

Leading Your Church to Birth a Daughter Church

Cultivating an Atmosphere for Corporate Reproduction

by KEN DAVIS

Church planting is the most effective evangelistic strategy for reaching the unchurched and unsaved. Many missiologists contend it's the best way to fulfill the Great Commission and to make disciples.

Among the many ways churches can be planted, intentionally parenting a daughter church is possibly the best approach. In fact, experience has shown that it is often far easier to plant a new church than to revitalize a dying one.

In the past, Bible-believing Baptists have often supported church-planting missionaries sent out under sound mission agencies, both internationally and domestically. Agency planters have been greatly used of God, particularly to plant in frontier areas where there is no nearby gospel-centered church. However, in recent years we've neglected what probably is the most effective method for launching new churches: churches directly birthing daughter churches, using their own resources and manpower. Sending a missionary church starter to plant for us is a more indirect approach and can rob the local church of the joy of raising up its own posterity.

Mission leaders are now rediscovering that planting a daughter church is one of the best ways to reach the unchurched. Over 220 million North Americans are lost and unchurched and have no meaningful connection with a gospel-centered church. In fact, today there are fewer churches per capita than 100 years ago. Even a quick look at the North American "harvest" reveals it is vast, diverse, and ready for reaping.

To meet this harvest challenge, Great Commission-focused congregations will need to rediscover the lost art of church reproduction. For shock effect, I like to call this "planned parenthood." Too often Baptists have grown by "accidental parenthood," that is, a church split! Planned parenting involves intentionality: budgeting, congregational preparation, team equipping, and much fervent prayer.

To begin the parenting journey, churches must be properly motivated. It is insufficient to plant new churches for pragmatic and demographic reasons; we must be driven by Scripture. Pastors and church leaders must be convinced there is a solid Biblical imperative for established churches taking the

initiative to intentionally reproduce themselves. They must see that church multiplication is not just the latest ministry fad; it is deeply rooted in Scripture. It's God's idea.

The Biblical Basis for Church Parenting

From the beginning, the Creator designed all healthy organisms with the capacity and desire to reproduce. God's purpose for all living creatures was clear: "Be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:22, 28). Multiplication was the sign and substance of God's blessing. Each group—plants, animals, people—was commanded to "bring forth" (reproduce) "according to its kind." Since the church is a living organism, God's creative plan requires that it, too, continually reproduce itself. Just as we are to multiply physically, we're intended to multiply spiritually. Thus, church parenting should be viewed as natural.

The Great Commission strategy of Christ is actually a spiritual multiplication mandate. He expects His followers to make and multiply disciples (Matt. 28:19, 20). His method for accomplishing this objective is evangelism, baptism, catechism, and congregationalism. Christ's disciple-making plan is to be carried out through the agency of the local church. Thus, to obey His mandate, if there is no congregation in a nearby community, we must start one. That is the story of the book of Acts: when people were saved, they were added to the church (2:42–47). Christ's call is for both individual and corporate reproduction. So church parenting should be viewed as Biblical.

The book of Acts shows that church multiplication was in the DNA of the early church, part of God's plan from the start. How did the apostles and first Christians carry out the last command of Christ? The historical record shows they reached their world through intentional church multiplication. Three things are said to have "multiplied" when God's people obeyed their marching orders: the Word of God (Acts 6:7; 12:24), the number of disciples (6:1, 7), and the number of churches regionally (9:31).

At each of these summary marker points in Acts, multiplication is the end result of the obedience of God's people. The same Greek word, *plēthunō*, is used for "multiply" in each of these references. This word speaks not just of adding to the church (Acts 2:47) but of exponential increase. It is a mark of the work of the Spirit of God. Luke shows how the church started by Jesus continued to expand as the Holy Spirit worked through the disciples. This expansion was geographic, but growth was quantitative, qualitative, and organic. Luke was recording for believers of every age what the church should look like.

In the apostle Paul's ministry in particular, we see this focused evangelistic strategy: he planted new churches that in turn planted new churches! The goal was never just to plant a single church. Paul's passion and plan was always to evangelize and plant where Christ had not yet been named and known (Rom. 15:20, 21).

Throughout Acts, the spread of the gospel and the

Dispelling Fears about Birthing a Daughter Church

Many churches seem reluctant to reproduce themselves in the form of new churches. This is unfortunate and unnatural.

Somewhere along the way, church reproduction and multiplication became unusual in North America. Usually it's because the pastor and leaders have developed misconceptions conditioned by common fears about parenting. Before moving forward into a church parenting project, these fears and concerns need to be dealt with.

Here are six of the most common concerns and myths, with suggested responses.

1. "We're too small"

Few churches believe they're large enough to reproduce. This raises the question, How big does a church need to be to start another? In practice, most congregations believe the answer is always just a little larger than they are. The reality is that 80 percent of North American churches are started by healthy, small- and medium-size churches.

Reproduction has more to do with your value system than your size. It is more an issue of your commitment to the Great Commission than the size of your membership or budget. We must remember that God has promised to do immeasurably more than we can imagine (Eph. 3:20). He often uses small things to confound the wise.

2. "It will cost too much"

Many average-size churches fear that parenting will be too expensive. They know sending seed families often means giving away tithers and committed givers. God, however, honors the Great Commission commitment of parenting churches. Studies show that normally within six months, a sponsoring church replaces its people sent to the new church. The same holds true of the finances. Prospective parents need to believe the Lord: "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). We can never outgive the Lord!

Church planting should not be confused with constructing a building. It's a faith venture, where people are brought together in relationships of fellowship and worship. Parenting doesn't need tons of cash; it's a people program, not a construction project. We don't need to start with an elaborate facility. There are many avenues for funding, and God will always bless a sacrificial church.

The truth is, in terms of actual dollars, planting a new church can be the most effective method of evangelization a church can invest in.

3. "We'll forfeit precious church fellowship"

Many fear parenting will destroy church unity and result in a loss of too many dear friends. True, there is pain in childbirth. Seeing devoted members of the church family move to the new church hurts. Parenting always involves sacrifices, but as in a human family, it's worth the investment.

Church parenting is a Biblical exercise of giving rather than getting or having. Typically in such selfless giving, the church receives a new rallying point and unites around a new challenge. The mother church

becomes even more attractive and sets in motion a new impetus for growth.

A healthy church understands that the goal is not how many you win and keep, but how many you train and send. Reaching the lost and unchurched is a higher priority than preserving fellowship, sweet as it may be.

4. "We'll lose leaders and workers"

Churches wonder who will take the place of so much talent and leadership invested in the new work. The irony is that in sending out our best—as the church at Antioch did (Acts 13:1–3)—the vacancies left behind are often filled by members and attenders waiting to get involved. Those who have been "pew-sitters" and spectators step up and begin serving with previously dormant spiritual gifts.

Prospective parenting churches need a missional mind-set and an enlarged vision for the harvest. The focus must be on the long-term growth of Christian churches, not on the short-term losses the congregation may experience.

5. "We'll be in competition with the daughter"

Experience shows just the opposite is true. Studies demonstrate that when new churches are planted, they spur on the evangelical Christian community to get serious about outreach. A new church normally is not launched just down the street from the parent church, so the focus is on reaching a new community or people group.

It takes different kinds of churches to reach different kinds of people. One church can't reach everybody. The truth is, even in the same community, two churches can coexist and complement one another, both reaching different segments of the community. Competition is not found in Christ's true church. Our struggle is with the evil one (Eph. 6:12).

6. "Our growth momentum will be hurt"

Will giving away people and financial resources harm the parent church? In reality, with proper planning, the reverse is more likely. Starting a daughter usually *helps* the sponsor church to grow. We must believe the Biblical promise, "Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over" (Luke 6:38).

In God's economy, "whatever a man sows, that he will also reap" (Gal. 6:7). Farmers understand this basic law of the land. Reproducing pastors must also understand God's math. When you try to hoard and hold onto people, you seldom grow to the next level. But when you freely give away your people and leaders, the Lord of harvest replenishes those resources in an amazingly short period of time and gives you more. It's a matter of faith!

Sadly, too often pastors are more concerned with their own corner of the vineyard rather than the growth of the church as a whole. A more important question is, How will parenting a daughter church affect the Great Commission advance of Jesus' church into unreached territories?

expansion of the church are intertwined. Acts 16:5 summarizes the rapid expansion: "So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily." They started with one church in Jerusalem; now there were many through multiplication. Thus, in Acts, church parenting should be viewed as normal, not as the exception. Unfortunately, in our day, corporate reproduction is often the exception.

The Antioch church is a fine example of an intentional mother church sending out its best, Barnabas and Saul, to do the Great Commission work of evangelistic church planting in pioneer areas (Acts 13:1–3).

Perhaps intentional church reproduction is best seen in the Ephesian church. Using the school of Tyrannus as his regional training base, Paul evidently mentored and sent about 15 leaders to plant at least six daughter churches in Asia Minor so that the entire region "heard the word of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 19:10, 20; Rev. 2; 3). Epaphras, one of his disciples, started the church at Colosse (Col. 1:5–7; 4:12–14). Evidently, Ephesus became the mother church of all the churches of Asia Minor.¹

Thus, birthing daughter churches is based upon God's original creation mandate, Christ's final commission to His church, and the example of the early church. In Scripture it is natural, Biblical, and normal.² From a careful study of both testaments, this Biblical principle emerges: healthy churches reproduce!

The True Fruit of a Church

An analogy might help. Let's ask, What is the true fruit of an apple tree? Many would say, "It's an apple, of course." But that is wrong. The true fruit of an apple tree is another apple tree. If you plant apple seeds in the ground, what you get is another fruit-producing apple tree. That's God's design.

Likewise, the true fruit of a small group is not a new Christian, but another group. The true fruit of an evangelist is not a convert, but new evangelists. The true fruit of a leader is not more followers, but new leaders. Likewise, the true fruit of a church is not just a new group or more new believers, but another local church!

Over a hundred years ago, Roland Allen, missionary to China, advocated this ecclesiological principle. In his classic missions text, *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church*, he shows that when the church is truly alive, spontaneous multiplication takes place, and that spontaneous expansion of the church involves not merely multiplication of Christians but

1 For validation of Paul's mentoring strategy and the regional church planting out of the church at Ephesus, see Dr. Ken Davis, "Mentoring Church Planters," *The Journal of Ministry and Theology* 14, no. 2 (Fall 2010); Robert Logan, *Be Fruitful and Multiply: Embracing God's Heart for Church Multiplication* (St. Charles, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 2006), 21–23.

2 For more about the Biblical and practical imperative for church planting, see chapters 1 and 2 in Roger McNamara and Ken Davis, *The Y-B-H (Yes, But How?) Handbook of Church Planting* (Xulon Press, 2005), available at RBPstore.org.

the multiplication of churches.³

This reality is evident when one studies both ancient and recent church history. Spurgeon's ministry in the 1870s was dominated by church planting. He was responsible (through the Tabernacle and his preacher's college) for the starting of 187 of the 682 Baptist churches planted in Britain from 1855 to 1897.⁴ Both the early Methodist and Baptist movements in America were marked by convert, group, and church multiplication so that they saw rapid growth on the western frontiers.⁵

Preparing Your Church for Corporate Reproduction

Pastors and church leaders, make no mistake: developing a culture of church multiplication will likely be one of the most challenging yet rewarding assignments you'll undertake.

How can an established church that has never been directly involved in church planting become a church-parenting church?

Many churches have a desire but don't know where to begin. Some, with good intentions, dive in and send out one of their own to plant a daughter church. But this effort often ends poorly. The existing church frequently becomes disillusioned with church planting altogether when its ill-equipped church planter fails. The church has invested a significant amount of resources into the planter and project but badly underestimated what it takes to properly assess, prepare, and coach a successful church planter today.

A Five-year Plan

Sending out a church planter is not the best first step. You can't become a church-planting church overnight. Here are some steps to take over time to position your congregation to make a significant impact through church planting. It is a five-year plan, realistic for any size church.

Year one

For year one, focus on two achievable objectives:

Step 1: Evaluate and redefine your church's missions strategy.

Many Bible-believing churches do international missions well. Other churches do local outreach well. But few churches model their corporate missions strategy after the threefold holistic pattern of Acts 1:8: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my

witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (ESV).

In this Great Commission text we see three aspects to church missions:

- Local: Jerusalem—Ministry to our city and local outreach
- Regional: Judea and Samaria—Domestic and cross-cultural church planting
- International: To the ends of the earth—Global missions beyond our borders

Many churches are involved in various parts of Christ's strategy. Few have combined them under one holistic missions strategy. Does your congregation value and practice all three of these components in a balanced way? To become a church-planting church, you must first be persuaded that church planting is a Biblical priority, an essential part of God's call to every church, and then design your corporate missions strategy accordingly.

Take time to realign your church strategy to include the priorities of Acts 1:8.

Step 2: Allocate a certain percentage of your annual budget for church planting.

Once you've decided to stress all three aspects of missions, the next step is to allocate resources for each. How much will be allocated for missions overall? How will these funds be divided among the three different aspects?

I recommend and encourage churches to work toward the goal of allocating 15 percent of their overall budget to missions: 5 percent to each of the Acts 1:8 priorities. Whatever you decide, keep in mind that churches that plant churches normally set aside significant financial resources for this work.

If you accomplish these first two goals in year one, you have made major progress. Be encouraged! Now you're ready to move to three more steps in years two to four.

Years two to four

Step 3: Partner with other churches in supporting a church planter.

What should you do with your newly freed-up church-planting resources? I suggest partnering with others in supporting a nearby church plant or planters. This might include

- recruiting a few churches to collaborate with yours to fully fund a regional church planter;
- joining with your state association or a planting network where you can partner together to support a church planter or planters.

Think of this as a planting mutual fund. Rather than trying to single-handedly fund a church planter, look to partner in doing so. In the seminary-based church-planter training ministry I lead, our church-planting projects are all done with partnering churches. For a solid Biblical basis and practical pointers for churches cooperating together to advance the gospel regionally, I recommend church leaders read *Churches*

3 Roland Allen, *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962).

4 Stephen Timmis, ed. *Multiplying Churches* (Fearn, Ross-shire, UK: Christian Focus Publications, 2000), 62–65.

5 See Ed Stetzer and Warren Bird, *Viral Churches* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 50–55. This book also gives numerous current examples of multiplying churches.

Partnering Together by Chris Bruno and Matt Dirks.

Step 4: Adopt and support an existing church planter.

Alongside this third step, I also recommend that churches adopt and build a close relationship with one particular church planter. Here are some ways to proceed as you coordinate with

Step 3:

- Prayerfully select one planter to support.
- Offer monthly financial support to that planter.
- Build a caring relationship with him.

Healthy churches normally and intentionally reproduce. Selfish and spiritually sick churches today are evidently on “birth control.” How deeply is your church committed to the vision of a daughter church? What are you willing to do to see this Biblical parenting vision achieved?

- Look for ways to bless him and his family.
- Allow the church planter to preach a couple times per year to cast vision and motivate.
- Send missions teams to assist the planter several times a year.
- Keep the planter in front of your people as part of your missions commitment.

Step 5: Intentionally build a church-planting ethos in your church.

If your congregation has never been involved in church planting, it is difficult to become a parenting church in one year. Your people may have little or no exposure to church planting. It takes time to cultivate or change culture. Give your church and people time to make this transition.

- Be consistent in your financial commitment.
- Be consistent in preaching, teaching, and communicating about church planting.

Cultivating a corporate parenting vision is best done by the lead pastor. He must create a mentality for multiplication and church planting through public preaching, private conversations, and leadership networking. His passion for the lost must be first seen, heard, and felt by the congregation before he asks for a response. Use newsletter articles, guest speakers, interviews with successful church planters, and short-term missions trips to expand the vision. Expect at least six to 12 months for your people to catch the vision and commit to parenting.

If you follow these five steps over a four-year period, your church will have prioritized church planting in your overall missions strategy, supported church planters, learned about church planting, and helped launch one or more new churches. The congregation has seen your commitment to church planting for several years and has become excited about being on mission with Jesus. Now you're ready to move into years five

and beyond with steps 6 and 7.

Year five and following

Step 6: Do a church-planting residency with a future church planter.

Study what other planting churches have done to develop an in-house church-planting internship and adapt workable ideas. Then devote 12–24 months to preparing and mentoring a lead planter.⁶ It's vital that you help the prospective planter bond

with your church.

This person may be “homegrown,” coming from inside your church, or be recruited from outside. He must be properly assessed, trained, and coached before your church sends him out. A nearby Baptist seminary or Bible college may be able to help you identify a student needing to do a residency internship. For example, Project Jerusalem requires Baptist Bible Seminary men who are training to be church planters to do a church-based internship.

Most Bible college and seminary graduates have not been adequately trained to be successful North American church planters in the 21st century. Don't assume your recruit is well equipped to launch a new church. As part of your church-designed planter training program, consider sending your future planter to a church-planting “boot camp.” Several GARBC-related mission agencies have annual planter training events that you might utilize.⁷

Step 7: Develop a planting team to send out with the lead planter.

As you continue to build a planting culture as a sending church, recruit and train a team of committed coworkers to form a launch leadership team. Consider hiring staff with the goal of sending them out to plant in the near future. In the current culture, it is poor strategy to send a “lone ranger” church-planting couple to start a new church from scratch without a supportive team. Team ministry has Biblical precedent and is far more successful.

6 For a Biblical case of churches mentoring church planters, see Ken Davis, “Mentoring Church Planters,” *The Journal of Ministry and Theology* 14, no. 2 (Fall 2010).

7 For example, Baptist Mid-Missions provides a four-day School of Church Planting held every June. The Association of Baptists for World Evangelism and Baptist Church Planters have similar training events.

May the Lord of the harvest motivate today's churches to intentionally reproduce so that this generation can be disciplined for Christ! "Jesus said . . . 'Do you not say, "There are still four months and then comes the harvest"? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!'" (John 4:34–36).

Aim to give 25–50 people to the church plant, leaders as well as laypeople, all with complementary gifts and roles. Check to see if a partnering church might give or lend two to five families to the planting project. Work with the support of a national or regional church association, planting network, or experienced planting ministry to help assess, train, and coach both your team leader and his launch team.⁸

In conclusion, healthy churches normally and intentionally reproduce. Selfish and spiritually sick churches remain infertile. Sadly, too many churches today are evidently on "birth

⁸ Project Jerusalem has developed numerous parenting resources to assist independent Baptist churches in their church-planting endeavors. The author also teaches the four-day module "Churches Planting Churches" every other August at BBS. It is designed for pastors and church leaders preparing to lead their congregations to parent daughter churches. Contact BBS for more information or for a list of resources for your church.

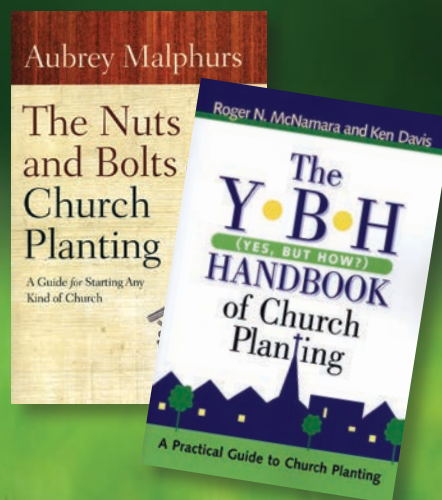
control." How deeply is your church committed to the vision of a daughter church? What are you willing to do to see this Biblical parenting vision achieved?

May the Lord of harvest motivate today's churches to intentionally reproduce so that this generation can be disciplined for Christ! **B**

Ken Davis (DMin, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) has been in church planting for over 35 years. At Baptist Bible Seminary, he has recruited, trained, and coached planting teams that have launched eight churches. He cowrote The Y-B-H (Yes, But How?) Handbook of Church Planting, a training textbook for independent Baptist colleges and seminaries. Dr. Davis has also written numerous journal articles on church-planting models, ethnic church planting, and multicultural themes.

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