

# Needed - A New/Old Church Planting Strategy

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Over thirty years ago the Christian Church Evangelizing Association (CCEA) was formed to assist in the planting of new churches in the Indianapolis area. For most of the last twenty years I have been associated with CCEA. I recently reviewed the history of CCEA. About this same time I was also reading or rereading things like:

America greatly needs a new round of bold, aggressive church planting efforts. . . Can . . . tens of thousands of local churches catch this vision?<sup>1</sup>

Every congregation should plant and mother a new congregation every two years. No congregation should remain barren and childless.<sup>2</sup>

Missionary [church planting] responsibility, in our view, does not rest in the Church Extension Division of IBSA, the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) nor with any board or society organized for missionary purposes. *It belongs to the local church.* [emphasis mine]<sup>3</sup>

A third problem was that the emphasis of the program had switched from equipping each local church to plant daughter churches to the recruitment, training and deployment of full-time church planters. In other words, . . . *they lost sight of the local church as the primary multiplier of new congregations.* [emphasis mine]<sup>4</sup>

Harvey Missionary Baptist Church . . . became the mother church to about twenty congregations. The Larkin Avenue Baptist Church . . . sponsored ten new churches in the first ten years of its existence.<sup>5</sup>

All of this made me think about how CCEA has planted churches and about church planting in our brotherhood as a whole.

## Needed - a new/old church planting strategy

### The problem

Historians say that around 100 years ago our movement was planting about 1000 churches per year. (Our share of a now divided movement would be over 250 churches per year.) In the early 1960's the records indicate we were starting close to 100 churches per year. Recent research indicates this is now about 30 churches per year.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Dan Griffiths, "Is the US Ready for DAWN?" DAWN Report September, 1992, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>Donald A. McGavran, Effective Evangelism, (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1988), pp. 11&12.

<sup>3</sup>Charles L. Chaney, Church Planting at the End of the Twentieth Century (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1982), p.49.

<sup>4</sup>Jim Montgomery, "When You Don't Reach Your Goal," DAWN Report, September, 1992, p. 11.

<sup>5</sup>Chaney, op. cit., p. 42.

<sup>6</sup>As late as 1967 the Directory of the Ministry listed over 100 new churches. In the three directories 1996 thru 1999 there are 288 new churches listed but only 40 (10 per year) of those were listed for the first time. The other 248 "new churches" include a camp, a campus ministry and 246 listings duplicating previous listings. Recent research found approximately 30 new churches started in the last year.

Several times in the early history of CCEA it was involved in two church plants in a year and averaged involvement in more than one church plant per year. The last 15 years CCEA has averaged about one new church every three years!

These are alarming trends. Six years ago I said, "Ten years from now our part of our movement could be planting less than 25 churches per year!" Within a couple of years of saying that we were close to that figure. We must make a radical change in the way we do church planting!

With the proper shift in the way we do church planting, ten years from now we could be planting more churches per year than we have ever planted. More than 1000 churches per year is within our capability!

It is now known that church planting is usually the most effective way to reach non-Christians; and denominational/movement/kingdom growth is directly related to the number of new churches planted<sup>1</sup>

### **The Solution**

As I contemplated the history of CCEA, one thing struck me. Early in its history CCEA helped churches (and individuals) plant churches. Recently CCEA has planted churches. With the exception of East 91st Street Christian Church, I am not aware of any church planted in the Indianapolis area which was initiated by another church (or churches) in more than 15 years!

Over the last 25 years we have bought a worldly definition of successful church planting. Consequently we have priced church planting out of the range of all but the largest churches plus organizations like CCEA. (I will talk about reducing church planting costs later).

### **WE MUST GET BACK TO CHURCHES AND INDIVIDUALS PLANTING CHURCHES.**

Every church should have a church planting committee. The closer the church planting effort is to the man in the pew, the more likely he is to become involved. That involvement may include prayer, calling, being part of the nucleus, etc. Whatever the involvement is, it is a tremendous asset we are now largely missing. (A large church could be divided into groups of one to three or four Bible School classes, etc. Each group would be responsible for regularly planting a new church. The entire church could have the role of an evangelizing association as described later.)

In addition, every church should have a church planting goal. When we have a public goal we generally work harder to reach that goal. Even our smallest churches could plant, perhaps with two or three (no more) other small churches, a new church every two or three years. The goal for our largest churches should be at least one church per year.

In 1991, the Southern Baptists were in the final stages of approving a "Key Church" program based on a similar program that was used in Texas. In a presentation to the Home Mission Board National Leadership Conference a "Key Church" was defined as a church which:

- \* Makes a long term commitment to make missions [missions equals church planting through out quotation] outreach a top priority.
- \* Prioritizes missions to the level of its own religious education and music programs.
- \* Establishes a Missions Development Council.
- \* Elects a director or minister of missions [a paid staff position] to lead missions expansion.
- \* Begins six mission/ministry [church] units each year. [Six was later changed to five.]

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<sup>1</sup>This is according to Dr. Donald McGavran, Dr. C. Peter Wagner, Dr. Medford Jones and other church growth experts.

\* sponsors at least six church type missions on a continuous basis. [The author of this proposal, who directed the Texas program, believes a new church should receive support for no more than a year.]<sup>1</sup>

Our largest churches could also do this.

### **Objections and responses.**

Many churches may think there is no need for a church where they are located. We need to look at not the number of churches in an area, but at the number of non-Christians (and inactive Christians). Usually these people can most easily be reached through a new church.

There is no urban area in the U.S. where the capacity of the churches even comes close to equaling the population. Even in rural areas there is a need for church planting. Based on the number of unchurched in one rural county in North central Indiana, the county needs at least seven or eight new churches.<sup>2</sup> Probably a better figure for that county would be twenty or thirty new churches. The situation in other rural areas is similar.

The kinds of churches that are needed, however, will usually not be a clone of the mother church. The message will remain the same, but the way it is presented will need to change to reach a different group of people.

Other churches are concerned about being hurt by a new church. Usually a new church helps nearby churches grow also, and God has a strange arithmetic for mother churches. One mother church sent about 15 percent of their average worship attendance to a daughter church. Six months later the mother church was averaging more than ever. Another church sent over half their choir members to a new church. The Sunday the new church started the mother church had more than normal in their own choir.

"We can't afford it," is a third objection to church planting. That is a major problem with the way we currently plant most churches. Most churches can't afford it. However, there is another way. Consider:

So how large do you have to be? Large in vision, not necessarily in numbers. One church of about 100 members is starting a new church every second year by sending out small teams. . . . .

One church of 70 people . . . in 1986 decided to do both: to build and to plant. After only 5 years they have 4 churches in that city and a total attendance of about 800.<sup>3</sup>

Peter Wagner says:

Frequently the founding pastor is bivocational or a tent-maker. This is one of the major ways of cutting the costs . . . and I highly recommend it. Most growing denominations make good use of bivocational workers. Southern Baptists, for example, have 10,000 bivocational pastors in the United States. They nurture these workers by giving them special recognition, providing them services they need, and training them in tracks that bypass the traditional seminary system. A full 50 percent of Southern Baptist pastors are not college graduates. This is a key reason why the Southern Baptist Convention is the largest Protestant denomination in the nation.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>J.V. Thomas, The Key Church Program, Unpublished presentation booklet for the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, National Leadership Conference, February, 1991, Chicago, Illinois. Before final adoption, "six" was changed to "five".

<sup>2</sup>This is based on the unchurched population of the county and Dr. C. Peter Wagner's criteria of one new church for every 1200 unchurched people. Other experts recommend one new church for as few as every 300 unchurched people. I think the latter is a better figure.

<sup>3</sup>Bruce Patrick, "Our Traditional Baggage Must Go," DAWN Report, September, 1992, pp. 6&7.

<sup>4</sup>C. Peter Wagner, Church Planting for a Greater Harvest, (Ventura, California: Regal Books, 1990), p. 72.

And Charles Chaney says:

Who led these churches? Laymen and men who had felt the inward call to preach. . . . they moved to one of these communities and "made tents." . . . Even today 50 percent of our pastors in Illinois continue to be bivocational.<sup>1</sup>

Many of the baby churches are nurtured and developed by lay preachers . . . Some have had theological training and some have not.

Availability is far more important than capability.<sup>2</sup>

Very few of them will be started by fully salaried church planters.<sup>3</sup>

Founding pastors plant and serve their churches for several years with little or no remuneration. Joseph Rainey has been the pastor of his church [about 250 members] for eight years. He has yet to receive one penny in salary.<sup>4</sup>

It is obvious . . . that seminary trained, ordained pastors will not be sufficient for the job ahead. The laity must be mobilized to the task, and men and women called of God but without the benefit of formal training must be utilized for church planting in our cities.<sup>5</sup>

Any church can afford to plant churches under the above conditions.

There is a place for full time paid church planters. Generally these will be catalytic church planters who will plant one or more churches per year. They will quickly turn over leadership in these churches to others, many of whom will be bivocational "lay" ministers whom the church planter and/or other church leaders will continue to train in an ongoing mentoring relationship.

#### **A NEW TEAM**

In the past few years the team concept, in which two or more fully funded church planters plant one church, has become popular among our churches. While there are advantages to this method, there are disadvantages that are often overlooked. There are better ways to use teams in church planting.

The primary advantages of the current team concept are that both the church plant and the individual church planters are almost guaranteed "success," and a relatively large church (often over the "200 barrier") is established.

The main disadvantage is that fewer people are reached. First, it creates a model that tends to discourage church planting because of the cost. Also, data from several recent church plants indicates that two fully funded church planters, using telemarketing, will reach about twenty per cent more people when they plant two churches rather than team planting one church. When there are more than two team members the difference is even greater.

There is significant further evidence that as the dollars per church plant go up, the number of people reached per thousand dollars goes down. The denominations that spend the most per church plant are stagnant or declining while those that spend the least (well under \$10,000.00 per church) have the most rapid growth.

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<sup>1</sup>Chaney, loc. cit.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 48&49.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 167.

Teams of workers are Biblical and we should continue to use teams in church planting, but we can be more effective if we add some new types of teams.

### **The new teams**

When we have a team of church planters (whether fully funded, partially funded or not funded) their goal should be to plant multiple churches in a relatively small area (city or section of a city). To retain the benefits of the team, there would be some kind of regular meeting of the team members for mutual encouragement and support. These meetings should be at least once a month. Twice a month would be better.

A team that plants multiple churches is, I believe, more biblical than a team which plants only one church. While we have few details, I don't believe Paul's team planted a church in Ephesus, for instance. I believe they planted several churches in and around Ephesus. (Acts 19:10) In fact, as far as I know, in addition to Ephesus, it is likely that several if not all of the other six churches of Revelation 2 and 3 were started by Paul's team while he was in Ephesus.<sup>1</sup>

A second type of team would be a team of people from a local church (or two or three small churches). This team would begin one, or preferably more than one, Bible study(s) in a target population. The people in the Bible study(s) would form the nucleus for a new church plant some months after the Bible study(s) begin. The team members would also secure a meeting place for the church; make whatever arrangements are necessary to begin worship services; provide teaching and preaching, etc.

A third type of team would add the local "evangelizing association" to the local church team. While the association may provide limited financial assistance, its main contribution would be church planting expertise and coaching of parent churches and new churches. This expertise could be provided both as a consultant to individual churches and individuals and thru workshops, seminars, etc. for both local churches and church planters. The association could also arrange local education for lay church planters.

In addition to providing church planting expertise, the association should encourage each local church to form a church planting committee and to plant churches (plural). Another valuable contribution would be to provide details regarding potential target populations (e.g. 34 year old married white male middle managers with two kids living in the suburb of Fishers. These are 62% unchurched. There are over 1200 people who come very close to meeting this description and they and their families number over 4000 people. This population segment is growing at nearly 20% per year.) I am convinced that these, church planting expertise and promoting churches planting churches, rather than planting churches themselves, is the way "evangelizing associations" can best advance the Kingdom of God.

Rural and small town churches, in addition to the church planting needs in their own area which were mentioned earlier, could team up with their young (or not so young) people who move to the city to plant churches. These Timothy's may be full time ministers, but in most cases they will be bivocational "lay" church planters.

### **Quality Church planting**

Some may complain that starting lots of small, low cost churches results in poor quality. However, some of these will grow into large churches<sup>2</sup>, perhaps nearly as many as if we tried to start only large churches. Furthermore, it seems that ten churches of fifty is better than one church of three or four hundred, especially when the larger church thinks it can, at best, plant another church only once every five or ten years while the churches of fifty see no major problem to duplicating themselves every year or two.

I think a large part of the problem is that we know too much. We've been to the church planting seminars and know the "right" way to plant a church. Consequently, unless we can do it "right" we don't do it.

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<sup>1</sup>In a personal conversation with Dr. Lewis Foster, adjunct professor of New Testament at Cincinnati Bible College & Seminary, he agreed that these and other churches in the area were likely started by Paul's team.

<sup>2</sup>Most of the largest churches in the world and in this country started with less than 50 people.

I am reminded of the story of Simon Sithole as told by Zidon Nutt. When Simon Sithole became a Christian he didn't have much education. He didn't know enough to know that he needed more education before he could be a preacher or plant a church or win a large number of people to the Lord. Because Simon Sithole didn't know that he couldn't do those things, in the six years that remained of his life he planted five churches and baptized nearly 2000 people into Christ. While Simon Sithole lived in another country and another culture, I think the story still applies. Charles Chaney, while director of church planting for the Southern Baptists in Illinois, had lots of experience in our culture. He says, "Availability is far more important than capability."<sup>1</sup>

I don't know what strategies Satan may use to hinder kingdom growth. However, if I were Satan there are two strategies related to church planting that I would use. I would try to keep churches and individuals from planting churches and I would try to have the Christians concentrate their resources on a very few church plants. The latter strategy would not only minimize the effectiveness of the resources, it would also help with the first strategy because churches and individuals would believe they could not afford to plant a church.

### **Making Double Vision a reality**

What could happen if we really get serious about churches planting churches? The Southern Baptists plan to have 1000 "Key Churches" each planting at least 5 churches per year. That would be about the same as 100 "Key Churches" for us. Suppose that between January 1, 2001 and December 31, 2005 we had an average of just 50 "Key Churches" planting an average of 5 churches each per year. That would equal 1250 new churches. Suppose that during that same time we had another 500 churches averaging one church plant per year and 2000 other churches each planting one new church. That would total 5750 new churches from slightly less than half our churches. What if most of the remaining churches also get involved?

Even without these remaining churches we would be planting close to 6000 new churches between now and the end of 2005. That compares with probably about 300 new churches if we continue on our present course. Even tho most of the 300 churches would be stronger than most of the 6000 and a larger percentage of the 6000 would fail to survive, the impact of the 6000 on the growth of the kingdom would be substantially greater than that of the 300.

If we continue as we are now, we will never achieve the goal of Double Vision (doubling our churches), not even in a hundred years or five hundred years. Presently we are planting less than one church for every church that dies. The best statistics we have indicate a very slight decline in number of churches over the last half dozen years<sup>2</sup>. Because the statistics are not completely accurate, it is impossible to say for sure that there has actually been a decline. However, it is very obvious that we are not making any significant progress. On the other hand, if we would have a massive commitment to churches regularly planting churches, doubling our churches over the next few years is not out of reach.

Are you available to start the ball rolling? Pray.

If you are a preacher, train your best people to do what you do so they can become a "lay" church planter or the "lay" minister of a recently planted church. Jesus had twelve trainees. You should have at least two or three.

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<sup>1</sup>Chaney, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

<sup>2</sup>The average number of churches reported in the **Directory of the Ministry** for 1996 thru 1998 is 24 less than the average for 1990 thru 1992.