipped to present a salvation plan to the person who answers the door may not always be an effective approach for the first intervention.

The strategy employed by Jesus when he sent his disciples out two by two has proven to continue to be very effective. Jesus explained to his disciples how they could gauge the receptivity to what they had to offer. They were instructed to only enter places where people wanted to hear what they had to say. Today in our evangelism trainings we instruct people to go out in groups of two. While one member of the team is engaging the person in an evangelism dialogue, the other can be praying or trying to deflect any distractions that could interrupt the conversation. (For example the person could take care of a crying baby or a playful dog that could become a distraction). Read the passage in Mark 6: 7-13 to reflect on evangelism strategies for your core group.

The group may target specific areas and begin the strategy by giving small gifts and sharing that there is an effort to start a new church in the community. Prepare an attractive brochure that briefly describes the vision, mission and values of the new church. Try to highlight important information: time and place of meetings, name and interesting information about the planter. Other promotional items such as scratch pads, pencils, pens, refrigerator magnets, back scratchers, Frisbees, etc, with the name of the

church and contact information printed on them can be used in these first visits to homes in the community. These are very effective promotional pieces and are relatively inexpensive. As always, excellence in all that the church does or shares is a very important calling card in the community.

In the initial stages of the church's growth, funds tend to be limited. We want to maximize our efforts to get the greatest return on our investment. Note homes where there was good receptivity to the message to target for the first round of repeat visits.

Door to Door Prayer

A very ingenious variation of the door to door strategy was used by Edgardo Silvosio in Rosario, Argentina. It came to be known as the Rosario Plan. The plan consisted of having prayer cells meeting in various homes in the city. About 30 minutes before the meeting was to begin, members of the group would go home to home around the meeting place asking of the families' prayer requests and explaining that they would be in a specific home praying for these special requests. The specific location of the home was shared in case any family wished to join them for prayers. The next week, the group members would knock on the same doors and visit with those families to see how God had answered their prayer requests and at the same time collect more prayer requests. In many cases, the families opened their doors to visits from members of the church. The group members then got involved in active evangelism by presenting the plan of salvation to these families and inviting them into relationship with Christ. Through this effort, many of these families came to know Christ and many joined the church

Children's Events

Sponsoring event that reach out and serve the children of the community is a great way to connect with the parents. Jim Griffith from Church Multiplication Ministry explains that it is usually the mother who makes the decision of where the family will go to church. Events designed for children will usually bring either both parents to the event or the mother. This can be a very effective way to present not only the gospel message in a subtle manner, but also provide the opportunity for the planter and leaders to be known in the community.

Iglesia Cristiana Oasis de Esperanza (Oasis of Hope Christian Church) is a Hispanic church in Dallas with a God sized mission. When Northway Christian Church decided to reach out to the Hispanic community in their area, Oasis de Esperanza was born. A former bar in a housing project where over 70,000 people live within a one square mile block was converted into a community center. Today Jose and Patricia Almanza serve dozens of children from a place that was once a dark spot in the life of this community. Hope radiates from that place today. Over the summer, hundreds of children were served through Vacation Bible School. Many parents heard then gospel from the lips of their children as the Almanzas and members of their family, along with members of their just-born congregation, made the difference in the life of the children and the adults of Vickery Meadows in Dallas. Through this door that was opened, other services were

offered to the community that worships in the facilities of Northway and holds weekday worship services.

Children's Outreach Model

Ministry outreach to children is a very effective way to reach families that will form the core of the new church. To do this, a group of lay people from the host congregation(s) or the core group go into the target area and offer Saturday Bible School for children. The possibility of initially meeting outdoors in a park may be an option. A place in the community is later identified and secured for this outreach.

This type of ministry allows for the all sectors of the congregation to become involved. Teams to teach Bible lessons, teams to teach crafts, teams to lead recreation, and teams to provide refreshments call on different interests and talents and can involve people of all ages from the host congregation(s). Contact teams are also needed to visit the homes the children come from. As the teams come to know the families, they can provide further assistance to those in need through other ministries of the church or through referrals to the corresponding government agencies. Contact teams need to target families that are unchurched or underchurched. Continuing to make visits and phone calls will be key to forming a core group for the new church start.

Over time, as contact teams visit homes, they can encourage adults from the community to become involved in helping out with the Bible School. Devotions time at the Bible School is offered to reach adults as well as children. The commitment to this program needs to be strong. On average, this program could meet between 12 and 18 months before it is ready to go onto a second phase.

The second phase of the project involves offering Bible study time for adults as they get involved with the program. The Bible studies can be held at the same time that children are in Bible school. Another option is to seek a different time that is convenient for the adults. Keep in mind that this will require a third team of people. This team will provide leadership for the small group study/studies. As studies continue, other elements of worship, such as prayer and singing, may be gradually introduced.

The third phase is moving to formal weekly worship services. Leaders of the project need to prayerfully discern when it is time to take this step. Along with the team providing leadership for worship, there need to be teams in place to work with people who make decisions to follow Christ during the worship services. There must be a plan for helping new Christians grow in their discipleship.

Adult Events

Another strategy to reach out to the target is to design events to meet the needs of the adults in the community. Once again, demographic and community research come into play. As you have identified the adults in the area, you have also gotten a feel for what their needs are. High divorce rates in your area might indicate you have many single parents. Putting together an activity that allows these single adults to socialize, while providing childcare, could be an effective outreach tool. An area that has a high growth rate of younger families might benefit from a finance and budget management seminar. Couples with disposable income might feel attracted to an investment seminar that emphasizes investments with socially conscious companies.

The possibilities are endless. The success of the attraction event rests in being able to read the real needs of the people that the new church is trying to reach. The time-tested events of Bar-B-Q's, dinners, concerts on the lawn and free movies may not have the same results from one target to the next. A more health conscious target area could respond better to a walk, run or cycle event to benefit some local charity. A blood or clothes drive sponsored by the church plant in conjunction with a local charity might get the name of the project in the minds of the community better than a lecture on some obscure biblical theme. A series of lectures by knowledgeable experts on health and community issues that are affecting the community is a witness to the community that this new church is interested in a holistic approach to ministry. Many times the local universities and graduate schools have these conferences available to the community and are not able to offer them for lack of gathering space outside of the university campus.

Health fairs that offer the community screening for hypertension and other health concerns may work in target areas where people do not usually have unlimited access to health plans and doctors. Pharmaceutical companies have marketing divisions that can make available materials and samples of over the counter medications. Some companies even provide personnel to come to these events to offer conferences on different topics. Check with your local Health Professions School and with the local American Medical Association or other health organizations. Many times as part of their community involvement, they have set up clinics and are readily available to take them into communities.

Others

At times a strategy that can be cost effective would be to offer space in your facilities for support groups to meet. Organizations such as Al-Anon, AA, and groups for bereavement support, families with Alzheimer's, ADHD (Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder), etc, are always looking for free gathering space. As you consider your target, you may want to identify which of these support groups would serve the needs of the community. For example, in a community with a great number of school-aged children, a support group for families with ADHD may be a niche the church could serve at a minimal cost. In areas serving a graying population, an Alzheimer's support group or adult daycare center could impact the community in a way that puts the name of the church in the radar of the community.

In your dialogue with the community leaders, as part of your effort to get to know the community, try to get a sense for what services or needs are not being met in the area. In your dialogue with government agencies, explore how the church can become a conduit for people in the community to access services that are underutilized from lack of knowledge, fear of the people who could benefit from their services, or because the bureaucracy of the government agencies has not developed the logistics of how to facilitate the access of these services to the community. Every year millions of dollars earmarked for serving communities are lost and returned to the coffers of the federal government because they were not used.

A great book for creative outreach events for church plants is *101 Ways to Reach Your Community*, a short book written by Steve Sjogren founder and pastor of Vineyard Community Church in Cincinnati, Ohio.¹⁶ Sjogren speaks of three levels or strategies for serving the community in a manner that also allows us to put the name of the church on the radar of the community. Blitzing, Connecting, and Investing are the three approaches Sjogren proposes for outreach. We recommend this book to planters hoping to resource great ideas for serving the community and promoting the church to the community. You will be surprised at some of the ideas the author not only came up with, but has tried with success in many places in the U.S. and overseas.

Focus groups are another strategy many church plants are using today. Because of marketing strategies that target consumers directly, many people know of focus groups and are willing to participate in them. Directed questions will help you distinguish between the *felt needs* of the people you are reaching out to and give you strategies to deal with the *real needs* of the people. The felt needs refer to those elements you may have well uncovered in your preliminary study of the community. Issues of community and societal problems present in these community that have to be addressed and the expectation of many is that the church “should take care of these things” Before we go off on a tangent of that is not what we are here for, let me share about a teaching moment a fellow pastor had on a mission trip to the Dominican Republic some years ago. At a great expense they had flown down all their musical equipment and sound system to put on a great evangelism event in a sector of the capital city. As they were passing out fliers inviting the people to the great event, a small child came up to the pastor, took a flier which he could not read and asked “can we get a meal with this paper?” The pastor explained it was going to be a great event with music and praise. The little boy looked up to her with wide eyes and told her “but I will not be able to hear the music over the sound of my empty stomach growling because I have not had anything to eat in several days” With that he turned around and disappeared into the crowd. The felt needs are those things that make the “stomach growl”. The people you are hoping to reach will not be able to hear your “praise and preaching” over the noise of their growling stomachs. Of course that real need refers to the need to bring people into relationship with Christ. You will find this task is a tad easier when you don’t have to deal with those growling stomachs

Your focus group questions need to prove insight into the lives of the people at the time that they give you a sense for where the community is in their receptivity to the gospel. A well conducted focus group will be you valuable information about who is your target person- think Saddleback Sam and Sue, the result of Rick Warrens's focus groups work in Saddleback, California¹⁷. The information gleamed should also help you establish priorities in establishing your ministry outreach niches (remember your limited resources are best utilized focusing on specific ministries rather than trying to be a new church for all people, and trying to save the community by dealing with all community issues)

Community Surveys and Phone Surveys are another tool used by some planters in trying to get to know the community at the same time becoming a familiar face to the people in the community (in the case of community surveys conducted house to house). There are companies and ministries that have developed models of questions and plans and some even offer the entire service and provide you with a report of the findings. A search on the Internet would direct you to some of these companies if you should desire to further explore these strategies.

Marketing and Promotion

Passive evangelism, a strategy for marketing or promoting the new church is another important tool for church growth. This focus is passive in the sense that many times the target people are reached indirectly through mailings, door hangers, brochures, etc. The creativity and innovation of the planter and the members of the core group with gifts in this area are stretched to a great degree. The challenge is how to get the message of the presence of a new ministry in an area where there are other churches. What aspects of the ministry need to be highlighted and in what way, so that the community is made aware of this new church that offers something unique, cutting edge, and makes people want to come and 'check it out'?

In this approach there is no personal contact and therefore it is up to the materials to make a good first impression. The burden for excellence lies upon the material being produced. In a setting where the passive marketing approach could be well received, or is the only viable alternative, extra care should be taken to produce materials that are visually eye catching and have the capacity to rise to the top of the pile of what would otherwise be considered junk mail.

Linda Kirby of Corporate Creations, based in Indianapolis, speaks of the challenge of 'ministry driven communication'. The focus of this approach affirms communication in itself as a ministry. Kirby talks of this ministry in four expressions:

- The ministry that invites people into your church
- The ministry that welcomes people into your church
- The ministry that retains people in your church
- The ministry that advances people's involvement in your church

Kirby goes on to present simple techniques that provide the base for an effective communication strategy and, most importantly, that can be carried out with a limited budget. First, a necessary tool is a computer with a color ink-jet printer. With the

advance of technology, these systems are available at very reasonable prices. Many large discount stores offer good deals on the computer and software. Many of these large stores will not charge sales tax on items bought for non-profit organizations. To qualify for this benefit you will need state issued evidence of the non-profit status of the organization you represent. In the case of individually initiated projects that are recognized by the regions or other units of the Christian church (Disciples of Christ), these sponsoring units can assist the planter in obtaining the necessary documents to be able to qualify for this benefit.

The second recommendation is to get acquainted with the Internet. The amount of materials available free of charge or for a nominal fee is astronomical. Appendix D will offer a sampling of websites where you can obtain free materials for promoting a new church or specific outreach event. There are also sites where you can download free or inexpensive templates for different publications for the church.

The success of your project is built upon clearly set goals along with clearly stated vision and mission statements. The best promotional material in the world cannot make up for ineffective vision and mission statements or for an organization lacking clearly defined goals.

Tied in with this whole idea of clear goals mission, vision and values, is the need to create an identity or consistent “logo” for you congregation. This can be as simple as the name of your church in a particular size and font or as creative as a specially designed image that identifies your church.

Many of our new church plants incorporate the Disciple chalice as part of this visual identity. As planters of new Disciples congregations, you may find yourself struggling with the fact that people today do not seek out denominations to become part of. People yearn for a sense of belonging more than membership. The dilemma for planters is how to promote a church that is part of an organization (i.e. denomination) at the same time being sensitive to the fact that institutional church may be a turn off for those same people they are trying to reach. There is not a simple answer to this challenge. Some of the trappings associated with institutional church, such as traditional music styles in worship, may work for your target audience. On the other hand, there may be new elements, not common to our older, established congregations that may come to be part of the DNA of these new Disciples congregations. Both ways, the diversity of our worship styles and ways in which we ‘do church’ will need to come together under the general cover of the covenantal relationship that brings such diverse congregations to the same table.

Many people ask what it means to be Disciples and the answer to the question depends on who is asked. Nevertheless, a symbol of who we are is the chalice. In seeking to establish the identity of your new congregation, the presence of the chalice will serve as a reminder of the fact that this local congregation is part of a greater body. You will have to evaluate your target and decide if this image will effectively promote your new church to your community. A visit to the Church website, www.disciples.org, will allow you to

download a chalice that can be used to prepare your stationary and envelopes as well as to include on your promotional material.

In the context of ethnic church plants, this form of passive marketing is rarely effective. Cultures where people tend to be more relational require face to face contact if there is to be any response to an invitation to worship or participation in an outreach event. The planting of an ethnic congregation will be more effective if there are events that can meet the needs of the people. The 'ministry of presence' will enable a word of mouth promotion amongst the people themselves. In ethnic communities where there tend to be support systems that go beyond the immediate family structures, communication flows fairly quickly. As those recognized as community leaders within the group give their approval to what is being done by the new church, people will become more open to what is being offered.

Ministry Plan

So getting people inside your doors is only the first step. Keeping them, helping them grow and sending them forth in ministry are also part of the holistic approach of a thriving ministry. The challenge to retain people and provide for them the discipleship experiences that will allow them to grow in their faith experiences and eventually enable them to go out into the world to live out their calling to the Great Commission is the ultimate calling of the church.

The ministry plan is a strategic plan that develops a timeline and puts in place benchmarks for the living out of the ministry of the new congregation. This is the tool that will allow the leadership to be faithful to its responsibility both with those who are outside of the faith community as well as to those who have come into the fold.

A ministry plan will give direction to the work of the group. People work more effectively when they have specific goals in mind. A ministry plan also builds in accountability structures for the work of the planter as well as the core group members. A ministry plan is a means for the planter and the core group to set up specific time intervals for carrying out and evaluating events. Normally a ministry plan will work in time intervals of six months. This time span allows for the planning of both active and passive evangelism events

In a ministry plan you establish timelines and benchmarks for attendance, finances, leadership development, facilities and program. Once again the uniqueness of each project may require that the planter and core group look at other areas for which there may be the need to establish specific goals and timelines.

I would recommend the reading of Stetzer, *Planting New Churches* of how to use the media to promote and market the ministry of the new church. Remember we want to bring people in through our doors so we can give ourselves the opportunity to let them know why this church is unlike any other in the community.

Attendance

The reason for being a congregation is to grow. This implies that new people are being reached and invited into relationship with Christ. When a church establishes time lines for growth, it is a direct call to create effective evangelism and discipleship programs. A church is well served by establishing concrete numeric goals such as:

“In the next six months, we will increase the attendance of our Saturday evening worship service by 20 people.”

This goal gives the church six months to work towards this growth. A six-month timeline implies that in the next three months, at least 10 new people need to be attending the

Saturday night worship service if the six-month goal is to be twenty. This three-month number is a benchmark.

Because the church is a holistic organization, to reach this goal means that the evangelism group will need to carry out evangelistic efforts, outreach events will need to be celebrated, discipleship groups will need to be in place to absorb these new people, and new relational groups may need to be created to anchor these people into the life of the faith community. Additional leaders will need to be recruited (hopefully they have already been trained). Decisions will need to be made regarding additional space; chairs will need to be brought in. The question needs to be asked: will the space be sufficient, or do we need to move into larger gathering space? See how complex it can get, just because the group decided to set a goal of growing by 20 people in the next six months!

Other examples of goals:

Leadership: At the end of the first three years of the life of our church, we will call a pastor to a full time position.

Note this has great impact on the finances of the church. The financial ministry will then have to develop a plan to increase income. The teaching component of the church will need to develop good stewardship resources to teach the church about tithing and supporting the church staff. Evangelism people will need to be more proactive about bringing in new people to the church. Again, six-month benchmarks allow the church to ascertain if they are on schedule for achieving this goal.

Finances: By the end of our first year, we will be tithing ten percent of our income to The Disciples Mission Fund and supporting all special day offerings.

The completion of this goal requires an educational effort that helps the people new to the church understand what the Disciples Mission Fund and these special offerings are all about. This could be a task for the education component of the church in partnership with the people involved with the financial aspect of the ministry. Of course another goal could have been to increase giving by a percentage rate or to reach a numeric goal for giving. Once again, the strategies for achieving these goals are laid out through the ministry plan.

Program: Starting in September, we will offer three Sunday school classes, one for adults, one for teenagers and one for children.

Again, this is one of those goals that require the involvement of many ministries of the church. Leaders (teachers) need to be identified, recruited and trained. Space needs to be identified for those new classes to meet. The impact on finances, if the group needs to rent more space or buy more equipment and materials to supply these classes, also needs to be considered. Each of these ministries will have to develop their own internal plan to prepare to be able to 'step up to the plate when the church is ready in September to begin offering these new classes.

As you can see, every element of the goals of the new church needs to be carefully considered. The purpose of every event needs to be clear in the minds of all those

involved. The desired outcomes (goals) need to be stated. Plans for follow up need to be in place so the church can deal with the growth or benefits of the activities.

This is part of the agenda you as a planter will need to develop with the members of your core group. Remember it is not the sole responsibility of the planter to carry all this out. A core group completely committed to the vision of the planter will take these ideas and implement them, recruiting others as need arises, and see that the goals are reached or, in the event of goals not being reached, will be able to provide to the planter and the rest of the members of the core group honest feedback that will allow for the establishing more realistic goals, although always seeking to push the limit, never settling into to comfort zones.

Instilling a sense of belonging

Win Arn, an expert on church growth proposes eight characteristics that indicate a person has become part of a faith community.¹⁸

The person should be able to mention the names of at least seven new friends they have made at church

- They should be able to identify their spiritual gifts
- Should be involved in at least one ministry/task/role appropriated to their spiritual gifts
- They should be actively involved in small group fellowships
- They should be contributing financially to the church on a regular basis
- They personally understand and identify with the goals of the church
- They attend worship services and other church functions regularly
- They are actively involved in evangelism, seeking to bring others into relationship with Christ.

This of course portrays an ideal situation of a 100% committed church member. This does not happen over night. Note that strategies, ministries and training need to be in place to be able to get this person from the community to progress through the levels of commitment to the church to where he or she becomes a committed core group member.

This highlights the discussion of small group ministries which has been presented in previous sections of this book. These characteristics of belonging point to the importance of discipleship groups and pairing the newcomers with spiritual mentors to shepherd newcomers into deeper levels of spiritual walk to take these visitors to the next level of commitment. Your ministry plan needs to detail the hand off process whereby which the planter is freed of the day to day responsibility of nurturing newcomers because in the initial stage of the church plant, his/her function is to be the fisher who hauls in nets full of fresh fish!

Finances

There are start up costs for a church that include relocation expenses if a planter needs to move and need to be considered as part of the expenses of the new church. Alongside this we need to consider facility rental, purchase of sound and musical instruments as well as other technology that will allow the new church to do ministry with excellence. Cost of ministry outreach also needs to be factored in as do expenses for advertising and marketing of the new church. Depending on the target area of ethnicity of the target group other expenses may also be involved. In the spirit of covenant that joins us as local congregations into the larger family of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), you will want to include in your budget from day one your commitment to the disciples Mission Fund of the Church. We also have other special day offerings that go to support the different ministries of the general church. In fact the Pentecost Offering goes entirely to fund the new church planting initiative of our Church. Visit the general church website www.disciples.org and click on the link to Church Finance Council for information on the Disciples Mission Fund and the special day offerings and information on how to get involved in supporting these general church initiatives.

We have included in the Appendices section (APPENDIX F) models for planning the budget for the operations of your congregation. Remember the New Church Ministry has available limited start up funds that can help jump start the ministry in its first stage. It is important that the finances of the church be clear from the first day. It is advisable that neither the planter nor any member of his or her family be the custodian of the church funds. Remember that as a not for profit organization you need to keep these monies in a specific account and must not mix these funds with your personal funds. Contact the regional office of the Christian Church to get information about the 501(C) 3 documentation you need to have on hand to open a bank account for the new church. For those projects that are nesting in an established Disciples congregation, the host congregation could provide treasury services through their treasurer until the new church is ready to assume that responsibility having the ideal person in place. See our Regional Policy Handbook, available through our website, www.newchurchministry.org for suggested guidelines of how to handle the finances of the congregation in the first stages of the ministry.

Ellen Mitchell, Vice President for Donor Relations for Church Extension has written a piece for those planters that are also raising funds for their project. (APPENDIX F).

As the focus of many mainline denominations shifted away from church planting to other maintenance issues in the life of their congregations, funds available for church planting dwindled and in many cases became depleted. Unfortunately, this is the case of the Disciples. Yet the challenge of lack of funds coupled with the passion of those who feel truly called to this ministry is allowing many to face this challenge in many creative ways.

The bivocational model for church planting.

As planters are leaving full time positions to take on the challenge of planting a new faith community, the reality of needing to generate monies for personal and in many cases, family expenses, is forcing more and more of our planters to look at job opportunities that allow them the flexibility to cover their expenses and at the same time have time to work with growing the church. The tent making model is not new in the life of the church. Paul's claim to fame was precisely that he was not a financial burden to anybody and that his ministry had never been hampered by lack of funds. Paul was an accomplished tent maker and used this talent to support himself wherever he went.

Working in the community is another way of getting to know the people and at the same time allow the people time to get to know you. Steve Sjorgren in *Community of Kindness* goes as far as suggesting that church planter should work in jobs in the community until the church reaches two hundred in worship even if the congregation is able to support the planter financially before reaching the 200 mark in average worship attendance. Five advantages of this strategy are:

1. You meet people to invite to church on the job
2. You will destroy the sacred-secular conflict that arises from already converted people that working in the church is valued more by God than working outside the church
3. You will send the message to the community that you are not trying to live off of the church or other people
4. You will force the congregation to learn to deal with issues because you will not be available 24/7.
5. You will forced to "interact with people in the marketplace" to allow people to see you as a normal person instead of the stereotypes people may have of pastors

In an effort to assist planters needing to be bi-vocational, Dan Ramsey author of *101 best Weekend Business*, suggests the following as good jobs for bi-vocational church planters¹⁹

Antique restoration service	apartment preparation service	auto detail service
Baking services	bookkeeping services	caregiver
Carpet cleaning service	catering service	child care
Chimney sweep	collection service	companion to elderly
Computer instructor	computer maintenance	construction clean up service
Cooking instructor	crafts business	desk top publisher
Driveway repair service	food delivery service	fund raiser
Furniture refinisher	handy-person service	house cleaning service
House painting service	importer	income tax preparation service
Information broker	kitchen utensil sharpener service	mail order sales
Masonry service	newsletter publisher	newspaper stringer
Personal consultant	photography service	picture framing service
Plant care service	pool cleaning	rental preparation
Research service	resume writer	reunion planner
Word processing	security service	small appliance repair
Teaching your skills	telephone survey service	translation service

Tree trimming service
Video/DVD copying service
Window cleaning service

tutoring service
wallpaper service
woodworking

used car salesperson
wedding planner
writer.

With the ingenuity and creativity of our planters and depending on the target area you have been called to plant this new faith community, you may find other job opportunities that may allow you to be a faithful tent maker as you continue to be faithful to the call of the Great Commission to make disciples.

A Word of Caution

As the ministry of planting a new church is continual, the planter needs to be constantly evaluating through prayer and discernment the course of the work. Jim Griffith speaks to the common mistakes planters tend to make as they let down their guard when they see the church is starting to take shape. We share this list of the 10 most Common Mistakes made by Church Planters in the hope that it will help you become aware of the pitfalls that could sidetrack your ministry.

1. **Taking Spiritual Warfare Lightly.** Griffith recommends that church planters spend time in spiritual disciplines such as fasting and prayer. Take time to pray on your own and take time to pray with those called to be part of your core group. It is important through this time of prayer that you constantly verify that you are on course with God's perspective on the calling to plant a new church. Many times in neglecting our spiritual training, we lose sight of the God-given vision. Griffith goes on to warn that because this is a war, those involved in the line of fire face the possibility of being wounded. I may add that as we mentioned earlier, spiritual warfare is the reason why a prayer ministry needs to be set up as part of the groundwork for this ministry. Yet understand that the most effective intercessory prayers will not be a complete safeguard against war casualties. The planter must develop a system to deal with the hurts and situations that may arise from internal and external strife.

One of the hardest things in the early stages of a new church is letting go of people. Yet at times pruning is the only way we can achieve further growth. There may come times that, as you pray your way through situations that are affecting the dynamics of the new church, you may have to release leaders and key members of the core group. Keep in mind that later in the life of this new church you may look at your core group and find very few of the people that started this journey with you. That is O.K.! Some of the people will leave as they feel they have accomplished what they came to do as part of the core group. Others will move on as they feel they are no longer comfortable or excited with the vision that has been put forth. But planter, understand that because there is a spiritual war going on, you may need to release some of these people for the 'good of the cause.'

There will come times of discouragement, doubts, or a sense of being overwhelmed because of the task ahead for both the people in the core group as well as the planter, who is not perfect nor above being the target of spiritual

warfare. Family needs and situations at work, if the planter is bi-vocational, can cause deep spiritual unrest as well. As you have mapped out the plan for who to reach, evangelize, disciple and send forth for the kingdom, you will also need to devise a plan of retreats and other resources to deal with the casualties of war that arise in your core group. Remember this will be one of those ministry plans of a very confidential nature. But to not have such a plan is to suffer unnecessary deaths in the leadership of this emerging congregation.

2. **Attempting to plant a church that reaches everyone.** A church that tries to reach out to everybody has no vision or focus and therefore no strategy. Because there is no specific target group, the energy of the core group and planter will shift focus with every addition. Groups with clear identities, projected goals, and definite direction attract people. A church that does not offer this will suffer from the revolving door effect. People will come and go and few will remain over time.
3. **Launching the project before its time** could also have a detrimental effect on the sustainability of the new church. In the Anglo culture that values excellence and has many options to choose from when it comes to a place to worship, the launching of a new church needs to be carefully planned, orchestrated and rehearsed. A new project could be in a pre-launch stage for months and even longer. This is the preparation time during which the leaders are trained, resources secured, worship determined, hospitality and follow up strategies developed and put in place, etc. Pre-launch is a time of frenzy and controlled chaos, where all scenarios are studied and possible kinks are worked out. When the first seekers come through the doors of our worship space for the first time, we need to remember we will only have one chance to make a first impression.

Note that in the context of ethnic church plants this pre-launch time may be interpreted in a different manner, or in other cases, nonexistent. Many of our Hispanic planters indicate that the drawing element in their plants is the Sunday worship service. This is the entry point into the church, unlike the Anglo context where a weekly small group or attraction event could be the initial draw into the church. A Hispanic church plant begins almost always with a Sunday worship service and builds on this to move people into small group Bible studies and other attraction events. Our dialogue with planters of other ethnic church plants seems to corroborate this chronology for plants within peoples from other cultures.

4. **Don't fall out of the recruiting mode once you have begun formal worship.** For some of the planters a 'field of dreams' mentality takes over. The logic is that once there is a formal, easily identifiable (!) place of worship, the people will now start coming to us. This is an error both the planter and the leadership of the project can fall into. There is an expectation that the planter will now shift into the pastoral mode and start to offer support to those who are already inside and considered part of the fold. The evangelistic fervor of the first days begins to wane and pretty soon the group becomes a closed system, which very few

outsiders can penetrate. A church that is not constantly receiving new people soon becomes stagnant and does into decline.

5. Closely related to the non-recruiting error is the **complete dependence on what happens during the worship service** as being enough of a spiritual charge to carry the people on through the week. The church needs to have in place a plan that allows people to connect with each other and with God during the week. An effective church will have small groups meeting at different times and places during the week, focusing on different themes and interests that give the people the opportunity to connect beyond the weekly all-church gathering. A newcomer to the church will be steered to a small group where the vision and mission of the church are constantly shared. These small groups partner with what is offered during worship time to disciple the newcomers to transform them into ‘disciples makers’.
6. Perhaps one of the gravest mistakes committed by a church planter is to **avoid speaking about money** until there is an urgent situation affecting the church. Money is a topic that renders many uncomfortable, especially in a time of financial scandals and mismanagements of which the church has also been guilty. On the other hand, it is an undeniable fact that it takes money to conduct ministry. In the case of a bi-vocational ministry, the sooner a planter can assume leadership on a full time basis, the quicker the church will grow, as more time is dedicated to the church. Add to that, that as the church grows and more ministries develop, and more outreach wants to be done, the need for money to do these things will also increase.

We prefer to tell our planters that we do not talk about money, rather we teach about stewardship. Many of our planters do not incorporate this conversation into their discipleship training. If the church is to grow unencumbered by financial constraints, the members need to understand the holistic concept of stewardship that challenges them to be faithful to God through this local congregation by offering their time, talents and treasures to further the ministries of the church. This highlights the importance of recruiting leaders to take the lead in the financial aspects of the operation of the church to avoid even the slightest indication of impropriety when the planter or a member of his or her family is handling finances for the church. This also points to the importance of developing a budget even if funds are limited, to help members understand the needs of the church.

The creation and sharing of this budget will also create an environment where financial matters are publicly discussed and the church membership is consulted regarding major decisions so that there is ownership over the financial responsibilities and debts the congregations incurs in.

A church with a healthy sense of stewardship can be challenged to rise to the occasion when a financial need above and beyond the regular needs of the church

comes up. A church with a healthy sense of stewardship consistently tithes and brings offerings so that the congregation operates with surpluses every year. Did you know that it is estimated that the average church member contributes less than 3% of their income to the church. Just think all that churches could go if we upped that percentage even to 5%!

7. There is something about the newness that comes with a new church that creates a permission-giving environment where people tend to flourish. Another mistake planter make is to **try to move away from that sense of newness too quickly**. Of course, a church that has been around for over ten years and still insists in calling itself new needs to review some of its concepts on newness! But a new church needs to be very intentional about moving through its developmental stages in a very healthy manner so it can build upon a solid foundation. As the church matures, it will need more leadership, programming, complex financial structures, possible multiple staff and the list goes on. Trying to jump a step in the normal developmental stages will have its consequences later on in the life of the church.

We at home were so surprised and proud when my son started walking at 10 months of age. Always on the run, the little guy did not even crawl before he started to walk! When he started preschool, he was having a hard time with his fine motor skills and his writing skills were terrible. I would joke that he would grow up to be a doctor. Finally, one day we took him in for an evaluation. To our surprise, the problem had its root in the fact that he had never crawled! For a few months, our three year old would go through ‘crawl therapy’ where he learned to develop hand and eye coordination, which is crucial to developing fine motor skills for learning to write later in life. I trust this vignette drives home what we are trying to tell you. Don’t be in such a hurry to grow, take your time to develop the solid foundation for healthy growth.

8. Another danger new church planters face when trying to birth a church is to **formalize leadership to quickly**. Remember prayer helps you discern your motivations as well as the motivations of those who come to you. A person in leadership who has no business being part of your church can bring down your project in a moment. Take time to get to know your leaders. Check out their references if they come to you from another congregation. Try to see who this person is in the community. What do people who know him or her tell you about this person? Observe his family and family life. The challenge is great if you are new to the community and depend on others for these references. Above all pray, pray, pray. Make sure your leaders understand there is no entitlement to occupying specific positions within the new church. If the situation arises, you must feel comfortable enough to admit you have made a mistake in naming a person to a leadership position and be able to release that person from the position if necessary. Along the same line, you must be sensitive to the situation if that person remains within the group after having been asked to relinquish a position.

It may be necessary to ask the person to leave the group for the good of the ministry.

9. We have news for you planter, the work in a new church is never done. There is a temptation once the project seems to be running smoothly to want to kick up your feet and take a long deserved rest. Although Sabbath time is necessary and needs to be worked into the ministry plan of the church, we are referring to the tendency to **fail to constantly be reevaluating the targets and discerning where the church is in relationship to its vision and mission.** The planter and the leadership of the congregation need to constantly be on the lookout for those that are coming into the church and those that are moving into the community. As the church grows and matures, it may be necessary to revisit the vision and mission of the project and see if they need to be fine-tuned or if they need to undergo major revisions.

A healthy church is never afraid to let go of, or modify what is not working. Failure to match the target and the strategy or failure to adjust to what God seems to be doing in the midst of the congregation could spell doom for a new church.

10. A final word from Jim Griffith points to the danger of **relying on advice of experts.** Not everybody is called, or capable of planting a Willow Creek or Saddleback type church. The planting of a church that has the potential for becoming a mega church is in itself an entirely different ball game. God calls planters to be faithful to the vision given to them. It is good to network with other planters and read what has been written out there about church planting. But ultimately, the responsibility for planting a viable congregation rests on the capacity of the planter to read correctly the signs in the field. This is a direct defense of the importance of the groundwork research that is conducted when analyzing and selecting target areas. The design of effective outreach and attraction events that responds to the needs of the target area is something that can only be suggested by others, based on what has worked for them in their own context. The ultimate success of the events rests on the shoulders of the planter who is in the field. It is good to read the experts, but ultimately, rely on the God who called you.

A Final Word.....Accountability

We know that church planting can be a very lonely ministry. Just trying to convince people that we have not gone crazy by wanting to step out in faith to plant a new church, giving up comforts and jobs to be faithful to a calling, is in itself a task. Seeking to understand the scope of the calling and going through a discernment process that requires deep soul searching is a step that has forced many to back off and give up the dream. Before the joys of vibrant ministry come the days when nobody shows up for attraction events or people inform the planter that they have decided to move on and seek out another place to worship. But believe me, the day will come when, as a result of the faithfulness to the calling, the church will begin to grow and prosper.

Unfortunately, at times planters tend to be lone rangers. They have this crazy notion that they can do it all alone. In their wanting to do it all and do it alone, they advance very little in response to the calling. Remember God did not call us to plant a church by ourselves, nor to suffer the dark moments of failure on our own. The truth of the matter is that we all need somebody to lend us a shoulder to cry on or a listening ear. The burn out and divorce rates among new church planters is alarming. Unless planters take the steps to seek balance in their personal life and ministerial duties, the consequence can be devastating. Any planter who insists on carrying out this ministry alone will find that success will be far out of reach.

Many years ago, I came across a book, whose author I no longer remember, but the title still rings in my mind, its asks: Who pastors the pastor? The book was written in Spanish and it speaks not only of the need a pastor has to seek pastoral care for him or herself, it also speaks to the issue of accountability. Any man or woman of God needs to hold her or himself accountable to a spiritual mentor or an organization. We know the cause of the downfall of many great ministries has its base in the lack of accountability of its leaders.

We cannot be effective leaders if we cannot first be willing to submit to the spiritual authority of others. Just as a ministry plan holds the planter and the core group accountable to the vision and mission of the church plant, submission to spiritual mentors holds the planter accountable to the Lord. When we are willing to hold ourselves accountable to somebody outside of the core group of the church plant we start on the right track. If even before we take the first steps in our project we establish our spiritual accountability structure, we will have set the base for a healthy system of check and balance.

If you do not have a spiritual mentor or a person you have entered into an accountability covenant with, I suggest you seek out such a person before going any further into the process. If you work into your personal method of ministry the notion of holding yourself accountable to somebody you trust and respect early in this faith journey, it will continue to be a part of you when the project is taking off.

As churches begin to grow, there tends, in some planters, to be a tendency to want to do it all. At times ‘professional envy’ can take over and the planter may feel threatened by the same leaders he or she has trained and feel that these leaders want to take over. An accountability partner will help the planter work through these issues. Letting go and handing off are natural processes that need to occur in the church because the focus of the planter is to bring people into relationship with Christ and then allow others to disciple and mentor these new believers and newcomers into the congregation. A ministry built around the figure of the planter is a cataclysm waiting to happen.

The juggling act of trying to keep many balls in motion at one time forces the planter to cut back on certain roles. An accountability partner will ensure that the role of spouse or parent is not the affected role. An accountability partner will help the planter to ensure that the personal responsibility to maintain and nurture a personal relationship with God is not the ball tossed out of the juggling act. An accountability partner can use the Jim Griffith’s *10 Most Common Mistakes of Church Planters* to continually hold the planter accountable to his calling.

As your project gets started, the temptation to become the Lone Ranger may arise. An accountability partner will help you to understand and work your way through the dangers of trying to do things on your own. Sexual scandals, financial scandals and issues of immorality are sure death tolls for even the most successful ministries. Only a servant that remains humble before the Lord and is willing to be in covenant with somebody who will call him or her in accountability continually will be able to succeed in ministry.

APPENDIX A

Bill Esaum and Tom Bandy share a great bible study in their book Growing Spiritual Redwoods. Using Acts 16, they help us understand the natural progression of a vision from its inception in the heart of the leader to its ownership by the group that is being lead. Allow me to incorporate some of the elements of their study in this analysis of the text. You may want to share this study with the members of your core group as you look to strategizing the work in your target area. (From spiritual redwoods, pages 28-32)

It all begins with a vision. Paul sees a Macedonian calling out to him in his dreams asking him to “come over and help them”. Now we have to remember that Paul had tried to reach the Asian continent a couple of times and had been unsuccessful. Twice the Spirit had kept them from preaching the word in the province of Asia (v.6-8). When the timing is right, the vision comes to a single individual, and fills that person’s life with new purpose and direction. Paul is given a vision to reach out to the Gentles in Macedonia. A vision that no doubt is going to seem controversial to some and that will certainly have its detractors and opposers, but nevertheless is God given. The God give quality of the vision is what guarantees its long term success.

It endures as the Team Vision. Paul shares the vision with Silas, Timothy and Luke, and together they shape and define the vision. Together as a team, as there is clarity around the calling, they follow the vision. What had been a wandering down many uncertain paths (V.6-8) suddenly becomes a straight course (v.11-12), towards the primary mission field of the day. This corporate conviction and clarity towards the vision motivates the growth of those who feel committed to the calling.

It centers on indigenous worship. The second Paul and his ministry team enter Phillipi, they seek a place to worship. The element of worship becomes core to the venture. The text states they worshiped “outside the gate by the river” (v.13). As the vision that has been birthed in a context of worship and discernment, so the work of carrying it out needs to be centered in the same context.

It all builds upon “Midwives”. One of the first locals Paul and his team do outreach with is Lydia. She is a business woman on a spiritual journey, who is transformed through the ministry efforts of Paul and his team (v.14). Lydia is recruited to be a part of the core group. She is that “person of peace” we talk about in the Growing Your Core Group section. She brings her gifts of evangelist to the team. Being rooted in the community and in the passion of her recent encounter with the living Christ, Lydia brings in the faith to nurture the individual lives of family, friends, neighbors, work associates and even strangers. Lydia along with others like her become the spiritual leaders with the ability to bring transformation to others, to nurture growth in others, and

to equip others to fulfill their own destinies in Christ. Lydia is a midwife that will continue bringing others into new life in Christ.

It grows through small groups. The home of Lydia became a discipleship center. People committed to the vision of the project will seek to maximize opportunities for new comers to experience intimacy with other people of the group. They will also strive to provide the opportunities for people to be exposed to the life transforming message of the gospel, and will finally offer the opportunities for them to grow in their faith experience.

It all results in transformation. The story of the healing of the fortune-teller is one of many stories. The entire community of Phillipi is impacted by the witness of the personal transformation of some of its notorious residents. A slave girl is healed of her affliction and those who profit from it are bankrupted (v.16-24). For some this is scandal, for others, a reason to rejoice and for others a cause for their own spiritual seeking.

It all shakes the foundations. When the transformation begins to happen, the obstacles emerge. (Whoever said it would be easy?!). Paul and Silas are arrested, thrown into prison and fastened in stocks. They overcome their obstacles by returning to their core vision – singing hymns and prayers to God. And God shakes the foundations of the acropolis, setting the prisoners free and making the jailors into prisoners.

It all leads to enormous diversity. When the doors of the prison are opened, not only are the prisoners listening to the gospel, but jailers are transformed as well. The jailer and his family become believers and are baptized. The composition of the church in Phillipi is a smorgasbord of different people. Those that were once strangers or hostile enemies find themselves united through the experience of their transformation. Lydia and her upper class family merchant family and friends, now worship with the slave girl healed from her affliction and a motley crew of former convicts and their former jailors (v. 33-35).

It requires leaders with the courage to get out of the way. Finally Paul and the planting team understanding their job has been completed, get ready to move on. They have equipped Lydia and other members of the new church to assume leadership with the faith community. (v.40). Empowering leaders is the only way to guarantee long term success to the project.

APPENDIX B

BIBLE STUDY THE JESUS MODEL MARK 1-3

Jesus never had the intention of conducting his ministry alone. The first weeks of his ministry were spent in time of personal preparation. After his baptism, he was led by the Spirit to a time of personal retreat (Mark 1: 12) This time out had a purpose.

What are the benefits of taking time away to discern the calling that God has laid upon your heart?

After his glorious mountain top experience, Jesus faces time of temptation (Mark 1:13) The purpose was to detract him from his ministry.

What obstacles have you face in preparation for responding to the call to plant a new church? How did you deal with the obstacles that could have derailed you from what you understand is a calling from God?

Jesus began the first phase of his ministry alone. The scripture tells us he preached, began to recruit the first potential members for his core group and did outreach. In some cases miraculous healings and exorcisms were also part of his ministry. (Mark 1: 14-3:6)

As you read through this passage, what parallels can you draw with the ministry or are involved with or what elements do you see incorporating into the ministry you hope to initiate?

APPENDIX C

New Church Ministry
PO Box 7030
Indianapolis, IN 46207
800.274.1883
www.newchurchministry.org

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End Notes

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- ¹ Easom, William and Thomas Bandy, *Growing Spiritual Redwoods* (Abingdon Press, Nashville: 1997) 23.
- ² Thompson, Deborah, Board of Church Extension, Church Advance Now, Indianapolis, IN.
- ³ Toffler, Alvin, *The Third Wave* (Bantam Books, New York: 1980) p. 112.
- ⁴ For further information on this topic and many other interesting topics that George Barna has researched, visit The Barna Group website at www.georgebarna.org.
- ⁵ Ridley, Charles. "How to select Church Planters". Fuller Institute: Pasadena, CA, 1988)
- ⁶ Tinsley, William, *Breaking the Mold: Church Planting in the 21st Century* (Creative Church Consultants, Dallas, TX: 1996) p. 22.
- ⁷ Barna, George. *The Power of Vision*. Regal Books:Ventura, CA. 2003.
- ⁸ Collins, Jim. *From Good to Great*, 43.
- ⁹ Foss, Michael, *Power Surge*, (Fortress Press:Minneapolis, 2000) p.111-136.
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ Collins, Jim. *From Good to Great*. 43.
- ¹² Warren, Rick. *The Purpose Driven Church*. P. 130-134.
- ¹³ Cos, David. *Breakthrough: Preschool Sunday School Work*. Nashville: Convention Press, 1990, p. 78.
- ¹⁴ Bandy, Thomas, *Moving off the Map* (Abingdon Press: Nashville, 1998) p. 21-22.
- ¹⁵ Neighbour, *Where Do We Go From Here?* (Torch Publications: Houston, TX, 1990). The concept of 'oikos' is explained and developed throughout the entire book.
- ¹⁶ Steve Sjogren. *101 Ways to Reach Your Community*. (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2001). We suggest the reading of the entire book for a great discussion on servant leadership and the great list of suggested activities that can be part of the outreach and attraction events efforts of the new church.
- ¹⁷ Warren, Rick. *The Purpose Driven Church*, 170.
- ¹⁸ Stetzer, Ed. *Starting New Churches in the Postmodern Age*. p 284.
- ¹⁸ Ramsey, Dan. *101 Best Weekend Businesses*. Career Press, 1996.

APPENDIX D

Here is a list of websites available to new church planters that offer resources free of charge or for a small fee. By no means is this list comprehensive but it is a good place to start. If you find another great site – please let us know so we can include it in future publications or training events.

www.disciples.org

For downloadable chalice logos, T.V./Radio spots, Disciples brochures, links to Disciples church websites, Disciples news and many other communication resources.

www.redclaymedia.com; www.infousa.com; www.zipinfo.com

For mailing lists

www.webmedley.com

For low cost websites and hosting (around \$40-\$100 per month)

www.cyberservants.com

Communication resources and articles for churches

www.churchartonline.com

For clip art (\$50 per year subscription)

www.vistaprint.com

For business cards, stationary, marketing and promotion materials and consumer products. Some of these services available for a fee. Available in different languages.

www.streamingfaith.com

This site links you to different radio and television broadcast and video streams from different church leaders that deal with many contemporary and biblical themes. Some available for a fee.

www.leonardsweet.com

For educational and devotional materials. Also provides links to other ministries and website where similar material is also available.

www.detailscom.com

This is a website technologically more advanced in what it offers. This website offers worship materials, videos and film footage as well as other hi-tech worship resources and materials. Almost all materials on this website are available for a fee. This website can also link you to other sites that offer similar ministry resources.

www.biblegateway.com

Offers you almost all translations of the Bible in almost all languages. You can cut and pasted specific texts for promotions and education materials.

www.scriptureresources.com.

Offers scripture texts and some Bible passages you can download at no cost. This site also provides articles for discussion in small groups and offers links to other websites where you can access material of similar content.

APPENDIX E

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Wagner, Peter C. *Church Planting for a Greater Harvest*, (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1990).

APPENDIX F

Models for budgeting and finance
are available by calling at 800-274-1883