

STEPS FOR PLANTING A CHURCH – By Allen Roth

Planting a church is an adventure, a journey, a process, a series of steps one after another. Jesus encouraged us to count the cost of being His disciple (Luke 14:28). Surely this principle applies as well to the vision of planting a new church.

The following is an attempt to outline the steps a church planter often encounters in the journey of planting a new church. It is not an exact template that we can mechanically follow in the process. God loves and uses a variety of personalities, gifts and ideas as He pleases. At the root of everything is total surrender to the will of God under the direction of the Holy Spirit. Without that continual surrender, nothing “works.”

May God guide as you “survey the terrain” and “count the cost” of planting a new church. May He fill you with hope, courage, vision and faith to dare and to do for His pleasure. May He wonderfully demonstrate through you His ability “...to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us” for His glory” (Eph. 3:20 ESV).

- ___ 1. Begin with prayer and fasting and continue that throughout the process.
- ___ 2. Talk to your church leaders (pastors, overseer, etc.) about your interest and vision. Solicit their advice and prayer. Recruit a mentor, coach and/or overseer for accountability. Recruit a network of encouragers. Talk to the BMA church planting sub-committee and solicit their partnership.
- ___ 3. Recruit prayer partners who will pray regularly for you and your vision of planting a church. Get their names; give them regular prayer requests.
- ___ 4. Count the cost: move, job change, impact on your family, befriending and spending time with the unchurched, saying “no” to some activities with home/extended church and relatives.
- ___ 5. Prayerfully determine which kind of church God is calling you to plant: a) one composed primarily of Mennonite-background believers (MBB) into which you want to incorporate local non-Mennonite-background believers (non-MBB); or b) one composed primarily of non-MBB’s initiated by a minority of MBB’s. This decision is absolutely crucial to make at the very beginning.
- ___ 6. Consider prayerfully the approach you envision using (in consultation with your church leadership)
a) “swarm” approach (get off to a good strong start by recruiting a number of church families);
b) “start from scratch” approach (recruit one or two other couples/singles, then win locals, with church planters being in the minority). This decision will significantly impact your strategy for planting the new church.
- ___ 7. Clarify early the team size you envision as well as the ideal proportion of MBB’s to non-MBB’s in the church plant (1/3; 1/4; 1/5 etc.) and what you propose to do if you approach exceeding that proportion. Put it down in writing. Then recruit co-workers accordingly.
- ___ 8. Recruit team members with gifts that will complement yours. Clarify your vision, beliefs and applications to ensure you are on “the same page” with each other. Discuss openly where you stand on “hot button” issues such as: divorce and remarriage; gender distinction in clothing; male/female roles; jewelry; modesty; worship styles, membership, affiliation, etc. Substantial differences that are unknown and unexplored can be destructive to team unity later.
- ___ 9. Prayerfully determine the area where you intend to plant a church. Consider factors such as: an area of spiritual/moral/social need; an interest you may have; a sense of calling; contacts you may have in the area; the number of evangelical churches there; proximity to other similar Mennonite churches, etc. Go personally to “spy out the land” to see if God confirms your interest and calling. Visit area churches and meet pastors, asking them about the community and needs they see and sharing with them your vision.

- ___ 10. Move to the community. Set a goal for how much time you will spend weekly to get acquainted and interact with the unchurched. Set regular times and days you will work intentionally to meet/befriend the unchurched. Ask your overseer to check in with you on how you are doing with your goals.
- ___ 11. Learn how to share “your story” (personal testimony) and “His Story” (the Gospel). Do it repeatedly until God gives you some people who accept Christ. Put priority on lots of personal, one-to-one, face-to-face witnessing. Don’t depend on impersonal means (tracts, billboards, etc.). Invite people to Christ. Ask for a commitment to Christ.
- ___ 12. Ask for opportunities to read/study the Bible together with those who are interested and especially with those who pray to accept/surrender to Christ. Start Bible reading/studies with people in their homes. Begin with a Gospel. The book of Matthew is recommended since it is the beginning book of the New Testament, contains the Sermon on the Mount, commands us to make disciples, baptize and to teach them to obey Christ’s commands and may have been written specifically for the purpose of teaching new believers. Try to include family members and friends of the interested person/new believer whenever possible in an effort to win people from the person’s network. Gather other useful tools that are helpful for the discipling process (see list of resources).
- ___ 13. If you decided to use the “start from scratch” approach, be cautious about quickly buying a building until you have a number of locals committed to Christ and who will help you in the discernment process so they take ownership in the project.
- ___ 14. Begin weekly corporate worship services (in a home or rented/purchased building) after you have made many relationships in the neighborhood, have begun home Bible studies and have outgrown living rooms. Establishing formal, public weekly worship services takes time; doing so too soon can actually diminish the time you need to build relationships with the very people you hope to win.
- ___ 15. If you include children’s ministry as part of your outreach strategy, make sure you “follow the children home” to meet their parents and extended family. If you and/or your team mates are not willing to befriend and win the parents, don’t use your precious time in children’s ministry.
- ___ 16. Once you begin regular worship services, take offerings. From the very beginning include giving toward a building fund and for missions. Teach new believers from the beginning the privilege of tithing. Include new believers in choosing a name for the new church. Beware of choosing street names—a future move may make the name obsolete.
- ___ 17. Invite new believers to a “Discovery Class” in which you share with them the vision of the church plant, your doctrine and your practice. Be up-front about who you are, what you believe and why, based on the Bible. Invite them to consider baptism and church membership. If you decide you will baptize soon after confession of faith with a later decision to become a church member, be sure you clarify prior to baptism that church membership is absolutely essential and agree together on subsequent discipleship classes with a specific time for review of the church membership decision.
- ___ 18. “Draw the net” at the appropriate time to form a charter membership (the first group of members). Prepare for the chartering service by first drawing up a constitution as well as requirements for church membership.
- ___ 19. Make a decision about affiliation with a larger movement rather than planning to “go it alone” as a local church. You may have already made the decision as a church planting team or you may wish to wait until the new church has a charter membership. If it is the latter, invite representatives of proposed movements to come to the church plant to present their vision, standards, answer questions, etc., following which you will lead the new church in making its decision. Once a decision is made, make arrangements for an overseer for the new church. An overseer can be very useful for encouragement, counsel, intercession and, occasionally, assistance through difficult situations.

- ___ 20. A church building: Rent? Buy? Build? Continue to save money as a new church for your future building. Make the decision together. Let the group wrestle it out together, rather than the church planting team or the sponsoring church deciding for the group. Avoid indebtedness if at all possible. Remember that cheap buildings may not always be cheap nor appropriate in the long haul.
- ___ 21. Throughout the whole process, take local believers with you as you witness and disciple. Teach them by modeling. Never stop witnessing. Find ways to build a vision in your church for personal witnessing, faithful discipling, courageous church planting and active missionary sending. Pray that your new church will be a church-planting church.
- ___ 22. Begin to give leadership training early in the process of church planting. This can include guided reading, small assignments, classes, apprenticeship on the leadership team, and more. Aim to involve the group in selecting leaders. Work and pray toward a leadership team. Pray that God will raise up local men to serve on the team. Begin with short term assignments: six months, a year, etc. to be followed by review.
- ___ 23. Give training in marriage and child rearing so that locals will have vision, hope and skill in marriage and family. If you don't, members from Mennonite background may have more children than the locals which will eventually tip your cultural mix, thus ending up with another MBB church.
- ___ 24. Expect setbacks and opposition. Persevere! Don't give up!
- ___ 25. Don't forget to fast and pray...all the way through!

Resources:

Church Planting...

Planting Churches That Plant Churches, Joel Comiskey, CCS Publishing, c. 2009, 204 pp.

Global Church Planting, Biblical Principles and Best Practices for Multiplication, Craig Ott and Gene Wilson, Baker Publishing, c. 2011, 449 pp.

A Vision of the Possible, Daniel Sinclair, Authentic Media, c. 2006, pp. 294.

Planting Churches Cross-Culturally, A Guide for Home and Foreign Missions, David J. Hesselgrave, Academic Books, c. 1991, pp. 348.

Evangelism...

Just For You

Tracts from CLP 800-776-0478; published monthly in English/Spanish

Have You Heard The Good News?

Booklet for sharing the Gospel from Christian Light Publications

Bible Study for Beginners

Gary Troyer www.lulu.com Six lessons to share the Gospel and lead to a decision for Christ

Mennonites, Who They Are, What They Believe Tract from CLP

Discipleship...

T4T, A Discipleship ReRevolution, Steve Smith and Ying Kai, WIG Take Resources, c. 2011, 348 pp.

Secrets For Growing Strong

allenroth50@gmail.com 718-827-1036 Seven basic lessons

Abundant Life

*18 basic lessons for new believers

The Big Picture, Overview of the Bible.

*20 lessons

Organic Disciplemaking

McCallum/Lowery 800-735-5865

Leadership Training...

Pastoral Theology, Life of Christ based on the Gospel of Matthew, 6 volumes, 3 months each; excellent for leadership training*

How To Preach, 10 lessons on how to prepare and deliver sermons*

*Note: These courses (titles and content) may be previewed at www.seaninternational.com/courses and may be purchased most reasonably from: Partners In Christ International, PO Box 237, Tempe, AZ 85280 480-731-9170.