

Christian Leadership Classes - Church Planting

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Why Plant New Churches

Many existing churches feel threatened when a new church comes to town. Many are reluctant to start new churches themselves, or consider it a low priority on the list of things churches are supposed to do. So why should we start new churches? I believe it is one of the most important questions facing Christianity today.

Peter Wagner's 5 Reasons

In his easy to read and helpful book, *Church Planting for a Greater Harvest* (1990, Regal Books), Fuller Theological Seminary professor Dr. C. Peter Wagner explains there are 5 very important reasons to plant new churches.

1. Church Planting is Biblical

Everyone knows that a mandate for the church is to go and make disciples (Matt 28). A group of disciples is a local church. The first activity accomplishing the purposes of Christianity is evangelism. The result of evangelism is people. These people need to gather together in small and large churches to be taught. To provide for a greater harvest, more local churches are needed.

2. Church Planting Means Denominational Survival

Christian leaders often lament the division that has caused so many denominations today. However, there is also a good side to this. There is a flavor of Christianity available for just about every taste. So long as what God considers important issues are maintained, the options in music, worship style, dress style, liturgy and traditions offer basic Christianity to an ever widening variety of non-Christians. We humans are often too weak to tolerate all this variety, so we choose to assemble with those most like us. It is a shame when part of the beautiful spectrum of God's Christian creation is lost. One way to stem the death of a denomination is "vigorously planting new churches."

3. Church Planting Develops New Leadership

Many churches do not develop lay leaders into church leaders. Many churches limit church leadership to those who can afford time and money to attend a seminary. However, the fastest growing churches do neither. They develop an atmosphere which stimulates the continuing development of leadership on all levels.

As Peter Wagner says, "new churches open wide the doors of leadership and ministry challenges and the entire Body of Christ subsequently benefits."

4. Church Planting Stimulates Existing Churches

A wonderful attitude of cooperation with existing churches can make some reluctant to start new ones for fear of harming present ones. Yet, current churches have often forgotten the great commission, and are no longer converting many to Christianity. When a new church comes to town, all are stimulated to rethink what they are doing about evangelism, and existing churches also tend to grow again. Even when there is a hostile attitude towards the new outsiders, God uses our human weakness for kingdom benefit.

5. Church Planting is Efficient

Many churches spend a lot of money on media evangelism. They often do excellent work, but at a high cost. Personal evangelism is the most cost effective method, and this is best conducted by a million local evangelistically-minded congregations, rather than exclusively by the relatively few denominational headquarters.

James Allen's 4 Reasons

In his Church Planting Manual (1997, Church Planting Ministries), which is posted on the internet, James P. Allen mentions 4 reasons to start new churches.

1. New Congregations are More Evangelistic

Typically, new churches win more than three times the number of people to Christ per year than those older than 15 years. One of the main reasons for this is that new churches have to be focused on evangelism in order to survive. Typically, a churchplanter will spend as much as 50% of his ministry calling on prospective Christians, whereas the established pastors spend very little if any time in evangelism. Typically, new converts will also still have many contacts with non-Christian friends. Christians establish more contacts with each other, and fewer with non-Christians.

2. New Congregations are a Blessing to Established Churches

This is similar to one of Peter Wagner's points. However, Jim Allen adds that fear is often a motivator for existing churches. Often this fear is associated with selfishness on the part of existing churches who want "exclusive fishing rights." However, God didn't give any part of his church an exclusive territory or franchise.

Such self-seeking fears, overlook the greater good of the Kingdom of God, and are unnecessary. A friend of mine once ran a furniture store, and commented that a furniture store thrives in the midst of several other furniture stores, because people like to visit them all. The same is true of churches. New churches of either the same denomination or another denomination located close together help to raise the spiritual awareness of the whole community, and everyone benefits.

3. New Congregations Raise Up New Leaders

Like Peter Wagner, Jim Allen believes that existing churches often "have a lack of room for more leaders." Some pastors complain that there are no leaders, but I have found that when new churches start leaders who were hidden in the woodwork all those years suddenly emerge. The truth is, they were always there, but felt overpowered by existing leaders, or unwanted, or simply didn't like to volunteer without being asked, or were shy, or didn't want to cause a problem, or had a personality conflict with an existing leader and felt that being part of a ministry team would cause too many personality conflicts.

Whatever the reason or reasons, planting new churches will allow these buried talents to be developed.

4. New Churches Reach Other Cultures

Most nations have minority cultures within their midst. Even among people of the same ethnic background, there are cultural differences between those of different ages. For instance, despite widely publicized racial problems between Americans of African and European descent, elderly blacks and whites have more in common with each other culturally than younger people of the same race. More churches split today over traditional versus contemporary or blended worship music than doctrine, somehow missing the point that music is a way to reach an unchurched generation for Christ. It is far easier to introduce a new worship style in a new church than an older one where tastes and power bases are entrenched.

Aubrey Malphurs' 4 Reasons

In his detailed and helpful book *Planting Growing Churches for the 21st Century* (1992, Baker Books), Dr. Aubrey Malphurs has his own comments on some of the points raised above and adds a couple more.

1. New Churches Grow Faster Than Established Churches

A Win Arn study showed that new churches can grow up to 4 times faster than older, larger churches. Can old churches ever achieve this growth rate? Aubrey Malphurs believes this task is too difficult, nobody knows how to do it effectively, and that starting new churches is a far easier task in the long run.

2. New Churches Evangelize Better Than Established Churches

Occasionally, some Christians feel called to help a new church, are teachable, cooperative and do so with the blessing of their former church association. Such people are a blessing, but rare. Sheep stealing (winning converts from other churches) is a distasteful business, a foolish move and often unethical. Members who transfer from older churches to a new one often bring with them unresolved issues which can really discourage a churchplanter, and hinder the growth of the new church. Far better to start with new people who had no recent association with another church.

Because most new churches desire to reach primarily the non-Christian or former Christian population, they are most effective in evangelism.

3. Leaders Gain Credibility Faster in New Churches

When a pastor transfers to an existing church, they are outsiders who must prove their worth. It can take a decade or more before a new pastor is finally accepted as the leader in an existing congregation, and not before he goes through a difficult struggle after the honeymoon is over. Often the honeymoon lasts a few years, but then opposition mounts. This is when most pastors are fired, or manipulated into quitting or transferring. This difficult adjustment period may last several years, and can be a time of great discouragement.

A great advantage of being the pioneering or founding pastor of a new church, is the instant credibility as leader. This is not to say that churchplanters who remain with their congregation for several decades won't have problems. When you deal with people, you expect problems. However, much of the post-honeymoon let-down doesn't occur. New people either like the new church or not. If they don't they leave in peace. If they do, they connect much easier from the outset.

4. People are More Open to Change in New Churches

The problem of new wine in old wineskins is not just something that faced the new church 2,000 years ago. It is something Christian churches face every year. When most of those you reach are new Christians, they won't be bringing with them preformed expectations and prejudices from previous church experience. This makes it much easier to introduce worship styles and expectations which can reach the next generation for Christ.

Elmer Towns' 2 Reasons

In his book *Getting a Church Started* (1993, Liberty University), churchplanting mentor Dr. Elmer Towns comments on a couple of reasons to plant new churches.

1. The Great Commission

Obedience to the Great Commission in Matthew 28 is the primary reason for planting new churches. As a result of the dispersion of believers recorded in Acts 8, new churches were planted in almost every known area of the world in less than 40 years.

2. The Call from God to Plant

Dr. Towns also gives another very important reason, God's call. If God has called someone to plant a new church, then nothing can stop them. He suggests three ways to prove that call. It begins with a burden that lasts longer than a day or two, and keeps nagging until something is done about it. The burning desire to start a new church can also be evidence of God's call. Lastly, Dr. Towns suggests that evidence or fruit of the gifts necessary to plant a church are needed. Of course, this is where faith comes in, because fruit may not come until after a church has been planted.

Robert Logan and Steven Ogne's 4 Reasons

In their excellent *Church Planter's Toolkit* (1991, Church Resource Ministries), Bob and Steve point to 4 reasons to start new churches.

1. The Nature of the Church

The church is in the process of establishing and training disciples. The best context for this is in a teaching community. The church is both an educational facility and a laboratory for Christian development.

2. The Historical Record

Christianity has always grown through the multiplication of assemblies of its saints. These churches were each only guaranteed a one generation existence, unless they believed in growth.

3. The World Realities

Human population keeps growing. These people will need to be reached with the gospel, and taught how to obey Christ in new churches.

4. The Vitality of New Churches

This is similar to some reasons given above. Just as children have more energy than their parents, and especially grandparents, so do new churches. This life and vitality is very attractive to new people.

Conclusion

C. Peter Wagner is often quoted as saying that church planting is the most effective evangelistic strategy under heaven. The great thing about existing churches is the wonderful atmosphere of love, joy and peace. The bad thing about this is that we can become comfortable, rather than getting about our Father's business of spreading the wonderful good news of salvation in Christ Jesus to others.