

SECTION 1

# Start on Solid Foundations



# 1 Why Plant New Churches?

THE BIRTH OF A BABY USUALLY BRINGS A LOT OF JOY. We love to examine the baby's tiny fingers as we marvel at God's miracle of newborn life. We want to hold the baby ourselves or draw close enough to hear its cute coos and tiny cries. We find ourselves full of hope, praying for the child, imagining how the world will be different as this little one grows, matures, and makes a difference for Christ.

The same infectious smiles accompany the birth of a new church.

On January 2, 2001, the board at Nampa, Idaho, First Church of the Nazarene made a historic decision. It voted unanimously to become a parent—to start a new church before the year ended. It would be based right there in their small town of 50,000 people. Stephen Borger, senior pastor at the time, spearheaded a campaign called Give It Away that invited prayer support from the parent church, raised major funding, and released several dozen of its people to join the launch team. They appointed their children's pastor, Paul Johnson, as the launch pastor.

The birth occurred in September 2001 as Real Life Community Church. The response was so strong that the new church had to go to double services in just three months. It touched hundreds of people who had given up on church—or had never been to a church.

The mother church that gave so much to make the new life happen likewise experienced new levels of life. The excitement and joy of helping bring about new life spurred renewal in all kinds of ministry.

In early 1997 another new baby named NorthStar was born, this one at the Comfort Inn Conference Center in Kennesaw, Georgia. Under the leadership of founding pastor Dwight "Ike" Reighard, the 365 people in attendance on that Sunday in January agreed to develop a lifestyle characterized by building relationships with lost people. So the infant church began to grow, experiencing the spiritual birth of new Christians at each phase of its life.

The young church became passionate about sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with family, friends, and neighbors. Today NorthStar has grown so much that it spilled over from one service to two on Sundays, plus a third service on Saturday night, not to mention ministries running throughout the week.

In New York City, Redeemer Presbyterian Church (PCA) was planted in 1989 through a team led by Tim Keller. It started with nothing more than an audacious dream: to launch a movement of churches from the heart of the nation's largest and arguably most influential city. More than a decade later, that goal remains at the forefront of every long-range planning discussion held by Redeemer Presbyterian Church on the island of Manhattan.

The worshiping congregation is 80 percent young, single adults, reflecting the demographics of Manhattan. It expanded from one to two and now three different services, each with a distinctive style. One is noted for classical music, another for the use of jazz. Even

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though it has already become a multisite church of worshiping congregations in several different locations across Manhattan, the congregation knows it will not reach huge sectors of unchurched population segments unless it also plants new churches.

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As a result, Redeemer Presbyterian also began to ring greater New York City with daughter congregations: two in 1994, one in 1995, one in 1999, and several more between 2000 and today. It has also been instrumental in starting new urban congregations in other cities like San Diego, Washington, D.C., Vancouver, and Campinas, São Paulo (Brazil). All share a highly positive view of the city as the strategic center for ministry, a noncondemning evangelistic heart for those who don't yet have a faith relationship with Jesus Christ, and a balanced concern for ministry in both word and deed.

In order to further accelerate impetus for continued church planting across many ethnicities, the church launched a Church Planting Center led by a Brazilian-American. In 2002 it hosted its first assessment for potential

church planters, walking several dozen people through five intensive days designed to determine their suitability for urban church planting.

Redeemer's daughter churches are making an impact for Christ from Greenwich Village to Harlem in Manhattan, from Astoria in Queens to Montclair in the New Jersey suburbs. The constant flow of prayer needs and encouraging reports back to the main congregation help keep its spiritual fervor high and its own evangelistic focus sharp.

## Two Primary Ways to Reach Your Immediate World

These stories represent the two primary ways to reach your community and world for Jesus Christ. You can work through an already-established church to bring renewal in the congregation and to spur outreach beyond its membership. You can also help birth a new church, either going yourself or in some way lending support to someone else who is extending the Body of Christ.

Both pathways represent good choices. Both recognize how strongly God's heart beats for lost people. Whether new churches or established ones do the outreach, the common thread is that lost people matter to God.

The choice is not an either-or issue; it's both-and. I challenge every reader of this book, whatever your role in the local church, to also become very intentional about helping plant new churches. Here are five compelling reasons why.

**1. New churches represent the leading edge of Jesus' Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20).** Starting a new church is the most proven, most effective means for reaching people who do not have a relationship with Jesus Christ. Research across many denominations has verified what Peter Wagner long ago stated: "The single most effective evangelistic methodology under heaven is planting new churches."<sup>1</sup>

Why? Most new churches are built with a sizeable number of new converts. Thom Rainer says in the typical established church in America, it takes the combined efforts of 85 Christians working over an entire year to produce one convert.<sup>2</sup> Not so for most new churches. They're often filled with new converts. It's not unusual for 10 to 50 percent of a new church's membership to say that they became followers of Christ through the outreach

of their church. The typical healthy new church gains most of its membership from among people who are not active with any other worshipping community.

**2. New churches also extend new frontiers for how to contextualize the gospel afresh (1 Cor. 9:20-23).** Church planters test new ideas as they look for ways to reach people for Jesus Christ. How? New churches often seek out people beyond the reach of existing churches. As they identify an underevangelized population segment or geography, they seek until they find a breakthrough that connects them with their target group or location. Through this creativity and prayerful innovation, the new congregations become the testing place for what is ahead in terms of avenues that God is blessing.

Almost without exception, the new churches from 20 to 40 years ago are the leaders of today. Of the largest churches in the United States, many fit that age range, such as Willow Creek Community Church in metro Chicago and Saddleback Community Church in metro Los Angeles.

**3. New churches bring new life and vitality back into the established churches.** The newer congregations who find the breakthroughs end up leading all of the other churches. They keep us all relevant. Their experiments and discoveries benefit the entire Body of Christ.

Every church was a new plant at some time. No church would exist unless someone helped it get started. This idea may not sound profound, but it's an important reality.

**4. New churches set the pace for entire denominations.** You can tell the vitality of a denomination or movement by the number of churches it plants. Some denominations are headed for serious trouble ahead simply because they plant such a small percentage of new congregations. Their birth rate doesn't even keep up with the death rate at the other end of the church life cycle.

Other thriving denominations, with constant stories of changed lives through Jesus Christ, are inevitably ones that place great value on church planting. They understand that the only way we expand beyond where we are today is to press out, become pioneers, and launch new works.

What will the world look like 200 years from now if no one has a new baby between now and then? The answer is easy: no one will be around to answer the question!

Churches likewise have a life cycle. Most of us can give a ready example of a church that's dying, but what are we doing to help new birth occur?

**5. Church planting gives Christians an incomparable joy and sense of purpose.** I planted two churches firsthand, both of which have become major churches in important regional cities—Columbus, Ohio, and Portland, Oregon. Every time I think about these congregations, I'm like a father who wells up with joy and pride inside.

A few years ago I visited the first church plant, Grove City Church of the Nazarene in Ohio. I met a couple dozen people I led to Christ maybe 20 years before. Their lives—and that of countless others they touched—are different because a new church reached out to them. On that same day Bob Huffaker, the senior pastor, told the whole congregation that I built a "great heart for redeeming people" into the DNA of the church. He affirmed that it has remained a core characteristic of the church throughout the years.

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In recent years, someone at the Phoenix airport came up to me and introduced himself. “I found Christ under your ministry at New Hope Community Church, Portland, Oregon,” he explained. “Today I’m pastoring a Church of God in Prescott, Arizona.”

Meeting him made my day because it filled me with joy. But I’m not the only one who is joyful because of him. Through that church, many more people experienced lasting eternal joys as they entered a life-changing relationship with Jesus Christ. That spreading of joy will go on and on, as it multiplies through the fruit of other people’s lives as well.

## The Best Personality Matches

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Everyone can be involved in a new church on a secondhand level through prayer, financial support, and other means of encouragement. Suppose God is calling you to a first-hand role in launching a new congregation. You might recognize God’s leading through a holy restlessness that could be identified through these questions:

- Are you someone who is dissatisfied with church as status quo, someone willing to take fresh, creative, or daring steps of faith to reach people for Christ? *Then you might be a church planter.*

- Do you feel boxed in a lot of times, and you want to break through the box and do something great for God? *Then you might be a church planter.*

- Do you like to create something from nothing, act as a pioneer, and try new things for God? *Then you might be a church planter.*

- Are you a “gatherer” of people, willing to think about drawing and connecting people from early morning to late night? *Then you might be a church planter.*

- Do you long to do the work of an evangelist, even if that’s not your spiritual gift? *Then you might be a church planter.*

There is no “one right way” to start a new church. God makes every church, like every fingerprint, just a little different. But there are certain personality types who typically excel as part of a new church plant.

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Church planting is essential to reach the next generation for Christ. How will you become more involved? As you dream and set goals for the future, why not ask God if

there is some way you could be more involved in helping a new church take birth?

If your heart is beating just a bit faster as you imagine these possibilities, then go back and read the Introduction to this *Starting a New Church: How to Plant a High-Impact Church* kit, so that you can get maximum benefit as you go through it.

Student Work Sheet 1

*Discussion Questions for Church Planting Teams*

1. You're probably going through this material because something has spurred your interest in starting a new church. What is that dream? Describe it as much as you can. Write down your church-planting dream. Save your description to return to in the coming months.
2. Which of the reasons given for starting a new church is most compelling to you? Why? How might your answer tie into a dream for your future?
3. What are your main spiritual gifts? How might God use them in the role of a new church starter?
4. Name three ingredients in your past that God might use to help launch a new church. These might be anything from people skills to organizational abilities to a compassion for people in need.
5. Make time to pray, asking God to shape your dream of what He wants to do through you. Tell God you're willing to be stretched. Ask for an ever-increasing faith.

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*Exercise*

Share your reasons for being involved in a new church plant with someone else, ideally someone who is unchurched. See how they respond. Debrief your experiences with your church-planting team.