



# church planting centers

*The document reflects our learning about church planting centers to date and therefore, is not a completed work. The questions raised here are the driving force behind our research which is being conducted in the first half of 2010. If you have comments or would like to contribute to this discussion please feel free to contact John M. Bailey at NAMB. ([jmbailey@namb.net](mailto:jmbailey@namb.net)) To track our progress visit [www.missionalnetwork.org](http://www.missionalnetwork.org) and click on the link for church planting centers.*

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# Church Planting Churches

The church exists to glorify God and to point people to Christ – to make disciples. However, numerous studies reveal that less than 1 percent of the churches in the western world experience growth through the conversion of irreligious people from the harvest. Of those that are effective in reaching the unchurched, there are some common principles or values which define how they are accomplishing their mission.

As we seek to aid in the development of church planting centers in North America we must first identify the common characteristics of a healthy reproducing church. What are the attributes of a pastor committed to multiplication? What are the values of the church? How do they live out those values? How do they see, and participate within, their denomination? What is their role outside of their community? What systems do they have that facilitate health and multiplication? What makes them different? What characteristics do we find in the majority of the church planting centers studied? Which characteristics are unique, possibly related to their methodology or context?

Once we have identified the characteristics of a reproducing church we can determine if these are essential from birth or if they can be transferred into an existing church. Our desire is to see the multiplication of church planting centers across North America and specifically, within specific cultures and people groups. Can these centers be developed or are the characteristics we identified necessary within a prospective church before they begin developing their center?

Annually Southern Baptists plant a good number of churches – anywhere from 1,200 to more than 1,500 each year. However, information compiled by NAMB's Center for Missional Research reports that only 15.7% of all Southern Baptist Churches are engaged in some type of church planting activity. It appears, then, that our greatest potential for fulfilling the Great Commission would be to engage more churches in some level of missionary activity and church planting.



# Church Planting Centers

Imagine what would happen in your area of the country if there were an entity that was planting 5 – 10 high quality, reproducing churches each year. Imagine if there were ten of these in your region – ten combined planted over 1,000 churches, which averaged 157 in attendance while planting an additional 566 churches internationally over a five-year period! Sounds like a fantasy you say? Nope. It's real. It is happening in places like Texas, Hawaii and the North West.

Like many, when you read the words *Church Planting Center* you may have thought of a church that plants a church every few years in order to do evangelism. You might be picturing churches much like your own – churches that gather for weekly worship, that use small groups and a variety of other programs as a means of doing evangelism and are led by professionally trained ministers who in many cases, become the founding pastor. But it is *only one way* to go about the making of disciples and planting churches.

Picture a church where it was “normal” for followers of Jesus to follow the missionary patterns displayed by Jesus and later, by the first century church, where they live, work or play. We believe you would find teams of disciples targeting an under-reached place or people group. They would be abundantly sowing the gospel in both word and deed. Their focus would be upon making disciples who are taught, and expected, to make disciples. These new disciples would be gathered into groups. Leaders from among these new disciples would be identified and empowered to lead – to repeat the process once again. And from this process comes the possibility of new churches being started – and yet the driving force for this church is a disciple making movement. We would classify this type of church a church planting center as well.



## Antioch

In Acts 8:1, 4 we read that it was the persecution following the martyrdom of Stephen that compelled everyday Christ-followers, not the apostles, to carry the gospel into Judea and Samaria (Acts 11:19,20). The Apostles had heard the commands of Christ first-hand. They had walked with Him. They had been empowered with the Holy Spirit. And yet, they stayed in Jerusalem and ministered to the Jews. They did not obey the entire command of Christ. As a result of their disobedience, some believe persecution fell upon the church and out of that persecution arose another church - The church at Antioch.

Antioch was located north of Jerusalem in Syria and was the third largest city in the Roman Empire. The city most likely had more than a half million residents. It was a busy sea port and the center of commerce for the region. It was a center for luxury and attracted a large number of people and religions. It was noted for its pagan worship and wicked religious rites and ceremonies. Despite all of this, it was here that a mission outpost was established by those fleeing from Jerusalem.

According to scripture (Acts 11:19-30 and 13:1-3), those fleeing from Jerusalem began their ministry by speaking the message of Christ to no one except Jews. However some Greek speaking Jews began sharing the good news about the Lord Jesus with the Hellenists in Antioch. God's hand was upon them and a large number of the Hellenists turned to the Lord. The church at Jerusalem, hearing of this activity and God's bestowing of favor upon their efforts, sent Barnabas to check things out. He discovered that everything they had heard was true. God was moving among non-Jewish people!

A large number of people were coming to Christ and Barnabas knew that something had to be done to ensure their growth and development as believers. Therefore he left Antioch and sought to recruit Saul, the very one who had persecuted the church in Jerusalem, to return with him to strengthen these new believers in Antioch. Scripture tells us two things; first, that Saul and Barnabas taught a large number of people for a year and that two; lives were so radically transformed that the locals began calling these believers in Jesus *Christians* for the first time.

In Acts chapter 13, we read that there were prophets in the church at Antioch spending time in worship and prayer. They heard the Holy Spirit command them to set apart Saul and Barnabas for the work to which God had called them. After spending additional time in prayer and fasting, they laid hands upon the two of them and sent them off on their first missionary journey.



From our text we can identify several values, principles and activities from the church at Antioch which may influence our conversation about churches that are involved in church planting. (Acts 11:20-29 and 13:1-3)

- They proclaimed the gospel to all peoples along natural lines of affinity and relationships. (11:20)
- They were culturally appropriate. (11:20, 25)
- They built relationships with non-believers in order to proclaim the gospel and to make disciples. (11:20)
- They strengthened and saw the transformation of new believers through the teaching of God's Word. (11:25, 26)
- They were generous in their giving. (11:29)
- They sought guidance of the Holy Spirit through intentional prayer, fasting and worship and were faithful to the commands given them. (13:2, 3)
- They commissioned their finest disciples to leave the church and make disciples among unreached peoples and in under-reached places resulting in the establishment of churches across the known world. (13:3)



# Missionary Patterns & Church Planting

The Church at Antioch, being led by the Spirit of God, sent Barnabas and Saul on their first missionary journey after a season of prayer and fasting. As a result of their work a large number of churches, which covered a good portion of the known world, were planted. The question we must address is a simple one, “Were they sent out by the Holy Spirit to plant churches?” If so, what was their strategy? If not, why were they sent out?

After rereading the Book of Acts and the gospels we conclude that there is no command to plant churches. What we find are believers with a passion to fulfill Jesus’ command in Matthew 28 to make disciples of all nations, not necessarily to plant churches. Therefore, it is safe to say that biblical church planting is a disciple making process that results in new churches being established.

After reading Acts 13 – 14 we have identified a simple missionary pattern that resulted in the making of disciples and therefore, the establishment of new churches:

- There was a sending by God into the harvest
- There was the formation of a missionary team which entered into a community with intentionality
- There was the broad communication of the Gospel in both word and deed
- There was the making of disciples
- These new disciples were gathered together
- Elders were appointed
- Ongoing care and support was provided by the team
- Over time, additional missionary teams were sent out by the churches

We see the source of this strategy in the life of Jesus:

- He was sent by the Father into the world
- A missionary team was formed to become fishers of men and to carry on the assignment after His departure
- Jesus both preached and demonstrated the gospel abundantly
- Disciples were made



- Jesus both commissioned and empowered His followers to repeat the process. As a matter of fact He made their assignment very clear – they were to go into the world to make disciples of all nations.

In 1 Corinthians 11:1 Paul challenged the church at Corinth, “Be imitators of me, as I also am of Christ.” The missionary pattern of Jesus, and therefore Paul, was highly relational, very simple and easily reproducible. Is it the only way to plant churches? No. And yet, if the starting of a worship service or programs – if marketing the church and gathering a crowd replace our passion to make disciples then we need to return to scripture and redefine our notion of success.



# Church Planting Centers

are environments where multiple disciples are intentionally **SELECTED, DEVELOPED,** and **SENT & SUSTAINED** to make disciples which results in new churches

### Environments

- Individual Churches
- Networks
- Associations
- Para-church or intentionally established Non-Profits

### Multiple Disciples

- Preparing more than one disciple at a time
- From outside the “environment” or community
- From within the “environment” (Indigenous)
- Laity that will lead or be a part of church planting teams

### Intentionally

- There is a process that can be communicated
- Disciple making that results in church planting is a stated value of the “environment”

### Selected

- Interns & teams are chosen based on pre-established criteria

### Developed

- Character
- Knowledge
- Skills
- Doctrine and Values of the denomination
- Family prepared

### Sent & Sustained

- With resources
- To the lost
- Continued networking and support



Our research has identified two approaches to church planting in North America: the founding pastor model which focuses upon the gathering of core or launch team followed by a public “launch” of weekly worship services or the apostolic model with an emphasis upon sending disciples into the harvest to make disciples, form small groups, develop leaders and provide ongoing support.

We have concluded that both models are needed in North America and that the definition above applies to either one of these two options. We also believe that the more traditional church planting model needs to have at the core of its being the multiplication of disciples.



## Options to Consider

As we reflect upon the potential to advance the Kingdom of God through church planting we have identified multiple scenarios. Here are just four examples to stimulate your thinking.

Options	Description	Focus	Length	Strength
<i>Church Planting Church</i>	A single church takes primary responsibility for starting new churches	Interns	6 months to 2 years	Transfer of experiences to new church
<i>Church Planting School</i>	A church equips planters through classroom and assignments	Students	6 months to a year	Develop multiple church planters simultaneously & systematically
<i>Partnering Church Network</i>	Group of churches or individuals collaborating to plant churches	Participating Churches	Less than a year	Variety of resources and expertise available to new church starts
<i>Disciple Making Center</i>	A church that deploys ordinary Christ-followers into the harvest.	Disciples	As quick as possible	Exponential growth, simple and minimal financial resources required

The first scenario is that of a ***church planting church***. In this situation we dream of a church that takes on the role of birthing multiple new churches from conception to reproduction. This *parenting church* is driven by a sense of responsibility for fulfilling the Great Commission through church planting. They have a system in place for raising up indigenous church planters and church planting teams. They also have potential church planters who seek them out, hoping for an opportunity to become a part of their church as an intern.

Internships are at the heart of this strategy. Although planters go through a selection process, the internship program ideally has a clearly thought out process for assessing their interns and creating customized learning plans – focusing not only on the skills needed to plant a church, but also seeking to develop the character and knowledge of the intern, his family and possibly his team. As the intern nears the completion of his program, he is assisted in the selection of a location that best fits his personality and passions and if possible, begins assembling a launch team from the host church.

The role of the *parenting church* does not end with the sending out of the planter and his team. The church provides ongoing support through a coaching relationship with the planter and his family, with finances, accounting and other



services. A network of her planters may be developed to assure ongoing encouragement and training.

The second scenario is that of a **church planting school**. Here we picture a “mature” church plant that has reached the point where it can transfer what it has learned to a group or network of church planters who may be scattered over a larger geographical region. The planters seek a partnership with the school because of their reputation regionally or nationally, their perception of the pastors or church planting directors involved, or possibly because of their strategy for reaching their community with the gospel. In other words, people see their methodology and want to reproduce it within their context.

The school not only has a selection process and provides instruction, but offers some level of accountability, coaching and minimal financial support upon completion of the program. The planters pay a fee to participate and see this partnership as a means for developing themselves as a leader and for growing their church. The former planter and his school’s success or reputation, along with the success of their church plants, will attract other church planters into the system.

The difference between this scenario and the first, a parenting church, is the issue of internships. The church planting schools typically do not have internships. Rather, the planters come into the school on regularly scheduled dates for their training and to network with other participants.

The next scenario is that of a **partnering church network**. Unlike our previous scenarios, this is a *group of churches and individuals* (could be driven by the local association) who have agreed to partner together to plant churches. Their work begins with an assessment of their community to identify the unreached people groups and under-reached places which leads to the development of a comprehensive church planting strategy. They then seek to enlist and develop the planters needed to implement that strategy among the targeted audience.

They see themselves as the providers of financial, as well as ongoing support, for the church planters who have been enlisted to fulfill their strategy. Like our previous scenarios, they have a system for selecting their applicants. They work with as many church plants as they can, with the number being determined in some ways by the finances they raise. Because they provide financial support there is a certain number of expectations which must be met by the planters. Network meetings, reports and regular evaluations may be a part of the process. In some cases personalized growth strategies are created as part of the relationship and implemented by the planter.



Like the church planting schools, they typically do not have internships. And, like the parenting church, there is a deeper parent/child relationship than what exists in the schools. There is more involvement in the life of the church plants from the churches in the network than in the schools as well.

The final scenario is that of a ***disciple making center***. Although it sees the value of traditional church planting strategies, it has at the heart of its strategy the multiplication, or the making of disciples by every day Christ-followers. From this disciple making emphasis within the harvest it sees the development of simple gatherings of new believers who have the potential of becoming a traditional church plant or becoming a network of small groups or house churches as the result of their disciple making activities. In many ways they have redefined what a church is – moving from a traditional model dependent upon a seminary trained, funded leader, with a worship center to something lead by everyday Christ followers who meet in homes or other, more personal venues.

Like church planting movements, this is highly relational, with the gospel flowing from one friend to another, from one family to another. Like the other scenarios, training and ongoing support is provided but as needed and in the context of relationships. Over the course of time certain leaders will emerge who have the ability to take the process and replicate it in a new setting or among a new group of people. As you can see, this model pictures the multiplication of disciples, leaders and small groups, that may or may not become a more traditional worship gathering or church, as the key to their success.



## Three Primary Roles of a CPC

As we examined the work of existing centers, Scripture and lostness in North America, we have compiled three primary roles that might define the work of a church planting center. They are captured in our definition of a CPC: *Church Planting Centers are environments where multiple disciples are intentionally selected, developed and sent to make disciples, which results in new churches.*

**Select:** The first role of a CPC is to select, to determine who gets into their system through a thorough assessment process and established standards. They are selective, not allowing just anyone with a desire to plant a church, journey with them. The selection process has multiple levels, possibly beginning with an application and moving deeper through a formal assessment, interviews and venues that allow the center to observe the planter's family under certain conditions.

The center should consider issues such as church planting potential, life experiences and situation, biblical character and calling. In assessing the candidates, it is crucial that the entire family be evaluated to help determine their willingness to plant a church and if they have a healthy foundation to anchor them during the tough times. The assessment process is ongoing, seeking to measure progress in reaching predetermined objectives as well as working to help the planter and his family to determine what place or specific people group they are best suited to reach with the gospel as they progress through the system.

A question that needs to be addressed here is, "How do we find planters?" So far our research has identified three streams through which candidates may flow into the centers; recruitment, referral and raising them up. Therefore, candidates may come from outside entities (such as a college, church, network, etc.) or from referrals made by planters who have gone through their system.

The development of indigenous leaders – the raising up of a planter from within the church planting center environment - however, will most likely lead to the rapid reproduction of disciples, small groups and leaders. For this to happen, the center will need to have an effective disciple making process that places an emphasis upon multiplication. Ideally, a center, if operating out of a local church, has at the core of its ministry a process for making disciples which results in the sending of disciples into the harvest who are trained and passionate about disciple making, forming small groups and the development of indigenous leaders. The center's assessors identify those with a passion for multiplication in the selection process, and it is then reinforced and coached throughout the planter's relationship with the center.



**Development:** The second role of a church planting center is the operation of an intentional, systematic process for the development of the planter and his family. Building upon what they discovered in the assessment process, a developmental plan is put into place to begin preparing the planting team with the skills needed to plant a church, to strengthen the health of the families involved, to strengthen the character of the participants and the knowledge needed to plant a healthy, reproducing church. Issues like doctrinal beliefs and if applicable, an understanding of the values of the denomination involved, are addressed as well.

The components of a healthy developmental process should include classroom instruction, practical ministry opportunities, walking alongside of practitioners and ongoing evaluation of the planter's development.

**Send and Sustain:** The third role of a church planting center is the provision of ongoing support for the planter and his team once they have been sent by the church or have completed their training. This may include life coaching, mentoring, network meetings, finances, administrative support, accountability and the ongoing provision of resources to ensure that the plant has the ability to implement their strategy. In this phase the center not only focuses upon the work of the planter after his departure, but upon the personal issues that surface in the life of the planter and his family as they *engage* their target audience with the gospel.

Our research currently shows that planters place great value upon the creation of a planter's network as well as access to a coach and possibly, a mentor. This type of ongoing networking and coaching creates a kingdom environment where planters can find solutions to pressing needs as they occur. It also can provide an environment where relationships, which may lead to the multiplication of new networks and a greater volume of new churches, can be formed.



## Conclusion

Across North America there is an emerging trend toward the decentralization of church planting – a movement from the provision of equipping and support by denominations toward a more church-centered approach. This movement has brought with it a certain amount of issues that have created tension between churches and their denominations. Within our own denomination several issues have reoccurred in a wide range of conventions. We have also identified a second trend where everyday Christ-followers are sent into the harvest to make disciples, establish small groups, and develop leaders who repeat the process over and over again. This movement has issues of its own which need to be addressed.

Both trends are healthy and needed if we are going to reduce the level of lostness in North America. Our quest is to work within both of the above named arenas in an effort to identify the processes, systems and resources needed to facilitate their development and implementation.

