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## Daughter Church Planting Makes Sense

Mark Williams

Planting a church was the most gigantic challenge I ever faced. Many times I wondered how my fledgling church would ever survive. Yet by God's grace it eventually grew to viability. Then a pastor friend (Bob Logan) challenged me to start planting daughter churches. Outwardly I responded stoically. But inwardly I was totally resistant to the idea. After all of my blood, sweat and tears, he seemed to be suggesting that I dismantle "my" church. Did he think I was some kind of dummy?

Thankfully, after prayer and careful consideration, I realized that he was right. Birthing daughter churches was the intelligent thing to do. It made sense for me, it made sense for my church and most of all, it made sense for the Kingdom.

### *It Made Sense for the Kingdom*

Before long it became very clear to me that daughter church planting *made sense for the Kingdom*. Frankly, I was too focused on building my own little kingdom and not concerned enough about building Christ's Kingdom. I was being stung by the "Killer B's" of pastoral success: Bodies, Bucks and Buildings. I wanted more of these three because they would make me look more successful. You might say that my prayer was: "Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. *My* kingdom come, *my* will be done." It's not that I wasn't doing Kingdom work. My attitude was the problem. I had a ministry of mixed motives.

Part of my problem was ignorance. I was unaware that in the USA we lose more churches each year than we start. At the same

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time, our population is expanding. Like many church leaders, I thought and acted like missions was somewhere “over there” across the seas. I did not realize that as an American I live in the third largest mission field in the world after China and India. If we lose our missions support base, we will kill the goose that laid the golden missions egg.

I also came to the realization that the biblical pattern is for missions to begin at home and then expand around the world. Jesus said to His disciples in Acts 1:8, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (NIV) Jerusalem was their home town—they were to start at home. Then they were to go to Judea—their home region. After that they were to reach out cross-culturally—to Samaria and the despised Samaritans. Finally they were to go “to the ends of the earth.” Like many churches, we had supported missions “to the ends” but we had largely neglected our Judea and Samaria.

I found it impressive that church planting is the most effective evangelistic method available. Researcher C. Peter Wagner has concluded that: “The single most effective evangelistic methodology under heaven is planting new churches.”<sup>1</sup>

Renowned church analyst and prolific author Lyle Schaller has written:

The most important single argument for making new church development a high priority is that this is the most effective means for reaching unchurched persons. Numerous studies have shown that 60 to 80 percent of the new adult members of new congregations are persons who were not actively involved in the life of any worshipping congregations immediately prior to joining that new mission. By contrast, most long established churches draw the majority of their new adult members from persons who transfer in from other congregations.<sup>2</sup>

It is astonishing that 60 to 80 percent of adult members of new churches begin to follow Christ because of that new church. Thus, if a church plant grows to 200 members in a few years time, it has usually won and is discipling 120 to 160 new believers. Rather than growing by reaching lost people, most long established churches in the USA are either plateaued or declining. My own church at ten years old was not having that kind of im-

pact. I began to think, “If I really have a heart for building Christ’s Kingdom, how could we *not* begin to birth daughter churches?”

Furthermore, I could not think of a more biblical method of reaching the world. Jesus said “I will build my church.” What did the apostles do to help fulfill that prediction and Christ’s Great Commission? Reflecting on that question, I recognized that they went from town to town, sharing Jesus and planting churches. Following the Gospels, the New Testament is largely the story of the planting of local churches and letters of instruction for them.

My conclusion was this: The *most biblical* and *most effective* method of reaching the world for Christ is the planting of new churches.

Furthermore, I concluded that the best way for those churches to be started is for churches to reproduce themselves. Why? Because babies need a mother. Baby churches need a nurturing mother church to provide:

- Encouragement when things are difficult.
- A place to celebrate when things go well.
- A family to help care for needs that arise.
- Wise counsel in the strategic decisions of life.

It is very difficult to replace the love of a human mother. Likewise, baby churches thrive when they have a mother church—the bride of Christ—to care for them.

And the family of God grows larger and larger as the number of churches expands. Rather than our church growing into a giant pumpkin (reminiscent of the Charlie Brown story) I began to envision a strawberry patchwork of churches. Strawberries begin to develop into a patch when the first plant is started. It sends down roots, produces fruit but doesn’t stop there. It also sends out runners that in turn put down roots, form plants and produce fruit. This process is repeated until an area is covered with strawberries.

The early church acted like this. Churches were multiplied, the Gospel was spread and the world was turned upside down. I began to think, “Why not today and why not me?” I remembered the words of Isaiah, “Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?’ And I said, ‘Here am I. Send me’” (Isaiah 6:8)!

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*It Made Sense for my Church*

I was surprised to find out that daughter church planting also *made sense for my church*. Initially I was afraid that birthing daughter churches would hurt our church. I found the opposite; it actually enhances the health and vitality of the mother church.

We determined a number of reasons why this is true. First, daughtering helped us deepen spiritually. Similar to tithing our finances, we tithed our people—about ten percent of our congregation went to help start the daughter church. It was very hard to see them go. But that act of sacrificial faith helped us grow in Christian maturity—just like people grow spiritually when they start to tithe.

Sometimes believers need to be set free for a new venture for Christ. Luis Palau has said, “Christians are like manure. Pile them together and they stink up the place. But spread them around and they nourish the world.” Sending and being sent to reach a new territory for Christ brings freshness to believers.

Furthermore, leaders were developed in our church as people were needed to step up and fill positions vacated by the “lay missionaries” we sent to towns nearby. People who had felt unneeded now knew that they had to reach out and fill important roles. When we donate blood, our bodies replenish the blood we need. Likewise in the body of Christ, when we give our lifeblood to a give life to a new church, the body replenishes itself. We also found that while not all who went to help with the daughter church were leaders, many became leaders because of the needs in the new church.

Evangelism became a higher priority in our church. As we began to hear of people being saved at our daughter church, we started to think, “Why can’t this happen more here?” We started to use some of the outreach strategies the daughter church was using. We had the wonderful joy of seeing people come to Jesus.

We experienced a significant paradigm shift. Our conviction was that our church actually grew when attendance declined the week after we sent members to plant the daughter church. How? Because when we added the total of two churches attendance, the amount was far greater than the one church had ever been. Our church grew quicker by multiplication than it ever grew by addition. Looking at that total gave us a greater sense of ministry impact and accomplishment.

Our long-term goal was to see BOTH churches grow. We

weren't trying to sacrifice the mother in order to build the daughter. In fact, I have found that birthing daughter churches usually stimulates growth in the mother. The result is two or more churches both doing a better job of fulfilling the Great Commission.

It also helped me to come to grips with the issue of church mortality. Just as we don't like the thought of our own passing, we avoid thoughts of the death of our church. Indeed, it seems like some churches have always been around and always will be. But the fact is that churches eventually die. They have a life cycle, just as people do.

A few years ago I was privileged to visit Turkey where much of the church planting in the book of Acts occurred. By the second Century it became one of the strongest Christian footholds in the Mediterranean region.<sup>3</sup> But today Turkey is 99.8% Muslim and Evangelical Christians comprise just 0.01% of the population.<sup>4</sup> We cannot visit any of the churches Paul started there because they are all deceased.

Likewise, over time all churches pass from the scene. The question is, when our church is gone, will there be daughter churches to replace it and keep the light of the Gospel alive? By giving birth to daughter churches we chose to make an impact that would continue for coming generations.

Christian Schwarz wrote about church health in *Natural Church Development*. The book is not about church planting, however he does make this comment: "Hardly anything demonstrates the health of a congregation as much as the willingness—and ability!—to give birth to new congregations. The opposite is true as well. Hardly anything is a more clear indication of illness than structures which by design hinder church multiplication, or at best permit it as an absolute exception."<sup>5</sup> I agree!

#### *It Made Sense for Me*

Not only did it make sense for Christ's Kingdom and my church, daughter church planting also *made sense for me*. Carolyn and I have three wonderful sons. Like most parents one of my greatest joys is my children. As a pastor I have similar joyful feelings about my daughter churches.

One of my daughters is now ten years old and has grown to about 1,000 people. Most importantly, hundreds of people have professed faith in Christ through that church. It is larger than the mother church (which still continues to have an effective minis-

try) and I am overjoyed with its success.

I am also delighted with the ministries of my other daughter churches. Five of six are within about 15 minutes drive from each other. Each is reaching a different cross-section of the population and two are reaching people who don't speak English (one is in Spanish and the other is in Japanese.)

One Sunday afternoon not long ago the largest daughter church baptized about 40 people in the Pacific Ocean nearby. Just up the beach, another daughter church baptized about fifteen people that same day. Later I learned that the mother church had two conversions in worship that morning. My buttons were bursting with pride and joy that day. I was reminded that that kind of impact would not have happened if we had continued to focus on only one church.

One of the families our daughter church reached was a single mother and her three children. When she came to the church, she was at the end of her rope. She had tried drugs, counseling, alcohol, relationships, sex and religion. But nothing brought her peace. She contemplated suicide and thought that if she killed herself, she might take her three children's lives as well. But about that time she got an invitation to New Hope Community Church. Knowing that some new hope was what she needed, she came to the first Sunday service and that day made a commitment to Jesus. Later her three children did as well. Their lives were forever changed!

Frankly, one of the hardest things I ever did was to start sending people I loved and "needed" to plant our first daughter church. I agonized, complained to God, mourned the loss of those church members and questioned our decision to daughter. I really felt like a dummy for a while. Missionary martyr Jim Elliot wisely said, "He is no fool [or dummy!] who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." I later came to believe that it was probably the *BEST* thing I ever did in ministry—the tremendous benefits were undeniable.

I was so inspired that after eleven years in that church I resigned to become the founding pastor of our third daughter church. But I do not believe that all pastors should become church planters like I did. Some are called to the Apollos role. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 3:6, "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow." Both roles are equally important. However I do hope that all Apollos type pastors have the joy of birthing daughter churches. Through mine, my ministry

has been immensely multiplied. My ministry legacy is more enduring. Most importantly, I am convinced that the Lord is very pleased with what I have done.

I have a limited time on earth. My mother's sudden death from a heart attack in 1995 made this fact dramatically real to me. Seeing her laid into the frozen earth that February would have been unbearable were it not for the fact that I knew we would see each other again on the other side. I am grateful that as a child mom taught me perhaps the most important lesson of life, expressed in this phrase she would quote; "Only one life, 'twill soon be past. Only what's done for Jesus will last." That is wisdom. In my limited time my life vision is to take as many people with me to heaven as I can when I die. I am convinced that the multiplication of churches is the most biblical and most effective way to fulfill that vision. Working toward that goal brings me immense joy and satisfaction.

#### Writer

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#### NOTES

1. C. Peter Wagner, *Church Planting for a Greater Harvest* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1990), p. 11.

2. Lyle Schaller, "Why Start New Churches?" *The Circuit Rider*, May 1979, p. 3.

3. Dr. Russell Spittler, Provost of Fuller Seminary, on a tape from Fuller Seminary, "Dual Feature on Church Growth, Then and Now," side two introduction to message by Eddie Gibbs on "Church Growth Viewed through a Glass Darkly, 2000."

4. Patrick Johnstone, *Operation World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993), p. 541.

5. Christian Schwarz, *Natural Church Development* (Carl Stream, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 1996) p. 69.

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