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**CHURCH PLANTING: LOOKING BACK, LOOKING FORWARD,
LOOKING UP, LOOKING OUT**

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David Stein

abstract

Church planting is one of the most exciting endeavors one can be blessed with the opportunity in which to participate. C. Peter Wagner once called church planting the single most effective evangelistic strategy under heaven. After one studies, prepares, and gets out into the real world, however, one can find that not everything always goes as planned or as desired. This article will reflect on church planting from an experiential and biographical perspective as well as through interaction with other experts in the field via literature. The writer hopes the reader will find insight, value, and encouragement to apply to one's own ministry that may be contemplating or interacting with church planting.

introduction

Have you been involved with or considered being involved in a church plant? The purpose of this article is to glean some insights from both my own observations and experience in church planting as well as from some of the literature in the field, which represents the experience of others as well. As such, this article will take a

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look at some of the real world dynamics involved in church planting by looking back, looking forward, looking up, and looking out. It is my hope that the reader will find this beneficial as he or she may contemplate moving out into one's own new ministry, perhaps for the first time. It can possibly help even the expert by shedding some light on a different array of experience by which one may yet sharpen his expertise. Jesus commanded us to go. Some of us have gone. This article offers the reader an opportunity to share in the experience of some of what I have learned as I sought to follow and obey the Savior and His Great Commission.

I grew up in a renewal church—a church of the Lutheran Renewal. Much of how Howard Snyder evaluates the Church Growth movement and thinks about church life is similar to how I grew up thinking in that church.¹ After moving on from that church, I became the assistant pastor at a church that this article will refer to as Main Street Mission Church.² This article will reflect on church planting from both first-and second-hand experience, as well as through interaction with literature in the field.

the traditional church—looking back

“Hindsight is always twenty-twenty,” someone has said. I grew up as a fourth generation member in a Lutheran church that this article will refer to as My First Lutheran Church.³ This church at one time had been a church plant, as would be true of any church at one time. Every church that exists had a beginning or a plant from somewhere at some time at some point. There were a few churches in the area going by a similar name that were directly connected with the American Lutheran Church (ALC) denomination. Originally a Norwegian immigrant church, this church ported much of its ministry paradigm from the “old country.”⁴

At one time in America, the ethnically Swedish (LCA) would not associate very much with the ethnically Norwegian (ALC) and vice versa. Each group had a different language and culture reflecting where they had come from. This is also perhaps a great illustration of the homogeneous unit principle of C. Peter Wagner. This factor may also make churches of these movements more vulnerable to the church disease C. Peter Wagner calls Ethnikitis. It was while at this church that my ministry and interest in church planting first began to cultivate. I presented to the

¹ Gary McIntosh and others, *Evaluating the Church Growth Movement: 5 Views* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 207.

² Not the real name, but it gets the point across for the purpose of this article.

³ Not the actual church name but illustrative and perhaps typical of similar churches.

⁴ Scandinavians in the Midwest talk about “the Old Country.” For example, there is a restaurant called the *Old Country Buffet*, but in California the name goes by *Home Town Buffet*, as the phrase may perhaps be understood regionally.

Stein: Church Planting: Looking Back, Looking Forward, Looking Up, Looki church some findings I had discovered by C. Peter Wagner in his work, *Church Planting for a Greater Harvest*. Wagner outlines twelve methods for planting a church: 1) Hiving off, 2) Colonization, 3) Adoption, 4) Accidental Parenthood, 5) The Satellite Model, 6) Multi-congregational Churches, 7) The Multiple Campus Model, 8) The Mission Team, 9) The Catalytic Church Planter, 10) The Founding Pastor, 11) The Independent Church Planter, and 12) The Apostolic Church Planter.⁵ Martin Robinson, who had experience in church planting in Birmingham, reflects on a similar list of models for planting a church in *Planting Tomorrow's Churches Today*.⁶ Fred King, who was the Director of Church Growth for the Christian and Missionary Alliance in 1992 outlines in *The Church Planter's Training Manual* thirteen ways to start a church: sending, differences in philosophy of ministry, appointing lay people for church planting, beginning an ethnic Sunday school class, inviting an ethnic church to begin in your facility, using long distance drivers, and giving money and prayer support for a church in a remote part of your district.⁷

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Charles Chaney, a dean at Southwest Baptist University in Bolivar, Missouri,⁸ talks about the need for developing a regional strategy for church planting in *Church Planting at the End of the Twentieth Century*. He comments that, "First, there is often no national or regional strategy for church planting to which the group is committed."⁹ Patterson and Scoggins, who published a *Church Multiplication Guide* with William Carey Library, advocate looking at church planting from a number of different angles. Among them are: that of the seeker,¹⁰ that of the field supervisor,¹¹ and that of the mother church.¹² First Lutheran was struggling with being a satellite church, meaning that people by and large had

⁵ C. Peter Wagner, *Church Planting for a Greater Harvest* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1990), 59.

⁶ Martin Robinson and Stuart Christine. *Planting Tomorrow's Churches Today: A Comprehensive Handbook* (Tunbridge: Monarch, 1992), 102. Under a heading of church planting by churches, Robinson identifies: 1) autonomous daughter churches (An example might be Rock Harbor <http://www.rockharbor.org/> which is a church plant of Mariner's church <http://www.marinerschurch.org/>. Another example might be Robert Logan's family of churches where in some cases it seems that the youth group hived off to found another church, leaving the parent church for the older generation, and the new church for a younger generation.), 2) Church planting by Colonization, 3) Church Planting by Adoption (This seems to be what Eagle Brook Church may be doing in some cases.), 4) Church Planting by Accident, 5) Semi-autonomous satellite churches—the strawberry runner method (One church will have multiple sites, for example six, that meet in different areas, but one administrative structure services them all.), 6) Multiple Site churches, and 7) Church Planting by Multiple Congregations. Another category is churches that are planted by groups: 8) Churches planted by a mission team, 9) Planting churches using a catalytic church planter, 10) Church planting using a founding pastor, 11) Planting churches with independent church planters, 12) Crusades and events, and 13) Other approaches such as an apostolic church planter where an individual retains authority over the churches he plants. See also *The Church Planters Handbook*.

⁷ Fred King, *The Church Planter's Training Manual* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1992), 29.

⁸ This article will relay the persons, job title, or credentials as of the writing of the cited book, as reported by the book, at the time of the writing of the book. The author may no longer hold that role at of the time of the writing of this article.

⁹ Charles Chaney, *Church Planting at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1982), 40.

¹⁰ George Patterson and Richard Scoggins, *Church Multiplication Guide* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2002), 95.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 133.

¹² *Ibid.*, 184.

moved from the inner city into the suburbs, yet many chose to still attend this local church. It was also the case that the ministry of this church attracted a number of church transfers who, for one reason or another, liked what we had to offer at this church, so they joined from another church or another location. This was in large part due to the popularity of the senior pastor who was a regular speaker at a regional conference; thus, his reputation spread. The dilemma that emerged was that when people drive more than twenty minutes to church, it starts to become too far for people to invite their friends and neighbors. Those in the neighborhood can find themselves either not interested or culturally at odds with the ethnic and cultural makeup of those who came to church from the outlying areas. Inner city folks and suburbanites can start to become two distinct sub-cultural groups each with a different set of needs, status, interest levels, income levels, etc. which can become barriers to overcome in reaching people for Christ through a local church.

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An idea was considered to start some satellite congregations in surrounding areas. For example, one satellite could be in the area of one of the northern suburbs such as Arden Hills or Montamedia from where some members came. A second one could be in Minneapolis from where some members came. A third satellite possibility could be on the Wisconsin border near the main freeway in a location such as a restaurant. A fourth could locate in Cottage Grove, a suburban area similar to Orange County, California, in the Twin Cities that was experiencing new growth. This strategy could perhaps be called, “Bring the church to where the people are going.” The church at Antioch may be a biblical example as well (Acts 11:19). Individual members raised objections. One of the main objections was that some stated that they liked coming to the main campus and would not want to attend a smaller meeting in their local area. The best the church could do was to have small groups in the various areas. An alternative response could have perhaps been articulated, “We are going to move ahead with a satellite campus in your area; however, if you would rather come to the main campus, you are welcome to do so.” Most likely, they eventually would have found that they liked the one nearby their home just as well. In the meantime, it could have multiplied the church in obedience to the Great Commission and may have spared the church from a dilemma that was to come.

Hindsight perhaps confirms what was only suspected then. It is now possible to look back on what actually happened and analyze the results. What in fact happened was most of the people who drove up from Cottage Grove, stopped making the drive. The people who came from Minneapolis found churches closer to home, as did the individuals who drove in from other outlying areas. What would have been the mother church continued to experience decline in the number

Stein: Church Planting: Looking Back, Looking Forward, Looking Up, Looki
of members attending. In other words, it seems as though had the church
proceeded to plant daughter churches, its overall health and vitality could be in
better shape today. There were also a number of ministry candidates in training at
the church at the time, who could have been utilized to implement a game plan to
fulfill the Great Commission with a church extension program of satellite
congregations.

the brand new church—looking forward

I was able to proceed in a church planting ministry by teaming up with another
experienced church planter. In an unpublished thesis available at Biola University's
library, Dirks advocates a strategy of teams as a method for starting new
churches.¹³ Working with another has some advantages to trying it alone. Briefly,
this church planter's story goes something like this: although he grew up in a
traditional mainline church, he came to faith in Christ through a movement known
as the Jesus People Movement. In fact, there was a church in the Twin Cities called
Jesus People Church which thrived during the 1970s. By comparison, the Calvary
Chapel family of churches in and around Orange County, California, basically
came on the scene during the Jesus People Movement of the 1970s as well. What
was unique about it is it reached a whole generation for Christ. Where the existing
churches perhaps tended to cater more toward an audience of the 1950s, Jesus
People Church was contemporary to especially those baby boomers born in the
1960s. This planter had planted some other churches during the peak of the Jesus
People Movement as well. When various doors closed on other options, this
planter began to seek the Lord about what he should do next. The result was to
found what this article will refer to as Main Street Mission Church.¹⁴

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I joined this planter as his assistant pastor and music minister. At the time, I
considered that this would be my ministry for the rest of my life. The church,
however, did not thrive as much as we expected (or hoped) it would. Although we
set out to be the new Jesus People Church, a church with attendance in the
thousands, we did not have the same results. We may have fallen into the trap of
not enough planning or resources mentioned by Stephen Gray in *Planting Fast
Growing Churches*.¹⁵ Although I sought to incorporate the best of ideas from
Planting Growing Churches for the 21st Century, we nonetheless found ourselves on
a very slow growth curve, rather than a catalytic growth curve of climbing to the

¹³ Matthew Dirks, "One in Heart and Mind: Planting Team-Led Churches" (unpublished thesis, Biola University, 2004), 1.

¹⁴ Not the real name but illustrative for the purpose of this article.

¹⁵ Stephen Gray, *Planting Fast Growing Churches* (St. Charles, IL: Churchsmart Resources, 2007), 10.

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next level.¹⁶ At the time, I viewed that book as sort of the ultimate reference on church planting and would survey its pages, sharing it with others for ideas on where our church perhaps needed a tune up for better results. Eventually many of us that comprised the various leadership posts in the church moved on to other things and in other areas.

Josh Hunt, an associate pastor in New Mexico and author of *Let it Grow*, describes one of the classic challenges a church can face is what he calls the pioneer/homesteader battle.¹⁷ We had some of that dynamic. Some of the core of people from other churches wanted to basically do the same thing as their former church, yet be in more significant positions of leadership. Those who could not be on the elder board of their former church wanted to be on the elder board at this new church. Even regarding less significant aspects, like to have a book table or a book room instead, some wanted to copy what the mother church did too closely. Some of the people wanted a cozy family church instead of the discipleship-oriented church that was the paradigm we were seeking, which created problems regarding the church's DNA or identity. So the church in its early years had to navigate through some struggles about what this new church would be like.

The entire experience was not as successful as I wanted it to be, as we struggled to pay the bills and maintain quality programs at a congregation size fewer than one hundred. I find that I am not alone in that feeling. Ed Stetzer, concerning one of his church plants, expressed a similar thought. He states, "The church was not the great success I thought it would be."¹⁸ Nelson Searcy, who went east to plant a Saddleback-style church, states that eighty percent of all church plants are declared duds by their five year mark.¹⁹ Martin Robinson, who had experience in church planting in Birmingham, talks about the value of support in *Planting Tomorrow's Churches Today*.²⁰ Stephen Gray, author of *Planting Fast Growing Churches*, also identifies an error of haste when there has not been enough planning or resources for a church plant.²¹ Kennon Callahan, author of *Twelve Keys of an Effective Church*, talks about how the Mission Church, in contrast to an established church, will be living on the edge of its resources rather than conserving and holding on to its resources.²² We certainly lived on the edge of our resources. Searcy also advises that one must have multiple coaches in order to

¹⁶ Gary McIntosh, *Taking Your Church to the Next Level* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 131.

¹⁷ Josh Hunt, *Let it Grow* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1993), 21.

¹⁸ Ed Stetzer, *Breaking the Missional Code* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 3.

¹⁹ Nelson Searcy and Kerrick Thomas, *Launch: Starting a New Church from Scratch* (Ventura, CA: Regal from Gospel Light, 2006), 9.

²⁰ Robinson, 120.

²¹ Gray, 10.

²² Kennon L. Callahan, *Effective Church Leadership: Building on the Twelve Keys* (San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco, 1990), 34.

Stein: Church Planting: Looking Back, Looking Forward, Looking Up, Looki attain success.²³ In his own ministry, he states he has had over fifteen speaking coaches and twenty church planting coaches.²⁴ Kevin Mannoia, a district overseer in the Free Methodist Church, states that church plants have a thirty-five percent success rate, especially when too much is left up to chance.²⁵ Mannoia, his father, and his grandmother, were all church planters, and he developed and implemented a church planting system called the Century 21 Church Planting System, a process for regional church planting.

I think in our Main Street Mission Church plant, we did not spend enough time thinking through the prenatal phase of church development.²⁶ We should have spent more time making sure we had the right core, the right kind of funding secured, or a team of volunteers from nearby churches to help us get basic ministries and services such as nursery, Sunday school, and youth group up and operational. An idea I have thought about since is this could be a great mission opportunity for others from nearby churches to come and serve maybe one weekend a month as a ministry opportunity to reach out. There could have been improvement in how we utilized the gifts of others.²⁷ A struggle a new church plant can have is maintaining an array of quality programs and ministries while the church grows through its infancy and toddler phase toward adulthood. Drawing from surrounding partner churches in this way might be one way to make more use of the gifts of others.

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the salvage church—looking up

Before shifting focus to a different area, there were two other church planting movements in the Twin Cities this article will note, in order to compare and contrast my own direct experience with others in a similar context.²⁸ Grace Church Richfield²⁹ seemed to strike a good balance between Gray's second warning to not copy too top-heavily from a mother church paradigm but yet to remain in perhaps what could be termed a denominational or church family identity.³⁰ There was a more famous church called Grace Church Edina³¹ that had a larger membership in the thousands (the average church in the Twin Cities runs around 250 in

²³ Searcy, 10.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Kevin W. Mannoia, *Church Planting: The Next Generation* (Indianapolis, IN: Light and Life Press, 1996), 13.

²⁶ Robert E. Logan, *International Church Planting Guide* (Alta Loma, CA: Strategic Ministries, Inc., 1988), 22.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, *Church Planting Workbook* (Pasadena, CA: Fuller Evangelistic Association, 1986), 153.

²⁸ Part of the value in researching church growth is to compare notes with what others are doing in order to find areas of improvement.

²⁹ This is the real name of the church.

³⁰ Gray, 10.

³¹ This is the real name of the church.

Great Commission Research Journal, Vol. 3, Iss. 1 [2022], Art. 6 attendance/membership). The larger churches that run around one thousand and above are in a different league.³² It is perhaps the corporate size instead of the family size church.³³ Grace Church Edina seemed to successfully parent at least four daughter churches that were enough like the founding church to see the family resemblance, yet distinct enough to be their own church.³⁴

Eagle Brook³⁵ seems to be effectively using a strategy of taking over churches that are dying³⁶ or “going out of business.” They currently have campuses in White Bear Lake (the original), Lino Lakes (the new main campus), Spring Lake Park, and in Blaine. When the church outgrew their original campus, they built a second campus but still kept the first. This is similar to North Heights Lutheran Church,³⁷ which is perhaps the largest, most successful church of the Lutheran Renewal in the Twin Cities. It, too, built a new campus but kept the original campus as well. Eagle Brook also kept the original facility, and then began to extend the church by taking over some churches that were dying or going out of business.³⁸ More or less “under new management,” they would move in with what was already a successful ministry paradigm in the area and an already established ministry team. Eagle Brook is technically a church of the Baptist General Conference,³⁹ but like Saddleback, goes for more the community church approach in name and emphasis rather than emphasizing its denominational affiliation.⁴⁰

Both of these church planting movements had stronger numerical results or, as I like to term it, a successful and thriving ministry paradigm, than what I directly experienced. Now there may be a range of reasons as to why one mission is successful and another one struggles. It may also be the case that the church health and successful ministry paradigm has to reach a certain level in order for a parent

³² McIntosh, *Taking Your Church to the Next Level*, 127.

³³ Beth Ann Gaede, *Size Transitions in Congregations* (Bethesda, MD: The Alban Institute, 2001), 31.

³⁴ More information is available on their web site at <http://www.atgrace.com/history>.

³⁵ This is the real name of the church. More information is available on their web site at <http://www.eaglebrookchurch.com/>.

³⁶ A book called *Legacy Churches* deals with the subject of churches that need to close the doors. The Concept of Life Cycles in churches, like life cycles in nature, is outlined in *Taking Your Church to the Next Level* by Gary McIntosh. *Corporate LifeCycles* by Ichak Adizes is a book about businesses which, like churches, also have life cycles.

³⁷ This is the real name of the church.

³⁸ As I understand it. I am an observer of these two church movements from a distance but seeking to compare notes with my direct, first-hand ministry experience.

³⁹ See also

http://www.scene3.org/chdirect/CHURCHES_list.php?a=search&value=1&SearchFor=eagle&SearchOption=Contains&SearchField=

⁴⁰ Denominational identity can be an advantage for those that like the denomination or relocate and want to find a church like one they used to attend. It can be a disadvantage for people who may not identify with the denomination or even have an unfavorable view about it. Groups can view other groups in a favorable or unfavorable way. In the end, there is one Lord Jesus Christ reaching people to Himself through a variety of church structures, groups, and networks (those that remain biblical). In heaven there probably is not going to be a Baptist part of town over here and a Lutheran part of town over there, for example, though each may hold their own tradition dear.

Stein: Church Planting: Looking Back, Looking Forward, Looking Up, Looking Out church to be able to successfully plant daughter churches. It is well known in church growth circles that too much of an emphasis on church health can overshadow a proper emphasis on church growth—sometimes a church may never get around to evangelism and fulfilling the Great Commission. There comes a point where a person can only be so holy this side of heaven, and one blind beggar has to help another find food, even if they are not yet perfect. We know enough; now let's go reach people with what we already know. One can't know everything before one does anything. So what we do is our best and trust God for the results. At the same time, we live and learn, as well as pass along what we have learned to help others.

the multi campus extension church—looking out

Some churches are perhaps representative of a good candidate for a multi-campus church expansion model.⁴¹ I know of a church, for example, that currently has two campuses located right across the street from each other and has begun simulcasting the 11:00 a.m. service across the two locations. For the past few years on Easter Sunday, there have been two separate services with two separate worship teams and preachers in the dual locations. Another large church nearby, to some extent, functions as a model to follow. That church has two campuses, as well.

Like the church in which I grew up, these churches also draw from a range of locations far and wide, not only from their neighborhoods, but also from surrounding communities. Within a ten mile radius of one church, there is a population of over three million. Ralph Moore, Senior Pastor of Hope Chapel in Hawaii and founder of Hope Chapel in Hermosa Beach, California, states that a daughter church should ask, "What can we do better or more ingeniously than our mother church?"⁴² Gray warns that church plants don't do too well if they have to copy too top-heavily from a mother church paradigm, but some do remain in what I term a "denominational identity."⁴³ In Minnesota, the land of the frozen chosen, we used to say, "God makes no two snowflakes alike," as an analogy of how God may want each church to be unique. The church at all times in all places retains certain aspects in common: the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, and biblical doctrine, but specific expressions of ministry or emphasis (movements) can come and go and stress different themes from time to time.

⁴¹ Wagner, 68.

⁴² Ralph Moore, *Starting A New Church* (Ventura, CA: Regal from Gospel Light, 2002), 34.

⁴³ Gray, 10.

78 With these models in mind, there are a number of more practical items to attend to in planting a church. Duane Ruth-Heffelbower, a lawyer and co-pastor with a General Conference Mennonite Church, touches on matters of creating a legal entity (incorporating)⁴⁴ and how to apply for tax exemption.⁴⁵ In *A Practical Manual on Church Planting*, Gary Rohrmayer talks about church planting in the context of the *Missio Dei*.⁴⁶ Rohrmayer also recommends thinking through six stages for planting a missional church: relating with God and others, networking and gathering, building a launch team, designing services and strategies, launching public services, and establishing community and ministries.⁴⁷ Samuel Faircloth, who served near forty years in Europe, including church planting, recommends setting up a team-centered administration.⁴⁸ It is with these lessons learned from both personal experience and the experience of others that I would like future church plants, those of which I am a part, or those of which the reader of this article is a part, to be even more successful than what we have perhaps experienced previously. When we need inspiration to keep on with the Great Commission, we can look back on our past and denominational traditions, we can look forward to the new things we see God doing in our world around us, we can look up and reach for help from someone who may be experiencing more success in a given context than we are, and we can look out on the fields that are white for harvest—be that across the street or across the world.

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⁴⁴ Duane Ruth-Heffelbower, *A Technical Manual for Church Planters* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions, 1989), 17.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁴⁶ Gary Rohrmayer, *First Steps For Planting A Missional Church* (St. Charles, IL: Churchsmart Resources, 2006), 9.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁴⁸ Samuel Faircloth, *Church Planting for Reproduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991), 122.

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