

PLANTING CHURCHES TOGETHER

DOCUMENT 3

We will look at how we *plant churches together* under these headings:

- Introduction
- 12 Biblical principles and practices of planting
- FAQ's about church planting

INTRODUCTION

The Great Commission, to take the gospel to the neighborhoods and the nations, is given to every generation - it *has* to be, because every generation needs to be freshly evangelized and disciplined. The timeless New Testament strategy for this is church planting. We need to be *convinced* of this.

We also need to be *sobered*, because planting churches is hard. Planting *healthy* churches is harder. Repeating the process on a regular basis is harder still. It is hard to birth a new church without the “mother” church taking strain. If the new church grows large and healthy, but the “mother” church shrinks and weakens, there is no net gain for the kingdom. It is hard to plant churches that are more about reproduction (seeing the unsaved come to faith) than merely repositioning believers from an existing church into the new church. For there to be net gain for the kingdom, there needs to be *reproduction*, not just repositioning. It is also psychologically hard for each local church to take “personal” responsibility for producing men to lead new churches. It can be tempting to outsource this responsibility to the movement, but church planters cannot be magically produced “by the movement.” They can only be produced by the local churches that those future planters are part of, within the movement. Certainly, the synergies of the movement can greatly help local churches with this process, but the movement is only as strong as the local churches in the movement. We can only say, “Our movement should be planting more churches,” if by that we mean, “We need to make sure that *our* church develops and deploys more plant leaders, support leaders, and finance.”

Reality check: a movement might take years to see exponential church planting, because it might take years to get the churches in the movement producing called and capable plant leaders. This is the key issue. Outside of God, *the leader of the plant is the critical success factor*. The other aspects - providing support leaders, finance, and strengthening visits from the outside - are all relatively easy compared to producing called and capable plant leaders. Furthermore, experience shows that you need a certain gift-mix to successfully plant a church. Being a good church leader doesn't necessarily mean you will be a good planter. For this reason, helping assess a potential church planter is vital, and forms part of our *Advance Church Planters Course* (ACPC).

Nevertheless, we have every reason to be encouraged. As we saw in *Document 1 The Big Idea*, despite considerable opposition, many strong churches were planted around the Mediterranean in the period of history recorded in book of Acts. Since then, millions of churches have been planted. Currently, there is a resurgence of church planting around the world and success stories can be found almost everywhere.

Be encouraged! At the time of writing this, our small movement (about 75 churches/congregations) has about 25 church plants happening, or in planning phase.

12 BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES OF PLANTING

1. The Importance of Strong Churches

The Jerusalem church was strong before it ventured beyond Jerusalem. The Antioch church appeared to have a strong five-man eldership team before sending two out to plant a church (Acts 13:1-3).

Application to Advance: Despite our zeal to plant more churches, we try not to compromise the fundamental strength of existing churches, as this would probably mean a net reduction of the kingdom of God, rather than a net gain.

2. Convinced of Both Local and Global

The Jerusalem church needed a severe jolt (persecution) to get them engaged beyond the local. Antioch needed a weighty prophetic moment to get them doing the same. Many churches need something similar to be galvanized to wider mission - such as reading this paragraph! Other churches are prone to imbalance the other way, i.e. over-extension that compromises the integrity of the local mission. It must be both/and.

Application to Advance: We help partner churches understand their obligation to the “glocal” (global and local) scope of The Great Commission.

3. Ensure Growth, Not Reshuffle

Without genuine and consistent gospel proclamation, church plants (and existing churches) can actually fail to truly extend the kingdom of God. Remember, reshuffling existing believers from a sending church to a new church does not necessarily mean anyone actually crosses the line of faith! The new church needs to prioritize evangelism. In Acts 8:4, we read, “*All* who were scattered went about preaching the word” – that’s the way to do it. Paul stressed that he personally baptized the first converts in the Corinthian church plant (1 Cor. 1:14-16) – that’s what church planting should be about.

Application to Advance: We help partner churches develop integrity and consistency of gospel proclamation. We help partner churches produce gospel-centered and gospel-sharing believers who understand the gospel clearly and are able to share it with others, whether at home-base or part of a church planting team.

4. Multiplication of Leaders

We encourage a “treble it” philosophy, whereby a church endeavors to produce three times the number of leaders that they currently need. The thinking is that you need one group of leaders to lead your church at its current size, another group to cope with increased numbers as your church grows, and another group available to send out to a new church plant. We encourage leadership development at every level, but developing “number 1 church planters,” i.e. men to lead new churches, is our main

focus. Philip was an example of a "number 1 church planter," who successfully planted in Samaria (Acts 8:5). Paul himself was a prolific "number 1 church planter." Another important group to develop is "support planters," i.e. those who are part of a church planting team. An example of this would be the Lystra church that generously sent Timothy to the wider mission (Acts 16:1-3).

Application to Advance: We help partner churches create a church culture that helps train up leaders at every level. We help partner churches spot, prepare, and correctly deploy "number 1 church planters" and "support planters," and elders, and deacons. Elders, senior leaders and potential "number 1 church planters" and "support planters" are encouraged to attend ACPC.

5. Short Strengthening Visits

Acts 8:14 records that, as the new church in Samaria was being planted, Peter and John came from Jerusalem to pray for these new believers to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Although this point underlines the importance of believers being filled with the Holy Spirit, it is actually about the importance of *short strengthening trips* to help get a new church up and running.

Application to Advance: We encourage short strengthening visits that build strength into church plants. We encourage all churches to offer their strengths and ask help for their weaknesses. It can be helpful to think in terms of categories, such as administrators, implementers, workplace gurus, discipleship gurus, worship leaders, and Ephesians 4 ministries. What are you good at? What do you need? Every church is strong in at least one area, and able to help strengthen a new church in that area.

6. Long, Region-Establishing Deployments

As well as making short visits to places, Paul sometimes relocated to a place for several years, which resulted in the planting of many churches. For example, his two-year relocation to Ephesus resulted in "all Asia" hearing the gospel (Acts 19:10), no doubt involving the planting of a region of churches in that area.

Application to Advance: Whenever possible, we try to free up appropriately gifted people for middle-to-long-term deployments to a new region to plant a region of churches. This is often costly, but a highly effective way to work.

7. Systematic Training of Leaders/Planters

While in Ephesus, Paul taught daily in the Hall of Tyrannus, which resulted in enormous gospel fruit in that region (Acts 19:10).

Application to Advance: Training of senior leaders and potential church planters is best done together, via programs such as ACPC and various eldership development tracks. Note, we do not want to disempower local churches in terms of their own training, but we believe that training leaders and planters together can complement the internal training that local churches do.

8. Backing Gifted Reproducers in Key Regions

In the book of Acts, it seems that certain combinations of *gifted individuals, and their churches, in key cities*, resulted in various “base churches” emerging as centers for multiplication. For example, the combination of the apostles and their mighty church in Jerusalem resulted in believers being scattered far and wide in Acts 8. Similarly, the combination of Paul and Barnabas in the great city of Antioch resulted in many churches being planted out the ministry of that church (Acts 13 and 14). We are also told that Thessalonica significantly influenced the surrounding regions (1 Thess. 1:7-8), and we can speculate that Philippi (the “leading city” of Macedonia) became a reproducing hub for Eastern Europe.

Application to Advance: There is often a noble desire in churches, especially in developed nations, to plant or support churches in underdeveloped and unreached nations. This desire can lead to a well-intentioned, yet non-strategic, possibly even unhelpful, approach. Without stifling credible acts of mission, we encourage partner churches to help raise up and help support *key individuals, based in key churches, in key geographical areas*, in distant nations, who can develop bases from which churches can be planted and strengthened in their nation. This is usually the most strategic way to work, and more fruitful in the long run.

9. Contribute Financially and in Prayer

New Testament churches contributed both finances and prayer to church plants.

Application to Advance: We encourage partner churches to sow both finances and prayer into the wider mission. To this end, we work hard on various online communications to boost awareness and prayer; and every partner church contributes financially to the mission. More about this in *Document 7 Finance*.

10. Partnership with a Translocal Team

The New Testament pattern reveals churches partnering with other churches *and* translocal teams in order to plant and strengthen churches. This combination of local churches *and* translocal ministries results in well-founded churches.

Application to Advance: We want partnership to be productive, enjoyable and based on healthy expectations. We want to emphasize church-to-church connections, as well as help each church meaningfully connect with gifted people who work translocally.

11. Robust in the Face of Setbacks

Acts 16 records two false starts in Asia and Bithynia before the gospel advanced into Philippi in Macedonia. Similarly, Paul needed to defend his church planting season in Thessalonica as not being a failure (1 Thess. 2:1).

Application to Advance: We try to help planters and their sending churches remain aware of the risks and challenges involved in church planting. We understand that church planting is not an exact science, and that there might be some unexpected turns in the road ahead. We remain loving and loyal to each other and the mission in the face of setbacks, disappointments, and delays.

12. Organized, Flexible and Spiritual

The New Testament planting strategy was a combination of the planned, the spontaneous, and the supernatural. There seemed to be a deliberate plan to target the main cities around the Mediterranean, but the early church also responded well to spontaneous initiatives. Examples include: preaching the gospel when they had to flee Jerusalem (Acts 8), obeying the prompting of the Holy Spirit to send out Barnabas and Paul (Acts 13:1-4), and visiting Macedonia as a result of Paul's dream (Acts 16:9-10).

Application to Advance: We try to be organized and strategic in our planning, while remaining flexible and open to spontaneous initiatives and the prophetic leadings of the Holy Spirit. We also work to cultivate prophets and prophecy in churches, and in the movement, knowing that this is one of the most important spiritual gifts.

FAQ'S ABOUT CHURCH PLANTING

Are church plants of an Advance church automatically part of Advance?

They are until elders are appointed. Then, once there are elders in place, the elders choose whether to continue with Advance or not. If they choose *not* to continue with us, we count it a privilege to have helped them get started; and we bless them on their way. Also, we sometimes support church plants that are not part of Advance (either independent plants or part of another movement); and when we do, there is no expectation that they will join Advance. Please note, however, out of respect for their situation, the kind of support we give a non-Advance plant might differ to the support we give Advance plants.

Are church planting and strengthening efforts optional or obligatory for partner churches?

We don't like words like, "obligatory," because it implies a "we have to," rather than "we get to," motivation. We run Advance on a "we get to" motivation, as this reflects the motivation of the gospel. Churches choose to become partner churches, because they are totally convinced by Scripture that normal New Testament Christianity involves church planting and strengthening, and therefore eagerly join in this worthy endeavor.

Other than the things we all do together to assist with planting and strengthening (prayer, financial giving, leadership training), each church will contribute selflessly to the mission according to their capacity, but without compromising the integrity of their local mission.

How can I plant a church with Advance?

If you are already part of an Advance partner church, you, your local elders, and some Advance leaders need to have a conversation about your aspirations. We will also need to discuss how we can help you test your calling, prepare for it, and support you in it. We recommend our *Advance Church Planters Course* (ACPC) in this regard.