

# TRAINING LEADERS BY STARTING CHURCHES!

THE COMPANION CHURCH LETTER

AUGUST, 2001

## **STEVE – THE UNTRAINED ACCOUNTANT**

Steve has always wanted to be an accountant. He is just wired that way, and through his teen years he dreamed of mixing it up with the white-collar crowd and crunching the numbers in some downtown firm. The problem is that when he went to college Steve majored in journalism, and since then, he has been working for his father in the family floral business. Steve is now 32. Undaunted by his lack of training, he hangs a shingle in front of his house calling himself an accountant and inviting in the public. He has never received training in accounting, but he decides to make it his profession! Is there something wrong with this picture?



## **WELL, HOW ABOUT MISSIONARIES?!**

Did you know that most people who apply to join a mission agency – people who want to become vocational church-planters – have never had training or experience in church planting? Perhaps they majored in Bible, or pastoral studies or even in missions. If they attended a missions-oriented Bible school, they may have had one professor who taught them the principles of church planting, yet they have no hands-on training or experience in starting a church.

Certainly, they know what their own church is like, and perhaps they understand how it functions, but like most believers, they can't picture their church in its infancy. Some were involved in a church split, where – *presto!* – their group formed a new church in a week, normally a group of saddened older believers who were trying to recover from a bad situation! But they've never seen a church formed slowly and positively by reaching the lost in their community. And now they are heading overseas ... to a foreign culture ... to plant churches as their profession. The answer to this problem lies with you as church leaders.

## **EVER THOUGHT ABOUT STARTING A CHURCH?**

Most churches miss a golden opportunity when they become inward-focused. If you go over to the window and look outside the walls of your building, you will see the best training ground in the world to train future missionaries – the communities around you. These are your Judeas and Samarias.

Churches that have planted sister churches have some great stories to tell! The experiences of some of these churches indicate that if your church would plant another church in a nearby community, you would accomplish three hugely important things for Christ and His Kingdom ... killing three birds with one stone!

## **1 You would give future missionary families some of the best missionary training they could find by training and assisting them to plant and lead the new church.**

---

What makes a good church-planter? Beyond a prayer-filled life, a Scripture-filled mind, and a yielded heart, what skills define an effective missionary? Evangelism, discipleship and leadership development. Notice that we said “skills,” not knowledge. Many potential missionaries have been taught and “seminarred” to death on the topic of evangelism. They have the knowledge – *and the guilt!* – but they have never received guided experience or training in building relationships with lost people, leading them to Christ and discipling them in the faith. They need practice in this *before they leave* for the foreign field!

As important as preaching and teaching are for existing churches, church-planters don't do a lot of that when they're starting a new church. They have to be calmly bold in building contacts with unbelievers. They have to be good one-on-one and in small groups. They have to know how to transition conversations from the secular to the spiritual to the Biblical. If a young couple has been a leader in planting a church in the next town, mission boards would clamor to have them!

## **2 You would reach a community that doesn't have enough gospel presence or Bible teaching, by planting a church in their neighborhood.**

---

Churches tend to reflect the culture of the communities and era in which they were born. Eras change, communities change and therefore culture changes. Unless a church continues to stay fresh in reaching its community, it will start to die as the congregation gets older and smaller. Statistics show that churches normally live seventy years – the same as a human life.

Church planting should therefore be a continual process in the life of the Body of Christ. Just as healthy believers reproduce, healthy local churches should be striving to reproduce other local churches rather than building ecclesiastical kingdoms that squelch out other smaller churches. Get out the map and take a drive into your Samaria. They need a church there.

## **3 You would see dynamic growth in the life and health of *your own* congregation by planting a daughter church.**

---

Amazing as it sounds, when a church plants another church, the “parent church” almost always grows larger. If your building is “maxed out,” and you wonder whether sending out some families to plant another church will help shrink your church, think again!

Spiritual growth gets kicked up a notch when you're learning for a purpose, when you're not just learning for learning's sake, but there is a sense of urgency and direction. Planting a church is huge! You're building another rebel base in the war against Satan's kingdom. God's children love to be equipped for battle, not just taught.

This is basic. It's like the 7<sup>th</sup> grader who wonders how he will ever use his geometry or the private who sees no purpose in the grueling heat of basic training. Take the 7<sup>th</sup> grader to a construction site for a day, or have a war raging for the raw recruit, and they will both learn with great vigor!

When you send out your trained singles and couples, there is normally another line of people wanting the same training for a similar project, and the enthusiasm that ripples through the congregation catches the attention of visitors who see a church with focus, vision and direction. They want to be a part of this. They stay. They get involved. The parent church grows.

## **START WITH A HEALTHY CHURCH AND UNITED LEADERS**

So, how do you start? Every church has its own situation and congregational dynamics, so there is no one pattern or approach to planting a church, but here are some ideas.

### **Your congregation must be spiritually healthy.**

To some people, a church plant is a church split, no matter what you say. Family doesn't abandon family, and no one should leave a church unless their job forces them to move away. Some in the church family may think that those who are leaving don't really like the parent church and want to have a church "their way." You will need a good deal of time to train a planting team. Use that time to teach the congregation about the biblical view of churches, church planting and the attitudes of those who send missionaries out to do God's work.

### **Your leaders – all of them – must be behind the idea.**

As with any major change, if there is one ambivalent or antagonistic leader, anyone who is reluctant will find in him a voice for their faction, and the effort to plant may cause a split. Take some time to work through a plan with all of your leaders. Don't just tell them what will happen; involve them in the planning process. Let them take some ownership.

## **BRAINSTORM SEVERAL STRATEGIES!**

Will you start the church in a home or homes? How long will you stay house-based? Will you build a building as soon as you can? Will one of the men eventually become the pastor or will you hire one? There are a lot of variables in church planting! Here are a few contrasting ideas you can examine.

<p><b>Evangelistic Team</b></p> <p><i>Through relationships, conversations and inquirer's studies, the team brings people to Christ and introduces them to the new church.</i></p>	<p><b>Home-Based</b></p> <p><i>The believers meet in a series of homes until the groups are big enough to get together once a month, or rent, buy or build a facility.</i></p>	<p><b>Church Planter</b></p> <p><i>Your lead planter sees his role as that of evangelism, organization and training leaders. The pastor will have to be trained or hired.</i></p>	<p><b>Church Plant</b></p> <p><i>Your team is being sent out to an area that does not have a solid, Bible teaching church nearby or is a high-growth area that needs several works.</i></p>	<p><b>Conversion Growth</b></p> <p><i>Your team must be highly relational and be well trained in apologetics, the gospel and evangelistic conversations and methods.</i></p>
<p><b>Canvassing Team</b></p> <p><i>The team distributes literature or holds public events in communities and invites people to church meetings where they can hear the gospel.</i></p>	<p><b>Building-Based</b></p> <p><i>The team pools its offerings to initially rent a facility (store front, etc.) and hold meetings there until it can buy or build a facility.</i></p>	<p><b>Planter-Pastor</b></p> <p><i>Your lead church planter has the gifts and enough training to become the new pastor once the church is large enough to support his family.</i></p>	<p><b>Church Recovery</b></p> <p><i>Your team is being sent out to a failing church that has asked for your assistance in evangelism, counseling and other ministry.</i></p>	<p><b>Transfer Growth</b></p> <p><i>Your team must be gifted in the ministry areas of music, drama, performance, public speaking, children's ministries and effective teaching.</i></p>

## **APPROACH AND APPOINT A TEAM**

This takes prayerful consideration. Following the pattern of Acts 13:1, you are looking for your *best* people, your talented leaders, to accomplish this task. "*No, we can't lose them!*" you may say. If they don't leave a gap when you send them, then don't send them. They must prove themselves before being sent into more difficult work. Be careful of asking for volunteers, lest you be faced with turning some away. Church leaders should pray for the Lord's leading and then approach a cross-section of godly families to determine their willingness to be used by the Lord in this kind of ministry.

If you are keying in on evangelism and building the church with new converts, you should be choosing families that are relational and adept in evangelism and discipleship. If you are using the building-based, transfer-growth concept of attracting people from nominal churches, you should choose a spectrum of families who can get the program of the church up and running in short order – a good speaker, musicians, drama team, childcare pros, an administrator, etc.

## **TARGETING PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES**

In what area should your church plant a church? That depends if you're trying to reach a specific target group. Paul preached the gospel to the Jew first, and then to the Gentile. He did some target-planning.

- **ETHNIC.** If you are trying to reach Hispanics or Jews, then you must target their ethnic communities and plan to live and meet there.
- **GEOGRAPHIC.** If you are looking to plant an inner-city church, then your team should move to the city. They need to live in the epicenter of their ministry. Commuting communicates – "I don't want to be anywhere near you, but you need to be reached with the gospel."
- **AGE GROUP.** If you are trying to reach retired folks or "Generation X," look for their communities. When you put together a team, remember that the tendency is for the bulk of a church's couples to be within 10 to 15 years of the age of your leader; so if the pastor is 40, most of the adults will be between 25-30 and 50-55. These numbers broaden if you have several leaders up front who have a range of ages.

Most churches try to reach everyone with the gospel. In such a case, the momentum of a new church lies with its young families, so you should be looking to locate in family communities, places where little children are running around on a Saturday afternoon. Often, families who have recently moved are more open to a new church. You can purchase lists of new mortgages or home purchases, and canvass in those areas with welcome bags. In America, you should look for new Home Depots and Walmarts to see where new subdivisions are going in. Check with the town planner to see where residential growth is moving. Why? Sad was the church that located itself in a community only to see its families move away because the community turned into an industrial park!

After you hone in on an area, study its "religious topography." Buy a big, updated map, check the yellow pages or the Sunday ad section of the newspaper for churches, and then go for a drive. Note where the churches are and what denominations they represent. Drive by them or attend them on Sunday to see what they're like. What images do people in your community see when you say "religion" or "church?" How will your church be the same or different than theirs? Do they seem to enjoy going to church? If you are going to minister to them, you must know what they've been through, and where they're coming from.

## ***DETERMINE HOW MUCH CONTROL YOUR CHURCH WILL HAVE***

The biblical principle is that a local church, once constituted with leaders, is an autonomous body, not to be ruled over by another person or organization. Optimally, the church-planting team should be trained well enough to incorporate and set a biblical course on its own! But, if the parent church wants to set a clear direction for the new church, it should work with the church-planting team in forming the new church's constitution, bylaws, doctrinal statement, purpose, vision and core values statements, etc. Once the new church is formed, it is on its own before the Lord. The parent church then moves to an advisory capacity – like when the kids marry and move out.

The more ongoing obligations you create between the two churches, the more conflicts can arise. The parent church may want to buy the first plot of ground for the new church, but that should be a gift, not a loan. The parent church may think of appointing one man as the lead church-planter, paying him two years' salary in advance until the new church gets on its feet financially. Make it a gift, not a loan. The new church may decide to wear certain styles of clothing or meet at times that seem strange to those in the parent church, which then tries to exert its influence through financial means.

## ***BEGIN LEADERSHIP TRAINING***

You start training your team by first assessing their strengths and weaknesses. To know where they are strong or could use some improvement, you must do some testing.

- **HEART.** Hopefully, you will have some idea of where their heart is, but take some time to discern their walk with the Lord. Are they involved with the spiritual disciplines of the Christian life? How can you help them improve? What are their spiritual gifts? What kind of ministry gives them the greatest joy and fulfillment?
- **HEAD.** They may be strong in their biblical knowledge but weak in apologetics, conversing with cultists or knowing how to reach Catholics. Perhaps you should spend a lengthy time doing an "oral audit" of each team member's knowledge and skill in the Scripture. Many Christians know the right answers but don't know why the answer is right, and don't know where to find supporting authority in the Bible. Line up a series of courses beginning with the topics most needed by the whole group.
- **HANDS.** Most believers desire training, not just teaching, in the area of skills. Teach them the principles of effective teaching and then have them teach a series with several others critiquing them. Teach them several presentations of the gospel and then go out and use them. Teach them principles of counseling and have them sit in on some sessions. Have your men perform some baptisms and the Lord's Supper. Everything they do should have some opportunity for feedback when they are finished.

## ***COMMISSION THEM AND RELEASE THEM***

Make the send-off official. Will these families be gone for good? Some churches ask their team to give the effort one year, and if they want, they can come back to the parent church. This can have a negative affect on the mental-emotional focus of the team. How often do you want them to come back and report? If the church is not too far away, and it really takes off, what will you do with families from the parent church that may want to transfer?

The church and the team need to think and talk through all of these issues, but as tricky as the road may seem, an ounce of prevention is definitely better than a pound of cure.

## CHURCH PLANTING EVALUATION CHART

Take a minute and evaluate whether your church should plant another church.

1. Name three nearby (Judea) communities in which your church could plant a new church or assist a struggling church:
  - 1 \_\_\_\_\_
  - 2 \_\_\_\_\_
  - 3 \_\_\_\_\_
  
2. Name two inner city (Samaria) neighborhoods in which your church could plant a new church or assist a struggling church:
  - 1 \_\_\_\_\_
  - 2 \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. Name five families in your church that would be most effective at evangelism and discipleship. Put a star by the one most likely to head up the team.
  - 1 \_\_\_\_\_
  - 2 \_\_\_\_\_
  - 3 \_\_\_\_\_
  - 4 \_\_\_\_\_
  - 5 \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. Name five families in your church that would be most effective at speaking, music, children's ministries and administration. Put a star by the one most likely to head up the team.
  - 1 \_\_\_\_\_
  - 2 \_\_\_\_\_
  - 3 \_\_\_\_\_
  - 4 \_\_\_\_\_
  - 5 \_\_\_\_\_
  
5. Name five families in your church who could be trained to take the place of the five families who would leave to plant another church.
  - 1 \_\_\_\_\_
  - 2 \_\_\_\_\_
  - 3 \_\_\_\_\_
  - 4 \_\_\_\_\_
  - 5 \_\_\_\_\_
  
6. What are three things you can do in the next month to begin "floating" the idea of planting a church with your leaders and congregation to see their response?
  - 1 \_\_\_\_\_
  - 2 \_\_\_\_\_
  - 3 \_\_\_\_\_
  
7. Many churches have, as part of their vision, to plant a new church or help to rescue a church every 3-4 years. How can you modify your vision statement to include domestic church planting?
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  
8. Who on the pastoral staff would be best to head up the training effort for the church planting team? How long would the training last?
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_