Book Review

“PLANTING MISSIONAL CHURCHES”

Your Guide to Starting Churches that Multiply

by Ed Stetzer and Daniel Im
B&H Academic, Nashville, Tennessee (2016)

The author’s intent was to write a book that would be used as a guide to lay a foundation for church planting. They examine various models utilized by a number of denominations and independent churches. Their desire is that the book would guide a church planter to “choose the right model, develop the appropriate systems, and build the needed ministry areas, so that you can ultimately multiply over and over again. I found the book loaded with information. It covers various methods of church planting and analyzes church planting. The book is filled with examples and information as recent as 2015 in the world of church planting. It includes numerous illustrations of churches that have been planted throughout the United States. Stetzer mentions that some of the early methods no longer work as well as they once did as he discovered in three church plants he had previously planted. Stetzer said, “The rapidly changing cultural landscape requires that we use different methods to reach different communities.” The authors impressed me with their drive and vision to see true church planting. The book is filled with quotes from church planters from a cross section of pastors in America. I feel the book effectively argues for the case of church planting today by stating that church planting is essential, and without it they argue that “Christianity will continue to decline in North America”.

The book had a section on the “models of church planting”. This included leadership models:

Model 1: The Apostle Paul or Apostolic church planter
Model 2: The founding Pastor
Model 3: Team Planting.

Chapters in the book that dealt with important subjects were: Multiethnic or Monoethnic Church planters, Pastor leadership issues, Developing a Launch Team, Finding a Meeting Place and The Launch of a New Church.

There are some useful charts and statistics given in the book:

- Page 182 The impact of not meeting in a traditional church building polled from 1,200 individuals.
- Page 196 A chart tracking average worship attendance in the first 4 years of a church’s existence that used direct mail versus those that did not. The use of direct mail increases the average attendance of a church in its first four years according LifeWay Research 2015.
- Page 198, 199 The authors point out the impact that social media can have on church planting. They state that “Social media is the twenty-first century town square. As such, any new church launch must engage in social media.” They quote some statistics from the Pew Research Center’s 2014 Social Media Update of America: (71% of all online adults use Facebook, 58% of the entire adult population uses Facebook, 66% of all online men use Facebook versus 77% of all online women. The research tells us that widespread use of Facebook is not limited to the younger generations: 87% of all online 18-29 year olds use Facebook. 73% of all online 30-49 year olds use Facebook. 63% of all online 50-64 year olds use Facebook. 56% of all online 65+-year olds use Facebook. It is fair to say that your church plant needs to have a presence on Facebook. Social media is no longer a fad. It is established in our culture. And new church plants should do anything and everything they can to engage the public in this forum, 74% of all adults who have some sort of presence online use social media, so your church needs to be accessible there.
- Page 239 The authors quote Mike Breen who states that “In the United States 96% of church growth is due to transfer growth and not churches striking into the heart of our enemy’s territory”.
- Page 307 A chart on new churches that practice one-on-one discipleship, 26% start another new church within their first 5 years. Among new churches that do not practice one-on-one discipleship, 14% start another
church within 5 years of existence. Among new churches that require a membership covenant for anyone joining their church, 26% start another new church within their first 5 years of existence. Among new churches that do not require a membership covenant for anyone joining their church, 16% start another new church within 5 years of existence. Among the churches who do not hold a new member’s class, 53% are self-sufficient within three years. Among new churches who hold a new member’s class, 71% are self-sufficient within three years.

- Page 330 The authors quote Dan Maxton of Converge Church Planting who relates twelve steps to help establish churches to plant new churches: 1. Study the unchurched through research and prayer. 2. Cast vision creatively. 3. Identify adequate funding sources. 4. Work with other churches for greater impact. 5. Decide whether to send people. 6. Select appropriate target communities. 7. Cultivate the congregation’s commitment. 8. Choose an entrepreneurial church planter. 9. Help the planter to bond with the parent congregation. 10. Locate a coach for the planter and a mentor for the pastor. 11. Know your changing role in the parenting process. 12. Be ready for rest and recovery.

A few highlights from the book

Under the section of the book that dealt with systems for church planting, this statement is made: “There are no perfect models and there is not a silver bullet for church planting.”

The authors quoted Charles Brock, a well known church planter of Independent Baptist Churches, Global. Brock stated, “Many years have passed since I wrote The Principles of and Practice of Indigenous Church Planting. In the book I said there are four absolute essentials in church planting: the Seed, Spirit, Sower and Soil. Today I am more convinced than ever that these are the four essentials which are indispensable.”

In the book I found an excerpt from Charles Ridley’s study of church planters to be interesting. Ridley determined the most successful church planters share thirteen behavioral characteristics: 1. Has a visionizing capacity. 2. Is intrinsically motivated. 3. Creates ownership of ministry. 4. Relates to the unchurched. 5. Has spousal cooperation. 6. Effectively builds relationships. 7. Is committed to church growth. 8. Responsiveness to the community. 9. Uses the giftedness of others. 10. Flexibility and adaptability. 11. Builds group cohesiveness. 12. Demonstrates resilience and 13. Exercised faith. Other qualifications include: certainty of call, call to community, culture, or people group, and extraordinary faith”.

The authors have a good discussion on mentoring and discipling. They said, “Unless the church planter is intentional at developing a plan for spiritual formation, the congregation will eventually become a mile wide and an inch deep.” The authors discuss the model of churches planting churches. They seek to give church tools to cast vision, become a parent church, and sponsor future church planters. They examine why there are more pastoral vacancies than qualified candidates and how this affects the future of church planting. They presented various models to better partner together to solve this leadership crisis.

The authors make a good point in regards to starting new churches versus rescuing dying churches. They said, “Saving a dead and dying church is much more difficult and ultimately more costly than starting new ones. Starting new churches is much easier and perhaps, a better overall stewardship of kingdom resources”. Some interesting statistics in the book were: “From 2007 to 2014, the number of evangelicals in America actually rose from 59.8 million to 62.2. Evangelicals now make up a clear majority (55 percent) of all US Protestants”. However, according the authors the younger generation is not interested or committed to identifying themselves as Christians even if they are. “Some churches are dying and our culture is changing, yet we know new churches can make a difference. I like this statement in the book, “We’d be wrong to send out planters with organizational, strategic, and marketing tools but not the fundamental truths of God’s Word and the principles of Scripture from which to work.” Throughout the book the authors use various texts of scripture to support some of their views on church planting, in particular they often refer to the book of Acts. The Fourth Chapter of the book deals with what makes a church planter. The chapter deals with the qualifications of
people called to be planters. He uses the example of Philip who went to Samaria (Acts 8:1-40) who was led of the Holy Spirit to plant a church. It was stated, “Early church history reflects that several of the apostles set out in different directions to plant churches”. The authors discussed laypeople who plant churches, like Aquilla and Priscilla. They feel church planting is a ministry for lay people as well as pastors. They also illustrate how teams planted churches in the New Testament, using men like Barnabas, Silvanus and Timothy who worked together in church planting. The author states that “one of the greatest hindrances to church planting (even in other places around the world) is the notion that all churches must have seminary-trained pastors to be legitimate. With the increased professionalization (education) of the clergy, church planting has suffered. Seminary-trained pastors often expect full-time salaries provided by established churches.”

The authors concluded, “Church planting is not easy but without it the church will continue to decline in North America. Most Americans and Canadians are not connected to any local church. The North American church is in trouble. We need to plant new churches, or the church will continue to decline. Even though some people oppose the idea of church planting, we must do it anyway because it’s biblical”.

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Book Review by Bob Cosby