



Are You Ready to Plant a New Church?

A Discernment Guide
for Church Planters

Dr. Ed Love

Well done!

If you are reading this, you are a special individual who understands Jesus called his disciples to seek and save the lost. The very fact that you are interested in starting a new church community places you in a very unique category. Since the day of Pentecost, disciples of Jesus have been starting new communities of faith, love, and hope. Even today, there is no better way to reach people with the message of Jesus than to start a new ministry in a city.

Thank you for taking the time to process this initial discernment guide. Hopefully, the following questions and suggestions will help you discern your next steps toward the advancement of God's mission in the world.

What is a new faith community?

New faith communities are simply fresh expressions of the Good News of Jesus in a community. We believe it will take all kinds of churches to reach all kinds of people. Many communities have church buildings on every corner, but we must realize approximately 80% of the American population is not participating in a church gathering on any given Sunday. A new life-giving church may be exactly what is needed in a community to help people return to God and find salvation. These new church communities ought to be committed to:

- 1) Making disciples who make disciples
- 2) Proclaiming the Jesus message
- 3) Worship frequently and engage in the essential sacraments
- 4) Having effective systems of discipleship
- 5) Teaching biblical patterns of stewardship
- 6) Being missional, relational and incarnational

- 7) Reaching the missing at all costs
- 8) Multiplying their DNA in other new faith communities
- 9) Remaining connected and accountable to some form of governing church structure

Am I ready?

Jesus taught us the importance of living with great faith, but he also taught us to be wise and count the cost before we start anything new for God.

Luke 14:28-30

“Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won’t you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, saying, ‘This person began to build and wasn’t able to finish.’”

Regardless of the strategy chosen to start a new church, you need to be ready for the challenge. Begin by asking yourself the following questions:

- 1) Is our current church ready to plant?
- 2) Do I have a good network of relationships?
- 3) How do I objectively assess my readiness?
- 4) If your church is not quite ready, how can it begin to get ready?
- 5) What do you think the personal cost is of starting a new community and are you prepared for the sacrifice?
- 6) What do you think you might gain by planting?
- 7) What strategy will you implement to make it happen?

What type of plant will you choose to develop?

There are many different ways to start a new church. Typically, the start-up is dependent on the target community and objectives. It is important to have some sort of model in your mind before you begin. Below you will find a short description of some of the strategies used today.

1) Network / Cluster Strategy

An existing network or cluster of churches in a region serves as the catalyst for launching the new church. Within this regional strategy, there is a high value placed on connection and relationship with the network.

2) Missionary Strategy

This type of strategy sends a planter into an area that he or she is not familiar with and have little to no relational connections. Sometimes the goal behind this strategy is to reach a budding population and create a beachhead for future plants.

3) Multi-Site Expansion Strategy

Many large churches desire to expand their ministry reach by starting a new site or campus in another location, with the goal of reaching more people within the area of the site. The new site is still considered a part of the larger church and operates under the umbrella of one board. They will typically have a site pastor, which is not necessarily the teaching pastor.

4) Church-Within-A-Church Strategy

In a world where property is incredibly expensive, many pastors have found wisdom in sharing their space with a new church.

Existing churches find this strategy especially helpful when trying to reach a different racial-ethnic group.

5) The Passing-of-the-Baton Strategy

This strategy requires a proactive discernment process from a denominational team. Existing churches may discover a new vision for their ministry or they will choose to let go of the old and make way for a new ministry under a new leader. These churches intentionally choose to release their assets, so a new vision can be formed.

6) Replant Strategy

Sometimes, the best thing a church community can do is close its doors and allow new visionary leadership to reopen the facility. The new church and new identity can be exactly what the community needs in order to respond to the fresh expression of the Good News.

7) House Church Strategy

Within the first century, having church in a house was the norm. Many modern people have also found the home makes for a great meeting location. House Churches are typically small, lay led, and may organize into regional networks.

8) Intentional Community Strategy

This strategy involves a small group of friends or family members who are motivated and passionate about using their network to start a new faith community in their hometown. This strategy is often traced back to Acts 2 and there have been many communities throughout history which have modeled this highly relationally oriented church community. Typically, these

intentional communities have no desire to formalize their structure, but are passionate about reaching those within their circle of influence.

9) The Surprise Birth Strategy

Just like a pregnancy may surprise parents, sometimes, God surprises us too. Often, a small group from within a church may explode and the best way to support the group is to help them become an organized church community.

10) Integrated Multi-Ethnic Strategy

This strategy is the result of people who are passionate about creating a diverse community where many different cultures are represented under one church umbrella.

What is my fit?

God has a unique wiring for every individual and church community. There is no one-size-fits-all when it comes to church planting, however, it is important to discern how God has uniquely wired you and your church. Not every church will be able to plant in the same way and every plant ends up being unique. The important thing to recognize is that God can start new things in many different ways. Some of the differences may include: generational, educational, racial, socio-economical, language, and worldviews. When preparing to plant it is important to consider these three overarching aspects:

- 1) *Spiritual Intensity* – How passionate are the leaders and people for following Jesus and building a long term ministry?

2) *Missional Focus* – How strategic are the leaders and people for reaching the missing in their circle of influence?

3) *Incarnational Witness* – How deliberate are the leaders and people for being Christ's hands and feet in a specific community or target group?

Even though new churches begin in many different ways, it is important that each new community is strong in their spiritual intensity, missional focus, and incarnational witness.

What is the planting process?

It is strongly recommended that a process of discernment needs to be implemented for any prospective planter or partnering church so that the new work will be viable, healthy and able to multiply in the future. This discernment process involves the following elements:

A. **Discerning God's Call** – This phase usually begins with a planter or pastor who is passionate about reaching the missing of a particular area or people group. Regardless of who starts the conversation, ultimately a group of God's people must finally evaluate the possibilities, picture and plans. It is important to realize many people have planted churches for the wrong reasons. Here are some misguided reasons:

- A strong desire to preach but no one will give you an opportunity
- Frustrated where you are because you can't do what you want to do
- Can't get an invitation to pastor an established church

- Out to prove something
- Need to get some experience—and church planting seems like a good opportunity to practice ministerial skills
- Dreaming of a large ministry to boost your own reputation or ego

None of these are adequate reasons, even if your personality sounds similar to the characteristics desired for church planters. However, if a person has the right reasons and the right wiring, the combination can lead to great church planting potential.

B. The Assessment Process – Even though a leader may feel called by God to plant a church, it is important to have a process in place where the planter is assessed by other unbiased leaders. The following web-source for a free initial self-assessment:

<https://cmcwesleyan.churchplanterprofiles.com>

After the initial self-assessment, it is essential to go through an extensive 3-day Church Planter Assessment Center. The assessors will analyze and evaluate these 13 areas:

1. VISIONIZING CAPACITY

- Builds projects, businesses or ministries from scratch
- Initiates efforts to build
- Communicates vision consistently in an inspiring, persuasive and creative manner
- Projects into the future consistently; has a future orientation
- Mobilizes human and financial resources to accomplish significant tasks
- Copes effectively with non-visionizing elements

2. INTRINSIC MOTIVATION

- Shows a high energy level and stamina
- Handles large workloads and significant responsibility
- Self-manages projects and completes them in a timely manner with little or no supervision
- Consistently strives for excellence
- Maintains commitments, integrity and character in tempting, challenging or less than ideal circumstances

3. CREATING OWNERSHIP OF MINISTRY

- Recruits others consistently
- Delegates to others to broaden their areas of responsibility
- Coaches others to attain higher levels of performance
- Reproduces leaders who reproduce others
- Instills in others a sense of personal responsibility for the growth and success of ministry

4. REACHING THE DISCONNECTED

- Intentionally builds relationships with non-Christians
- Brings non-Christians to a decision for Christ
- Assimilates new Christians into the church
- Sensitively relates with the unchurched on a personal level while remaining non-compromising

5. SPOUSAL COOPERATION

- Agree upon respective roles and expectations in ministry

- Sets healthy boundaries regarding workload and its impact upon family life
- Models wholesome family life before church and community
- Communicates openly and resolves conflicts in a healthy manner
- Shares convictions regarding church planting

6. EFFECTVELY BUILDS RELATIONSHIPS

- Initiates and builds relationships
- Demonstrates a sincere interest in people
- Constructively handles criticism and relational difficulties
- Develops a strong and diverse social network

7. COMMITTED TO CHURCH GROWTH

- Seeks training in church growth principles
- Implements church growth principles effectively
- Establishes and maintains growth-oriented priorities
- Critically evaluates church growth principles, concepts and models of ministry
- Appreciates growth taking its own course while not preoccupied with superficially fast growth
- Understands the inherent nature and demands of growth

8. RESPONSIVENESS TO COMMUNITY

- Finds the unique pulse and character of local communities
- Develops programs that meet specific needs in a community
- Utilizes community outreach to build the church

- Adapts philosophy of ministry to fit the character of the community
- Prioritizes ministry opportunities on the basis of resources and potential impact

9. UTILIZES GIFTEDNESS OF OTHERS

- Systematically helps people identify their areas of spiritual giftedness
- Helps people use their giftedness by matching them to ministry where they can be most effective
- Equips, develops and trains others to maximize their giftedness
- Releases people into ministry when they are ready

10. FLEXIBILITY & ADAPATBILITY

- Maintains open-mindedness
- Refocuses and makes mid-course corrections during times of change or ambiguity
- Adapts to unexpected events and disruptions while staying on course
- Manages multiple tasks and responsibilities simultaneously
- Promotes and encourages vision-based innovation

11. BUILDING COHESIVE GROUPS

- Harmonizes people despite their differences
- Resolves group conflicts and divisive issues quickly and sensitively
- Monitors and maintains the morale of the people

- Utilizes small groups effectively to accomplish ministry objectives
- Promotes assimilation of others into the body life of the church

12. RESILIENCE

- Remains optimistic and perseveres when convinced they are in God's will
- Makes good use of support systems during times of crisis, setback and disappointment
- Bounces back quickly from loss and discouragement
- Evidences emotional stability through the joys and disappointments of life
- Experiences unjust situations without lashing out or lingering bitterness

13. EXERCISES FAITH

- Maintains one's spiritual vitality through practice of spiritual disciplines
- Takes significant faith risks and is not resistant to major change
- Is convinced of church planting call
- Positively impacts the faith of others
- Sustains in prayer even when answers are delayed

C. Season of Preparation – This phase requires patience. God may bring surprises, but he is not hasty. During this time period, there are many things a leader needs to consider and develop. Here are a few next steps for a prospective planter:

- Clarify your calling from God
- Discern the location of the plant
- Collect the demographics
- Exegete the community
- Examine ways God is working in similar communities
- Discover God's unique vision for your church
- Adjust the vision as you learn more about the context
- Begin coaching and training
- Develop a core team
- Enlist a prayer team
- Organize an 18-24 month vision and strategic plan document
- Begin assessing your financial needs
- Work with your network, mother church or district leader on the timeline and objectives

As Jesus said, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest fields." (Luke 10:2) Maybe the Lord is calling you to...

Make Disciples...

Plant Churches...

Transform the World...

Hopefully, this booklet has helped you discern your next steps as they relate to church planting. The planting process may seem rather complicated, but thankfully we have the Spirit of God to help guide and direct us.

APPENDIX 1:

The Discernment Zone

It is important to enter a serious discernment process in order to confirm if God is indeed calling you to start a new church. Without divine confirmation, you will likely start for the wrong reasons and quit when ministry begins to feel difficult. Yet, when the Holy Spirit confirms this unique calling, you will begin to tap into a deep sense of enduring faithfulness and obedience, continuing on with grit and perseverance.

Every disciple is born into the kingdom of God as a missionary. We are all sent-ones. Our identities as children in God's kingdom and participation in his mission are like a tree connected to its root system. Jesus described this direct connection to all of his disciples when he said, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere." (Acts 1:8)

This mandate does not necessarily mean every disciple will be called to start a new faith community, although in some situations, this will be the end result. We must agree Jesus' first call was simply to follow him wherever we go. In Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus said, "As you go, make disciples..." Jesus did not say, "As you go, plant churches..." However, what ends up happening when you make a lot of disciples? You need to plant a lot of churches that continue the disciple making movement! This picture was God's plan all along and God gifts certain leaders to spark these new missional initiatives.

It is important to know God expresses his calling differently in every leader. Some people receive a bolt of lightning; some people receive continual and progressive nudges throughout their lifetime. Even though no calling experience is the same, there are transferable

principles we can come to acknowledge.

As you proceed into the discernment zone, here are three dynamics to prayerfully consider:

1. Consider how God has WIRED you.

Catalytic Innovator:

Do you like to start new things?

Does innovation inspire you?

Do you enjoy the start-up process?

Do small business atmospheres motivate you?

Do you have a history of starting new things from the ground up?

Do others know you as a risk taker?

My Reflections:

Vision Caster:

Do you dream big?

Do people tend to follow you?

Do you enjoy communicating what God is up to in the world?

Does your heart break for people disconnected from Christ and the church?

Do you enjoy developing a strategy to support your vision?

Do you respond to challenges with solutions and get things done?

My Reflections:

Friends with non-Christians:

Do you enjoy spending time with people who are far from God?

Do you have non-church going friends consistently in your phone call or texting history?

Do you enjoy hosting events or meals with people who aren't in your church?

Do you pray for God to use you as a light within your relationships?

Do you pray for people, by name, that do not yet know the love of Christ?

My Reflections:

2. Consider how people RESPOND to your leadership.

While God's calling does not originate from other humans, you will find people close to you have an uncanny ability to recognize church planting fruit in your life. Remember, the Early Church eventually affirmed the apostle Paul by recognizing his call to the Gentiles (Gal. 2:1-10; Acts 13:1-3). In the same way, if God is calling you toward starting a new faith community, God will use others to affirm this calling. Here are a few discernment questions to consider:

Have you developed a relationship of trust with the leadership of your church?

Do those whom God has placed in leadership oversight of you know about your interest in starting a new kingdom project?

Do you submit well to the leaders God has placed in your life?

Are you open to going wherever God may call you?

Do you get the sense others might follow you wherever you go?

Do people tend to enjoy being around you and your ministry

culture?

Do people come to you and ask questions about life and God?

Does God regularly use you to bring about change in the lives of others?

Have you led people to Jesus outside of a church setting?

My Reflections:

3. Consider the perpetual PASSION of your heart.

While it is not uncommon for leaders of new churches to be dissatisfied with the status quo, this dissatisfaction must not be about a lack of style or programs—it must be born out of a hunger to reach those who are far from God. Here are a few discernment questions to consider:

Do you believe the good news of Jesus changes lives?

Do you love seeing people put their faith in Christ for salvation?

Do you crave seeing people commit to Christ through baptism?

Do you love being transformed by Jesus?

Do you love learning more and more about the Bible?

Do you have a spiritual boldness?

Do you daydream about fresh ways to express God's purposes in the world?

Are you willing to say NO to other opportunities in order to say YES to the growing pains of developing a new faith community?

My Reflections:

These three principles and questions related to your wiring, people's response to your leadership, and your involvement with non-Christians may not be a complete checklist, but they can serve as a conversation starter to express the desires of your heart to your spouse, a best friend, pastor, or district superintendent. If you feel as if God is beginning to confirm a church planting calling on your life, then proceed with humble confidence, knowing that with God ALL things are possible (Mt. 19:26).

If you do feel led to discover more about your unique wiring, one next step is to take the church planters pre-assessment test found here:

www.wesleyan.org/multiplication/assessment

If you do not feel led to take a next step, then know this: Not everyone is called to plant a new church, but everyone needs to be *about* church planting. Church planting is like raising a cell phone tower in order to increase coverage in areas desperate for the Good News of Jesus. Without a doubt, church planting is an effective form of evangelism in our day and age and the world needs more mission-minded communities, not less. It's possible God might not be calling you to lead the charge of a new initiative, but maybe God is calling you to leave your comfort zone and participate in a new kingdom work. If this is the case, begin praying for God to raise up a specific leader for your area or prepare your heart to go when the opportunity presents itself.

God's first command was to be fruitful and multiply (Genesis 1:28), and Jesus' last command was to go into the world and multiply (Matthew 28:19-20). Multiplication is at the core of God's heart and God longs for multiplication to be at the core of our hearts as well. May you discover the great joy of being a multiplier in God's kingdom...