

THEME: **CHOSEN TO BEAR FRUIT...  
THROUGH STARTING NEW CHURCHES** S-450  
Or: **If I Were Starting A Church Again...**  
SCRIPTURE: John 15:16,17  
GOAL: Listeners will learn from experiences, both positive and not positive, about starting a new church, and will be inspired to do so.  
DATE/PLACE: 1/11/09 Shiloh Mennonite, Reading, PA New Year's focus on reaching Reading

**INTRODUCTION:**

One of the most gratifying things of my life is being used of God to start churches... (types, places, etc.)

The early church understood Jesus' mandate to make disciples by gathering new believers in churches.

Sub-title of message could be: "If I Were Starting A Church Again..."

Why start new churches when there are so many already? Only 12% could get into churches in North America if all were filled to capacity; our country needs more churches for national, social, moral renewal (the Wesleys in England vs. France's revolution); denominational survival; integration of new people; discovery and development of gifts; the early Church's example; Jesus' promise "I will build my church".

**INSTRUCTION:**

1. I would try to discern more clearly (and narrowly) the **primary geographical, ethnic focus** God has laid out for us (without excluding anyone). EX: recent immigrants, drug addicts, homeless, students, alcoholics, etc.— or --- more settled folks. EX: the need for a skeleton in order to have something to attach muscle, flesh, etc.
2. I would try to include **more prayer** in my personal life, in the team, and in the life of the church (with fasting).
3. At the outset of the church planting effort, I would settle on an **ideal proportion** of Mennonite background believers (MBB) in relation to non-Mennonite background believers (perhaps 25% / 75%). Then as MBBs explore coming to help in the work, I would refer them to our ideal. If their coming would exceed that proportion, I would ask them to wait, to witness in their home areas till we win more locals or to settle in a neighboring community where we could coach them as they start a sister church. I would not set that ideal at 50/50 since those with church experience carry a disproportionate influence due to their head start in Bible knowledge, personal growth in disciplines, and cultural similarity to the church planters.
4. I would promote conversion growth by persistently **asking people to go witnessing** with me (weekly), especially locals won to Christ. I would put priority on one-to-one witnessing and rely less on impersonal means (such as distributing literature). When we started our school, I neglected evangelism with the increase of administrative work involved. I should not have neglected it.
5. I would give more attention to **biological growth** (church growth through the birth of member children). I would give more classes on God's love of children, child training, etc. Converts often come to our churches without the entire family and with worldly (negative) values about children. If not corrected, the numbers of those from Mennonite background can soon overtake the non-MBBs just through birth rate— unless we learn how "to win them faster than we can birth them."
6. I would be more careful with transfer growth by quickly **contacting the pastor of regular visitors** to our church to make sure they are not wolves in sheep's clothing. "Other people's wandering sheep may become your goats." I would neither encourage nor prohibit transfer growth. The fruit of evangelism tends to be more loyal to the local church than transfer growth.

7. I would insist on organizing a ***weekly outreach time*** as a regular part of our church calendar at which all would be encouraged and urged to participate in some fashion. Why do we organize regular worship and prayer meetings, expecting faithful attendance, but not regular outreach?
8. I would encourage ***cell groups*** from the very beginning as an integral part of the life of the church.
9. I would organize prompt ***visits to local visitors*** of church activities and connections with the families of children contacted through VBS, clubs and camps.
10. I would try to ***tweak our periodic special events*** so that we would have at least one quarterly event planned with the unchurched in mind and encourage church people to bring their unchurched friends. EX: fourth of July; Labor Day; Christmas; Easter; men/boys' camping; couples' banquet, etc. Perhaps even require church people to bring (or at least to have invited an unchurched friend) in order to be able to attend.
11. I would start the ***Servant-Leader Apprenticeship*** earlier as a deliberate, planned approach to raise up more leaders, not only to pastor the new church but also to serve as missionaries and church planters.
12. I would put more ***emphasis on discipleship*** and try to get locals involved in both receiving and giving discipleship as a way of life. EX: Bible study; *Abundant Life*; *Life of Christ* and many other type materials.
13. I would do everything possible to provide a ***Spanish option*** during Sunday School in order to nurture those who are learning English in an attempt to keep both generations in the church and nurtured.
14. I would ***adjust my approach*** a bit in two areas: teach I Cor. 11 emphasizing headship rather than primarily from the perspective of being a veiling for prayer; perhaps not make total abstinence from alcohol a test of membership but teach and urge in that direction. (I still waver on how I would approach this last one.)
15. I would locate the ***responsibility for a church plant*** within the leadership team of the church rather than with the local missions committee. Perhaps set a maximum size (120); plan and pray toward a church plant early in the life of the church.

CONCLUSION: