

Church Planting

Rev. Sean Love

Every local congregation (yes, even an Anglican parish) is a church plant. Every congregation begins sometime and somewhere as people respond to the gospel and are gathered by God into a congregation faithful to his word, living lives of worship to him in their geographical setting, to his glory.

Every church plant is unique in its context: timing and denominational circumstance, resources, sending congregation (if any), geographical and cultural setting, leadership, core members.

There are two main situations in Canada in an Anglican setting:

- 1) A “re-plant” of the entire existing orthodox congregation into a new physical and institutional space with all the opportunities that presents
- 2) A new church plant from an existing congregation

However, there are common principles to all church planting. The three most important are:

- 1) God plants churches. His eternal purpose is to gather people around Himself and His Word (i.e. Sinai). Earthly gatherings reflect what we are already in Christ (Eph 2.6). Therefore, planting congregations of faithful people is a response to His initiative, vision, and power. He is due glory.
- 2) Prayer, as a measure of our dependence on God, is essential.
- 3) All ‘church plants’ are ‘churches’ in the full New Testament sense. They are just at the beginning stages.

Why plant churches, anyway?

Church Multiplying in a Global Age: Acts 14

- 1) Church multiplying: Church planting is normal and constant
 - a. Not traumatic or spasmodic
 - i. Proclamation leads to planting
 - ii. Planting overlooked?
 - b. Pattern from 14.21-28 (Context: globalized, urban, pluralistic (14.11)
 - i. Christian formation
 - 1) Evangelism v 21
 - 2) Instruction v 21b-22 (See Acts 16.5; 15.32; 9.31)
 - ii. Church formation
 - 1) Believers congregate (ch's 14-16)
 - 2) Leaders consecrated v 23

2) Final Result: _____

A Strategy for Planting Churches

Paul's strategy was to plant urban churches.

- First, he went to the largest city in the region and preached and instructed people in the faith.
- Then, he appointed elders in every town (planted local congregations with biblical and godly leadership).

Paul knew that the way to most effectively influence a country was through its primary cities, and that the way to most permanently influence a city was to plant churches in it.

Richmond, B.C. is growing at a phenomenal rate (over 50 condo towers either being built or in the planning stages) and there is room for hundreds of new church plants. St. John's Richmond, which established itself (planted) in January 2007, should begin to think and pray about planting its first congregation already!

It has been shown by many studies that new churches are, by far, the best way to reach new residents, people groups, and generations. Newer churches attract new groups about 6-10 times better and faster than older churches do. Why? Younger and newer people can get into leadership faster; younger congregations can experiment more with how to reach the local context; it is more necessary that members' natural and spiritual gifts are put to use, which increases ministry at all levels (that is, there are no passengers, just crew!); and not least, the goal each week is not to satisfy the desires of the long-time members (there are none!) but to reach new people.

It is also the case that the average new church gains most of its members from people outside any church involvement at all. New churches of necessity have to focus on the needs of the outsider. And there is a multiplier effect when new believers become committed to a congregation: in the first few years a Christian will generally have more face to face contact with non-Christians than they will later on. Therefore they attract non-believers to the new church more 'reliably' than long time Christians. New believers tend to beget new believers.

Financially, new churches, unlike many other Christian ministries, require outside funding only at the beginning, and within a few years become the source of Christian giving to other ministries.

If a congregation needs to re-plant itself in a new location, the process at its best can allow for a sharpening of thinking around congregational priorities. It can be a time where unhelpful or peripheral practices, committees, causes, etc. are retired, and new mechanisms to get the saving word out established. Also, media exposure centered on the re-establishment of an existing congregation could help alert the community in a new way to the existence of a revitalized congregation.

In all these ways we see that church planting is both biblically natural and strategically effective, in God's sovereignty, in advancing the gospel.

Church planting is (ought to be) a natural part of Christian ministry: reading Acts we see that the basic elements of ministry include Bible teaching, evangelism, fellowship, discipleship, corporate worship—and church planting. Sending people out to begin new congregations is, in the New Testament, natural and constant, not traumatic and spasmodic.