

## CREATING CHURCH MULTIPLICATION THROUGH A DENOMINATIONAL STRUCTURE

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A denomination will not survive, much less thrive, if it does not strategically and effectively plant churches. Church planting is the primary means by which new inroads are made. Church planting is the method by which a denomination keeps its vitality, energy, and vigor. The denominations that neglect this emphasis become ingrown, resulting in them “. . . losing the vigor and the high octane faith that caused them to succeed in the first place.”<sup>1</sup> Lyle Schaller found a correlation between membership and church planting:

Every denomination reporting an increase in membership reports an increase in the number of congregations. Every denomination reporting an increase in the total number of congregations reports an increase in members. Every denomination reporting a decrease in membership reports a decrease in congregations. Every denomination reporting a decrease in congregations reports a decrease in members.<sup>2</sup>

It is my observation that new congregations bring an increase in every critical aspect of denominational life, such as salvations, baptisms, financial resources, and

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<sup>1</sup> Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of American 1776–1990* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 163.

<sup>2</sup> Josh Hunt, *Let It Grow* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993), 75.

attendance. These are key markers all denominations tend to value. The role of a judicatory is not to plant the churches, but to create an environment wherein churches might grow and become healthy and fit in order to multiply. “George Bullard says two things must be in place for a church planting movement to occur: (1) a denomination must be planting 5 percent, or more, of the number of existing churches, and (2) this must be a grassroots movement bubbling up from the local churches.”<sup>3</sup> The denominational leadership must cultivate an atmosphere to energize this grassroots movement, yet the cultivation of such an atmosphere does not come naturally to most denominational leaders.

Church planting, in its essence, is outward looking. It is the determination to push the boundaries of church. It is driven by sending people out, not merely gathering them in. At its core is the reality that we are a missional people. We are a missional people because the God we honor is missional. He *sent* His Son *into* the world!<sup>4</sup> As a response we, too, are sent into our everyday worlds to infiltrate and impact those we encounter.

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Church planting movements are not easily accommodated by existing denominational structure. It is not that the structure cannot accommodate the movement, it is that often it will not. Conversely, the movement itself begins to believe that the denominational structure in and of itself is the problem to its fluidity. Both perspectives are erroneous!

The movement needs the denomination for parameters, and the denomination needs the movement for innovation. Left to themselves both are rushing toward potential disaster. There must be a balance between the necessity to push outward and the stability of the existing structure. The problem we face is that, for denominational leaders, stability is valued at a higher level than a movement. This stability becomes the value most cherished, a stability that is protected by inaction. Risks are not safe, therefore they threaten stability. Risks are inherent in movements, thus the missional nature of movements are resisted. “The reasonable decision is not necessarily the safe decision. In a given situation, the most reasonable course of action may involve grave risks and great dangers.”<sup>5</sup> The willingness to make the *reasonable, but unsafe* decision eludes many denominations.

A denominational structure, in and of itself, does not dampen a church planting movement. It is when the structure becomes *in and of itself* that the movement is stunted. The structure must be that which equips and empowers for mission, not drags and deters.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>4</sup> John 3:16, NLT

<sup>5</sup> Alan Axelrod, *Profiles in Audacity* (New York: Sterling Publishing Co., Inc., 2006), 6.

The question: Can a church planting movement begin apart from a denominational environment? Absolutely! However, the focus of this paper is on churches that function within a denominational structure. This being the case, we need to determine how such a movement can happen within an existing structure. Change will need to occur, and this change needs to be a combination of *inside out* (denominational leadership) and *outside in* (local church leaders exerting positive pressure on the denominational structure). It is important to identify deterrents to church planting movements. These are not all inclusive, but they do provide insight into potential blockages that may exist in denominations.

**Priority:** There are many activities that can dilute an emphasis on church multiplication. One critical activity is the clamor of existing churches for denominational help. These activities are necessary, but they can easily dull the edge of a movement. There need to be tools provided for churches to grow and be healthy. However, if it is not regularly emphasized that health is for the purpose of multiplication, churches will continue to focus on themselves, creating an ingrown atmosphere.

**Complacency:** Complacency is not a plan. It is easy to resist pushing ahead if we have *enough* to function. Why push church multiplication when the resources we have provide for what we need? Much of the same challenges of *enough about them, what about us* local churches encounter, can occur denominationally.

David exploited the complacency attitude when he captured Jerusalem. The Jebusites believed they had no need to worry. They were in a highly fortified city. They had plenty of resources to wait out a siege. “. . . ‘You’ll never get in here,’ the Jebusites taunted. ‘Even the blind and lame could keep you out!’ For the Jebusites *thought* (emphasis mine) they were safe.”<sup>6</sup> And where did this mentality get them? Captured! “But David captured the fortress of Zion. . . .”<sup>7</sup>

It is very easy for denominations to *think* they are safe. They have a solid reputation. They may have endowments. They have a comfortable amount of churches and mission fields to manage. They have excellent educational institutions. They have buildings to house denominational officials. They get complacent! They neglect pushing out into new territory. They become more about history than hope. They focus on their doctrinal distinctives instead of the Gospel. They become more about themselves than the culture they are called to minister.

**Management:** Denominations tend to resist the unleashing of a movement because it can be unmanageable. Movements are not manageable, nor should they

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<sup>6</sup> II Samuel 5:6, NLT.

<sup>7</sup> II Samuel 5:7, NLT.

necessarily be. Yet, it is this very dynamic of *unmanageability* that gives denominational leaders pause of what such a movement will bring.

“Denominations often withdraw their support when they sense that they have lost ‘control’ of a planting situation.”<sup>8</sup>

**Buy in:** Getting local church leaders to buy in to a church planting movement is huge. It can be so difficult that denominations figure it is easier to plant churches themselves. Denominational church planting is the path of least resistance. Unfortunately it is also the path of least effectiveness.

**Limiting organization:** Denominations give much verbalization to the importance of multiplication, but their organizational structures are often designed to encourage the opposite.

A denomination set big goals for church multiplication and revitalization.

They cast lofty, far-reaching vision and talked a great deal about the need for more new churches. But when it came time for acting on those goals, they were reticent to free up money or release people. The leaders said it was important, but wouldn’t make the tough calls necessary to move forward. Their talk was bigger than their walk.<sup>9</sup>

Recognition is reserved for the churches that have grown. Financial incentives are provided for churches that buy land and build bigger facilities. What does this tell us? *The system is perfect for the results it is now getting. If different results are desired, a different system will need to be built.* “Until recently, most denominations have been more concerned with reorganization and survival than with establishing new churches.”<sup>10</sup>

Can a church planting movement happen within a denominational structure? I believe it can if changes are made. But this will take honest evaluation and the willingness to do the hard work of changing a culture. Dale Galloway observes, “. . . thriving denominations, with constant stories of changed lives through Jesus Christ, inevitably place great value on church planting. They understand that the only way we expand beyond where we are today is to press out, become pioneers, and launch new works.”<sup>11</sup> What can be done for a denomination to create such a climate? A climate that will result in the stories and expansion Galloway mentions.

A denomination creates a culture for church planting through **clear vision casting**. Vision casting is clarifying the preferred future of the denomination. Vision begins with the leadership getting clarity of that future. “Vision casters will

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<sup>8</sup> Phil Stevenson, *The Ripple Church* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2004), 140.

<sup>9</sup> Robert E. Logan, *Be Fruitful and Multiply* (ST. Charles, IL: Church Smart Resources, 2006), 43.

<sup>10</sup> Stuart Murray, *Church Planting: Laying Foundations* (Scottsdale PA: Herald Press, 2001), 15.

<sup>11</sup> NETResults, November/December 2002.

need to do enough cultivating of the heart for people to be able to see the harvest, and enough looking at the harvest to develop true compassion.”<sup>12</sup>

The vision gets saturated into the denominational culture as leaders talk about it constantly and with clarity. Vision should be that which drives a movement. “A good vision is God-given, and, in my mind, should inspire the greatest sacrifices. People ought to be willing to live and die for the vision.”<sup>13</sup>

A denomination creates a culture for church planting through creating *greater capacity* for its leaders and churches. Capacity is created when resources are provided and allowances are made for entrepreneurial endeavors. Often this resource is seen as financial. Finances, however, are a small portion of creating capacity. “Beyond salary assistance, church planters prefer assistance with church-development and training resources—books, boot camp, assessment, conferences, and other helps.”<sup>14</sup>

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The Wesleyan Church has developed a methodology that incorporates district (judicatory) leadership, new churches, and existing churches. These need to partner together in order to produce healthy churches that will multiply disciples, leaders, and churches. The district/denominational role is the creation of an environment for churches to grow, thrive, and multiply. The five key components in this environment creation are: *Recruitment, Assessment, Training, Coaching, and Networking*.

Each component needs to be developed to equip and empower the local church to multiply. It is very tempting for denominations to move in and attempt to do it themselves. This temptation must be avoided. There needs to be a great deal of flexibility in the system. How each is done may vary from church to church and region to region, and denominational leadership must be trusting in this.

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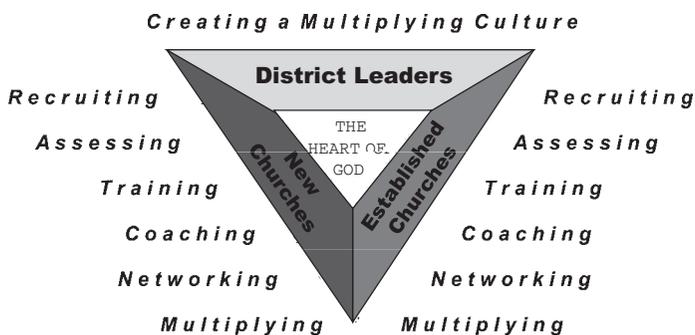
<sup>12</sup> Robert E. Logan, *Be Fruitful and Multiply* (St. Charles, IL: Church Smart Resources, 2006), 44.

<sup>13</sup> Fred Herron, *Expanding God’s Kingdom through Church Planting* (New York: Writer’s Showcase, 2003), 122.

<sup>14</sup> Ed Stetzer and Warren Bird, “The State of Church Planting in the United States” (*Journal of the American Society for Church Growth*, summer 2008), 18.

<sup>15</sup> Ed Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 78.

# The Wesleyan Missional Movement



## ***Multiplying Healthy Churches That Will Multiply*** ***Disciples*** ***Leaders*** ***Churches***

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The denominational leaders need to highlight the value of each component without dictating the delivery system. For example, it is not so much how assessment is done, but that it is done effectively. “There is no way, with the data currently available, to determine what is the best type of assessment.”<sup>16</sup> What is known is that an assessed planter has greater effectiveness than an un-assessed planter.<sup>17</sup>

The most effective means of spawning a church planting movement is that of a team approach. It is denominations creating a multiplication culture. It is the encouraging of local congregations to plant new churches. But this is more easily said than done. More emphasis is being given to churches parenting churches, but the activity has yet to catch up to verbalization.

It appears that although denominations are reporting a marked overall increase in church planting and in parent churches, regional leaders indicate that there are still only 15% of that denomination’s local churches who are actually parenting churches. The majority of church-planting is being done by a very small percentage of that denomination’s churches, or the parent church

<sup>16</sup> Ed Stetzer and Warren Bird, “The State of Church Planting in the United States” (Journal of the American Society for Church Growth, summer 2008), 14.

<sup>17</sup> Ed Stetzer and Phillip Connor, “Church Plant Survivability and Health Study 2007” (A Publication of the Center for Missional Research, North American Mission Board, 2007)

only participating from a distance. However, the 15% statistic will likely increase with time, but only a small percentage of already established churches account for the church-planting growth within a denomination.<sup>18</sup>

This sounds the clarion call. We need more established churches to participate in the starting of new churches. “One of the greatest problems for the contemporary church in America is that not enough of them are involved in starting churches.”<sup>19</sup> Denominational leaders can sound this call. They can create flexibility in their structure for this to happen. They can empower a movement if there is a willingness to allow the Spirit to work, even if it is outside structural comfort.

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<sup>18</sup> Ed Stetzer and Warren Bird, “The State of Church Planting in the United States” (Journal of the American Society for Church Growth, summer 2008), 21–22.

<sup>19</sup> Aubrey Malphurs, *Planting Growing Churches for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 251.