

TORONTO UNITED CHURCH COUNCIL

Connecting Resources with Ministry

Church Development Discussion Papers

TITLE: 16 Ways of Starting New Congregations

AUTHOR(S): Tim Vink

PAPER: 2011-47

REVIEW DATE: January 2011

When an established church is planning to parent a new congregation, context is critical. The needs of the community shape the way that church can reach it effectively, and the church's history and abilities are likewise varied. Depending on that context, church planting can take a variety of forms.

Costs and results will vary, and long-term expansion strategies should involve more than one of these models. Establishing new churches can build momentum, especially when those churches have a built-in impulse to reproduce themselves again as soon as possible. Often this happens within three years, and a church family tree starts growing.

To be effective in long-term strategies, use of as many models as possible is required. Here are some examples.

Parachute: Send a planter and his or her family into a new community to start from scratch.

- Advantages: You can start anywhere the Spirit leads you, and you can extend the church's reach to new territory or people groups.
- Disadvantages: This is usually more expensive – up to \$100,000 annually – and has a lower success rate (25-50%). It also takes a highly motivated and gifted individual to lead the plant.

Team Migration: A group of Christian leaders and members purposefully relocate simultaneously to a new community to plant a church. Group size averages between five and thirty people.

- Advantages: Starting from a much stronger base gives this method a higher success rate. Christian community and multi-gifted leaders are already intact, and a base of emotional and financial support is jump-started.
- Disadvantages: It's hard to find this level of freedom and commitment in a group. Uprooting and moving also means developing new relationships in a new place.

Hive Off: A large congregation of 300 or more hires a planter to come on staff for nine months or so – enough time to gather a healthy group with which to plant a new church, usually in the same community. This group can range in size from thirty to over 200 people.

- Advantages: Called and motivated members will go with the planter. Since a

strong functioning body is sent out, the new plant will typically become self-supporting and self-governing in a short time, often eighteen months or less. This method also establishes strong ties between parent and offspring church.

- Disadvantages: Parent church has a larger "rebuilding" process, though God seems to supply many new members to the parent church in the process of this vision being lived out.

Satellite: A congregation is started at another location in the same area as the parent church and remains under the leadership of the parent church staff and governing board.

- Advantages: This method is often better at targeting an under-reached group that the parent church has a heart for within a new location or style. It covers leadership and administration needs centrally and has low costs.
- Disadvantages: The new church can remain dependent on the parent church longer or be over-controlled.

Multi-Site to Planting: An existing church opens several new venues or locations to reach out, often using video messages from the parent church and live worship and ministry teams in the secondary locations. Some churches have over twenty services a week this way. New members are initially added to the parent church, but in time some of these sites can "spin off" when they are further developed in leadership, body life, finances, and supporting structures.

- Advantages: This hybrid of expanding the parent church and reaching creatively into the community allows a gradual and "tested" timeline for planting. Parent churches have a strong sense of ownership in the planting process.
- Disadvantages: This can require extensive technological expertise and a dynamic communicator from the parent church staff.

Adoption: An established church comes under a supportive relationship between the local church and the judicatory for purposes of greater growth and mutual benefit.

- Advantages: The adopted church is more developed and can grow rapidly with new partnering relationships. This can often bring diversity to the denomination while demonstrating unity in mission.
- Disadvantages: The new church comes with its own history and leadership, so it will assimilate more slowly into a judicatory relationship. These churches may need to consider non-ordained leadership.

House Church Network: Smaller, multiplying home churches reach out to unchurched neighbours in daily community. These groups are usually made up of five to fifteen people. Over 90% of worship, fellowship, discipleship, ministry, and mission occurs in homes and neighbourhoods.

- Advantages: Home churches are very inexpensive and have high participation from the people involved. The churches can "travel" and reproduce anywhere using a growing leadership group. This method has a deeper discipleship impact than the typical congregational model and is based far more on "go and make disciples" than on "come to church to visit us".

- Disadvantages: Churches can remain small and independent if they are not well led by visionary and evangelistic leaders. This method requires some unlearning of typical church processes and expectations in favour of small group dynamics, and it's harder to connect to typical denominational structures.

Host Campus: A larger church with good facilities offers space and encouragement to a start-up church. The start-up church has little ministry supervision by the host and is often predominantly of another ethnic group or economic class.

- Advantages: If the host church offers facilities at low or no rent, this is a tremendous financial help to the new church. It also maximizes the use of existing facilities in a more 24/7 direction.
- Disadvantages: Tensions can arise due to cultural gaps and a weak relationship between the churches. The relationship can become abusive if the host church raises rent or the guest church become unruly.

Sponsoring Church: A parent church plants a new community of faith on its campus until growth allows the offspring church to move out of the home. This kind of church incubator intentionally involves a much higher investment on the part of the parent church, often involving the coaching of the planter and supervision of the ministry's direction and development.

- Advantages: This model has the same advantages as the Host Campus model. It also provides a stronger start for the new church, has a higher success rate, and involves less conflict and temptation for either church to abuse the situation. It may not require the parent church to give any members to the plant.
- Disadvantages: This model takes purposeful leadership on the parent church, along with some wisdom and skill to coach and empower the new church, making the relationship mutually beneficial. A coordinating committee with members from both churches will help avoid calendar conflicts and will fairly share common costs. Holding joint services two to four times a year helps with communication and provides a way to celebrate one another's successes.

Church Split: Agenda disharmony or a leadership crisis precipitates the rapid departure of a specific group of people, who then form a new congregation nearby. Obviously, this is not the ideal, but it does happen, and it can become redemptive in the long run.

- Advantages: People have specific motivation to take a risk and plant a new church after enough pressure and heartache builds up in a "non-reproducing" environment; the energy of the situation often means the new church will survive.
- Disadvantage: There's lots of pain and blame to go around, and the witness of both churches is hurt. If the new congregation is caught up in the painful past and does not develop a clear new vision for ministry and outreach, it will have difficulty growing.

Cell-Celebration Model: A planter originates the new church through multiplying neighbourhood cell groups. These groups move from monthly private worship with one to four cells to weekly public worship of multiple cells. The cell remains the big

"side door" workhorse for the community, carrying 50 to 75% of the worship, fellowship, discipleship, ministry and mission of the church. This is a middle-ground approach between a house church and a typical congregational model.

- Advantages: This model bridges the gap between many people's current expectations about how to "do" church and the effective church model from the early church, which is closer to today's simple but expanding house church network model. It keeps the depth of discipleship for the unchurched growing better than most congregational models.
- Disadvantages: It's hard work to develop effective cells that multiply more participants, leaders, and groups, and it can be challenging to figure out ministry for the children in the cells.

Re-Potting: A new congregation starts meeting in an available building after a former church closes. (It is crucial that the new church have a distinct new name and identity.)

- Advantages: A fresh start is often effective more quickly than revitalizing an older congregation. In terms of reaching the unchurched and ministering to the community, this can provide a legacy opportunity for a declining church, whose closing may end up benefiting the mission overall.
- Disadvantages: A trade-off occurs in that one church finishes its life-cycle in order for a new one to begin. It can be hard for members of the former church unless enough celebration and closure take place.

Re-Launch: An existing, struggling church picks a new location (or moves to location requiring a new congregation) to expand ministry, exerting a fresh effort at a brand-new vision and growth cycle, often with a name change.

- Advantages: This model uses a committed core of people to re-imagine ministry and mission while they still have an active critical mass.
- Disadvantages: It takes courageous leadership and coaching, along with skilled assessment of the place and people of the replanting, or it can result in "same song, second verse".

Turnaround Church: This model involves revitalizing a declining church of fifty or fewer participants with new leadership and vision in such a way that a whole new congregation is essentially re-birthing. It often includes a different mix of cultures, though the same name and history continue.

- Advantages: This fits the challenge of a changing community situation, and becoming outward focused can reverse a radical decline.
- Disadvantages: This is a difficult model to engage unless the church and visionary leaders share a clear sense of urgency.

Catalytic Missionary Planter: An apostolic leader helps start a series of new churches in an area by taking a group from zero to more than 120 and then calling in a founding pastor. The leader then moves on to do this again in a series of other locations.

- Advantages: Experienced and effective leaders do what they do best – establishing new congregations from birth to first pastor. Up to one church a year can be started by one Missionary Planter.
- Disadvantages: This model means deploying full-time leaders in the field, so this usually comes with a \$100,000 per year, per planter level of commitment. The transition from planter to first pastor can be difficult, and

it requires people knowing from the very start that the planter is a temporary servant for their sake.

Apostolic Regional Mission from the Body: A highly gifted leader or agency heads up a whole new church development movement among a group of churches and leaders in a particular region. This individual or agency gathers and coaches planters and trains new leaders throughout the cycles of church growth.

- **Advantages:** This is the most rapid training and outreach strategy and can see up to five churches a year begin.
- **Disadvantages:** This model requires a readiness to substantially invest in the rapid expansion of the church so the values, resources and structures of the local churches and judicatories involved need to support the initiative.

Tim Vink is Coordinator for the Church Multiplication program of the Reformed Church in America.

Church Development Discussion Papers are not formal publications of The Toronto United Church Council. They present independent ideas and observations that are intended to encourage discussion and comment among church leaders in local congregations and Presbyteries. The information, interpretations, and conclusions expressed in these Discussion Papers are entirely those of the author(s) and should not be attributed to The Toronto United Church Council. Articles are reprinted with permission.