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Each issue of the *Great Commission Research Journal* features recent dissertations and theses of interest to our readers. Particular attention is given to publications that present research on evangelism, church growth, church planting and multiplication, missional church, emerging/emergent church, communication theory, leadership theory, and other topics related to effective fulfillment of the Great Commission. Directors of doctoral programs, as well as graduating students, are encouraged to send notice of recent dissertations to Dr. Gary L. McIntosh, Dissertation Editor, at [gary.mcintosh@biola.edu](mailto:gary.mcintosh@biola.edu). Due to space limitations, and the large number of dissertations published each year, only a few dissertations are featured.

This issue of the *Great Commission Research Journal* features recent dissertations that focus on some aspect of church planting and church growth.

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*"Life beyond the launch: Case studies in post-launch vitality, adaptation, and identity formation of new Wesleyan congregations."* Author: Duane E. Brown, Ph.D. dissertation, Asbury Theological Seminary, 2009. 278 pages.

## **abstract**

This dissertation examines the post-launch lifecycle stage of ten selected new churches launched from 1996–2005 within the Wesleyan Church of North America. The purpose of the study is to better understand the factors of vitality for the pivotal post-launch stage of church planting within Wesleyan church-planting movements.

150 A history of the Wesleyan church planting ministry points to two significant turning points that have led denominational leaders away from denominationally-driven paradigms to the current “Churches Planting Churches” movement. A full statistical analysis and report of Wesleyan church planting for the period 1996–2005 provides several recommendations for future developments.

Two theories shaped the theoretical propositions and analysis of the data related to vitality. Howard Snyder’s Renewal View of Church Growth helped to evaluate the overall vitality of the congregation with specific focus on the relationship between the new church and the denomination. Findings support the proposition about the relationship between vitality and how the church develops its identity and relates to the denomination in the post launch stage. A Lifecycle Theory construct from Martin Saarinen, adapted from the work of Ichak Adizes, is used to evaluate the organizational and leadership adaptability of the new church. Findings support the proposition regarding congregational vitality and organizational and leadership adaptability in the post launch stage. Likewise, infant Wesleyan churches must prepare for the possible crisis moment and new stage of development as it navigates merger with the denomination.

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*"Entrepreneurial orientation and church planting: Exploring the effect that entrepreneurial orientation of church planters has on planting effective/healthy churches in three northern districts of the Assemblies of God."* Author: Kristopher J. Blanchard, Ph.D. dissertation, Capella University, 2009. 111 pages.

**abstract**

The General Council of the Assemblies of God was formed in 1914 when 300 individuals, from 20 different states, met together in Hot Springs, Arkansas. Since that time, the Assemblies of God has planted an average of 132 sustainable churches per year. The key word in the previous sentence is sustainable, because the Assemblies of God closed a total of 700 churches from 2003 to 2005.

There is limited empirical research regarding the role that the church planter has on the success of the church plant to help promote reasoned strategies to this end. For this reason, this study explored what effect the entrepreneurial orientation of church planters has on the average growth rate of church plants in three northern districts of the Assemblies of God.

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A number of studies have defined effective/healthy church plants as churches that experience continued growth. Church planters responded to the Entrepreneur Attitude Orientation (EAO) assessment that was developed in 1987 by Robinson. By examining each individual church planter's EAO score, it was possible to examine if a relationship exists between the entrepreneurial orientation of the church planter and the average growth rate of the church plant. This understanding will aid the denomination in recruiting and training individuals who are capable of planting churches with higher-than-average growth rates.

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*"Church planting sponsorship: A statistical analysis of sponsoring a church plant as a means of revitalization of the sponsor church."* Author: Jeffrey C. Farmer, Ph.D. dissertation, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2007. 117 pages.

**abstract**

The purpose of the study was to determine whether or not the sponsorship of a new church plant had an impact on selected church growth variables in the

sponsoring churches. The study involved SBC churches which reported sponsoring a new church-type mission (church plant) in 1999. Data for fifteen growth variables over a period of eleven years (1994–2004) were collected for the 624 churches which sponsored a church plant in 1999.

Statistical analysis was conducted utilizing paired samples tests, comparative analysis, and one way ANOVA. Eight variables were identified as having been impacted by church plant sponsorship with Designated Offerings being the variable most affected. The proximity of the church plant to the sponsor church did not have a significant effect.

This research project found that the sponsor church was positively impacted in eight growth variables. These variables were categorized into two types: monetary variables and worship attendance. The monetary variables included total receipts, undesigned gifts, designated gifts, total missions expenditures, Annie Armstrong Easter offerings, Lottie Moon Christmas offerings, and tithes. Worship attendance referred to the average attendance at the church's primary worship service.

An implication of the study suggests that plateaued or declining churches should seriously and prayerfully consider sponsoring a church plant every three to five years in order to create a missional atmosphere in the local church. A missional atmosphere in the church aids the members to be more spiritually mature by being more receptive to the Holy Spirit. The members will see their community from a kingdom perspective rather than a parochial perspective. The result will be a revitalized local church, the expansion of the kingdom, and the glorification of Christ.

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*"From the new day to the new century: Free Methodist strategies for metropolitan church planting in light of 1985–2000 efforts and results."* Author: Dwight T. Gregory, D.Min. dissertation, 2005, Asbury Theological Seminary, 2005. 129 pages.

## **abstract**

The years 1985–2000 marked a denominational emphasis, "The New Day." Goals included planting 1000 new congregations in North America by the year 2000 and reaching membership of 125,000. By the end, with over 400 church plants attempted, figures revealed a net loss in membership and number of churches, even with 156 new churches added. My study sought to learn from successes and shortcomings.

Research involved denominational yearbooks, examining changes in light of studies related to church growth, church planting, and urban ministry. Assessment was made of numerical indicators, including church sizes, ethnicity, growth status, and geographic distribution. Size and growth status of the approximately 1000 congregations was calculated for benchmark years. Each church-planting attempt was tracked, noting status in 2000. Questionnaires and interviews involved denominational leaders.

Findings include increased prominence of new churches, larger churches, and ethnic churches. Church plants sponsored by local churches were more successful than those initiated by regional judicatories. Recommendations include training pastors in philosophy and cultivation of church membership, a new role for the Department of World Missions in North America, and attempts to connect large churches with urban centers of high need or potential but limited local denominational resources.

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*"A comparison of the effectiveness of selected church planting models measured by conversion growth and new church starts."* Author: Joel Owens Rainey, Ed.D. dissertation, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2005. 173 pages.

## **abstract**

This dissertation examines the relationship between church planting model employment, conversion growth and the rate of new church starts, and the various contexts in which churches are planted. The desired outcome is a more thorough understanding of which church planting models are more effective in certain contexts. The dissertation opens by identifying the research concern for the need to determine which models of church ministry best fit the various cultural contexts which now exist on the North American continent.

A review of the precedent literature is also included which covers the biblical and theological foundations of church planting, as well as missiological foundations which guide church planting. A thorough description of each of the models examined in this study is also given in light of the literature base.

The precedent literature review is followed by a description of the methodological design for this study, which describes the two phases of the research. A survey instrument was developed by the researcher based on the research questions guiding the current study. Data from the instrument obtained

the necessary information to determine if relationships exist between conversion growth, convert retention, and model selection.

A description of the research findings follows. The data confirmed much of what the precedent literature had claimed. Yet the data also revealed an inverted relationship between the size of the churches and the rate of conversion growth. An evaluation of the research design described the strengths and weaknesses of the study in detail.

The study concludes by suggesting that the demographics of individuals reached by the church planting models examined largely coincide with the contentions of the precedent literature. The study also suggests that Southern Baptists are still effective at reaching the demographic typical of their present makeup. Yet much improvement is needed, most notably among ethnic groups and emerging generations. The study also applies the findings to church planting praxis, principally by suggesting that slower growth will be the norm in churches that actively seek the lost. It is also suggested that more attention should be given to emerging models of church planting.

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*“Staying power: Pastoral tenure in church planting.”* Author: Stan R. Buck, D.Min. dissertation, 2003. 97 pages.

### **abstract**

This study compared the relationship between pastoral tenure and congregational growth in the churches planted by the North Indiana Conference of the United Methodist Church from 1980–2000 and sought to discern the causes of pastoral turnover in those churches. In the churches where the founding pastor provided long-term leadership, more consistent growth occurred.

The difficult issues faced by the founding pastors were also evaluated in this study along with strategies designed to help navigate these challenges. The study encourages church leaders to develop an intentional commitment to long-term pastoral tenure in church planting, a commitment to “staying power.”

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*"Effective church planting: A qualitative analysis of selected church planting models."*

Author: Troy Lennon Bush, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1999. 152 pages.

## **abstract**

This dissertation examines the relationship between church planting models and the resulting churches. The thesis is that church planting models substantially shape the resulting churches. In particular, this study examines two models, Trevor McIlwain's chronological Bible teaching model and George Patterson's Theological Education and Evangelism by Extension (TEEE) model, and a sample of resulting churches under the rubric of eight qualities.

Chapter 1 introduces the subject by briefly tracing the fissure between Evangelicals and Protestants in the WCC over the nature of mission and the increased use of strategies and methodologies by evangelicals. It suggests that church planting models are forms of technology and are, therefore, value laden.

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Chapter 2 presents a chronological description of eighteen published church planting models in the periods 1970–79, 1980–89, and 1990–99. By presenting the models in a chronological manner, I traced the history of evangelical, church planting models during the last thirty years. Each model is presented briefly, including the occasion for its development, the context in which it developed, and its significant characteristics.

Chapter 3 establishes the qualitative criteria for the analysis of church planting models. Attention is given to the historic quest for the universal qualities of a local church, and four significant eras in which the church's nature and function are the primary focus serve well the purpose of this chapter: Augustine and the Donatists, The Reformation, The Three-Selfs Movement, and Donald McGavran and the Church Growth Movement. Eight qualities of a local church arise out this examination and provide the criteria needed to evaluate effective church planting in the next two chapters.

Chapter 4 is the first of two chapters that analyzes a selected church planting model with this fourth chapter presenting an analysis of Trevor McIlwain's chronological teaching model. A description of the model's construct begins the chapter. Then, the model and the resulting church sample are analyzed with regard to the eight qualities identified in chapter three. Attention is given to the relationship between the model and the churches.

Chapter 5 is the second of two chapters analyzing a selected church planting model with this chapter analyzing George Patterson's TEEE model. A description of the model's construct begins the chapter. Then, the model and the resulting church sample are analyzed with regard to the eight qualities. Attention is given to the relationship between the model and the churches.

The conclusion summarizes the findings of the dissertation. Suggestions for further study are made with an emphasis being on models of church planting not addressed by this dissertation. It ends with a challenge to mission-sending institutions and missionaries, calling upon them to qualitatively evaluate their church planting ministries, especially the models they utilize.

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*"Pastoral leadership in church planting: A case study approach."* Daryl E. McCarthy, D.Min. dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1990. 400 pages.

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## **abstract**

The purpose of this dissertation is to present a case study on church planting by describing the planting and first two years of growth of Shawnee Mission Church of God in Overland Park, Kansas, a suburb of Kansas City.

The dissertation describes the inception of the vision to found the church and follows its development through the first two years of its growth by describing the coalescing of the church planting team and the initiation of the aspects of its ministry.

This dissertation emphasizes the importance of careful preparation for the first public service of a new church and the crucial role of outreach and advertising. A preliminary theology of worship is presented which was developed by the church in its efforts to be both biblical and evangelistically relevant to the unchurched. The importance of visitor follow-up in church planting is emphasized by the detailed and comprehensive strategy followed by Shawnee Mission Church. The principles and methods for incorporating new members in Shawnee Mission Church are described as well.

The dissertation describes the joys and trauma of church planting from a pastor's perspective. It illustrates both the positive rewards of church birth as well as the emotional and spiritual toll such an enterprise can exact.

The thrust of the dissertation is to clarify the partnership of divine and human activity in the work of church planting. The value of sociological insights for the



church has traditionally been disparaged. On the other hand, some early church growth literature neglected the spiritual dynamics of church planting and growth. This dissertation seeks to illustrate the importance of both human and divine activity in church planting and growth.

The conclusion of the dissertation is that both divine activity and human activity and insights are necessary for successful church planting. As the old saying expresses it, “Christ alone can save the world, but Christ cannot save the world alone.” Just so, there is no church planting and genuine growth apart from the supernatural aid of the Holy Spirit. But neither will any church planting and growth occur apart from the committed work of God’s workers.

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*“The evangelistic strategy of Charles Haddon Spurgeon for the multiplication of churches and implications for modern church extension theory.”* Author: Rodney Douglas Earls, Ph.D. dissertation, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989. 270 pages.

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## **abstract**

The thesis of this study is that Charles Haddon Spurgeon’s strategy of evangelism for multiplying churches provides an effective paradigm for modern church extension work. The evangelistic strategy of Spurgeon is based on the first century model of the early church. He brings to the church an evangelistic strategy of demonstrated practicality and results. Biblical foundations guide the concepts and principles Spurgeon offers for effective evangelism.

Part I researches the formative influences upon Spurgeon’s life that influenced his understanding of God and His mission in evangelism. Spurgeon’s background reveals the power of God’s Word in molding a strong faith usable for evangelistic missions. The conversion of Spurgeon provides a clear and powerful interpretation of the gospel. This becomes the motivating and guiding doctrine for all evangelistic mission strategy. The experiences of Spurgeon at Waterbeach affirm the power of this doctrine to bring about change to holiness and for service to Jesus Christ.

Part II documents the evangelistic strategy of Spurgeon as revealed in the Pastor’s College and Metropolitan Tabernacle. The training and equipping of men for evangelism and church planting proves to be the axiomatic means to multiplying churches. The particular approach to training men for church growth and church extension executed by Spurgeon defines effectual training of pastor-evangelists for successful church multiplication.

Part III analyzes the principles observed by Spurgeon in eventuating the multiplication of individual followers of Christ and congregated bodies of believers. The evangelistic passion of Spurgeon proves useful to impassion congregants to soul winning and church extension. The message and methodology of Spurgeon, guided by biblical mandate, provides the modern church an effective model for successful church extension.

This study concludes that Spurgeon's principles are relevant and even essential to the church for the accomplishment of church extension. Charles Haddon Spurgeon is a true friend and guide for the church to achieve her mission purpose.