

Female and Fertile: Reproductive Capacity in the Local Congregation

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1. Look back to when and where your church was first "planted."
 - a. For what reason(s) was your church first planted? _____
 - b. Who was the founding pastor/church planter? _____
 - c. What has proven to be the greatest challenge(s) to the health and growth of your congregation

 - d. What "spiritual victories" (ministry breakthroughs) have been granted to your congregation over the years? _____
 - e. How is your congregation different today than when it was first planted?

 - f. How is the community around you different today? _____
2. An engaging thought: "every congregation begins as a mission congregation." Like humans, none are born fully mature. How is a congregation's birth/growth similar to that of a human?
3. In Luke 19:10, how did Jesus describe what He came to do ... and what the church must continue to do? _____
4. In the Scriptures the church is always female. How do the following passages shed light on the female designation of the church?
 - a. Revelation 21:9 _____
 - b. 2 Corinthians 11:2 _____
 - c. Revelation 22:17 _____
 - d. John 3:29 _____
5. Try to "flesh out" this concept by identifying five female characteristics which illustrate/demonstrate the nature of the church. Then use a concordance or word search engine to document that characteristic with a documenting passage from Scripture.

Female Characteristic	Scripture Reference
a. _____	_____
b. _____	_____
c. _____	_____
d. _____	_____
e. _____	_____

6. Since the church is a female organism (Body of Christ), it too has been built and designed to reproduce. Some have described the Book of Acts as a basic telling of the story of how the church reproduced through disciple-making and church planting by Paul and the apostles. How do each of

these connected passages in Acts reveal a God-given vision for reproductive church planting?

- a. Acts 1: 8 _____
 - b. Acts 8:1 _____
 - c. Acts 11:19-21 _____
 - d. Acts 11:26 -- What name was first given to the believers in Christ in the Antioch congregation?

 - e. Acts 13:1-3: Summarize how the Church at Antioch of Syria demonstrated its female capacity for reproduction and church planting. _____
7. It has been suggested that the church in Ephesus is yet another example of a church with great female reproductive capacity. There is considerable thought which sees the Ephesus congregation as the "mother church" of the other six churches mentioned in the Revelation: Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. Using a Bible atlas, find a map of the "Seven Historical Churches of the Revelation," described in Revelation 2:1-3:22. Describe how the Ephesus congregation might have given birth to multiple new congregations.

8. Conclude by exploring these reflection questions with your group and others in your congregation.
- a. Why is the church always described in female terms?
 - b. Someone said, "Many churches have 'fertility problems.'" What might they have meant?
 - c. Many Christians in the USA see church planting as the responsibility of district or denomination. Do you agree with that perception? Is church planting the right and privilege and responsibility of the local congregation? Why or why not?
 - d. Has God called your congregation to reproduce and give birth to a new mission congregation? How is such a call heard or discerned?
 - e. The *Ablaze!* Mission Initiative in the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod calls for the planting of 2,000 new churches in the United States by 2017. Is that a good and God-pleasing goal? How will that many churches be planted during that time frame?
 - f. What would happen if you initiated a conversation with your congregational leaders, probing the possibility that God is calling your church to reach more people for Christ by giving birth to a new mission congregation?
 - g. What is the relationship between "making disciples" and "church planting"?

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Accompanying Leaders' Guide is also available from the Center for U.S. Missions.