

Failure to Launch? -- --  
Why do so Many Churches Overlook Church Planting?  
by Mike Ruhl

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On a recent flight from Orange County to Detroit, the Boeing 757 featured the in-flight film *Failure to Launch*. Even without headphones, the story-line was both obvious and engaging. Two aging parents are eager for their thirty-something son to move out of their home and launch his own life. So the parents hire a female consultant to facilitate their son's "launch into fulfillment" by moving out. The female consultant explains that most *failures to launch* are due to lack of self-esteem. So she launches a plan to create a romantic relationship with their son, craft a memorable first encounter, design an emotional crisis, plus multiply opportunities to fellowship with his close friends, and for them to convince and teach the son to "move out." The plan back-fires, however, at least for a while. For instead of bonding with the female consultant, the home-tied son wants to break up. Hence the film title: *Failure to Launch*.

What about church planting? Those words refer to a Christian congregation seeing and seizing the opportunity for fulfilling spiritual reproduction by giving birth to a new congregation. Has your congregation considered investing energetically in kingdom-growth by daughtering a new congregation? Or might this be an example of a *failure to launch*? Is your congregational self-esteem, rooted in the merits of the cross and empty tomb of Jesus Christ, strong enough to push you out of the parochial nest and make new disciples for Christ by creating a new church in the real world? Has the Holy Spirit ignited a kingdom-growth vision which transcends addition and embraces *multiplication*?

Reflect on this listing of adapted *Church Planting Affirmations*, all of which support the successful launch of new congregations from existing congregations.

1. Church planting is biblical.
2. Church planting is based on fervent, continual prayer.
3. Church planting is indispensable to evangelizing the world.
4. Church planting is guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit.
5. Church planting is accompanied by bold witnessing to the Gospel.
6. Church planting trusts the Lord of the Church to make provision.
7. Church planting is about reaching all people wherever they dwell.
8. Church planting sees all humans in need of the forgiveness of Christ.
9. Church planting follows the New Testament in honoring diversity.
10. Church planting is sacrificial in nature.
11. Church planting is indigenous to the local context
12. Church planting is dependent more on the call of God than on human or financial resources.
13. Church planting is hard work.

14. Church planting includes ministry to the whole person.
15. Church planting is done best by and through local congregations.

Some of these affirmations may challenge our traditional (and organizational) perception about church planting, and even create some doubts and fears in an established congregation about “leaving home” by stepping out in faith to sponsor the planting of a new church. Is it truly more effective when local congregations plant new congregations instead of districts and denominations? Should new church plants truly reflect the context and culture in which they are planted instead of cloning the church culture? Can the world truly be evangelized without aggressive church planting? Can established churches with limited people and financial resources still plant a new church? Is it factual that God truly does “multiply the bread and fish” and provide the necessary resources to accomplish church planting? Will giving birth to a new daughter congregation only weaken the mother congregation?

Doubts and fears such as these are capable of closing the hearts and minds of existing congregations to the possibilities of making more and better disciples for Christ for time and for eternity through church planting.

In fact, for some congregations, it is like not wanting to “grow up and leave home,” choosing instead to remain in familiar surroundings that are safe and secure and free of risk-taking for a higher purpose.

*Failure to launch?*