

That Haunting Question: Why Plant New Churches?

by Mike Ruhl

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It happened again.

Apostolic leaders gathered together to dialog and network around the subject of the Great Commission. All affirmed that God is a Missionary God. All agreed that sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ is “the main business” of the Christian church. All had hearts ablaze for reaching spiritually disconnected people with the Gospel of salvation by grace and through faith in Jesus Christ.

And then it happened again.

Someone asked: *With so much evangelism to be done, why is there so much talk about planting new churches?* Another apostolic leader chimed in: Why yes! If our existing churches were healthier and more faithful to the Word of Truth, there would be many, many more people reached with the Gospel of Christ! Why plant new churches?

For some, that is a *haunting* question. That is, it is a question which comes to mind continually, almost like an obsession. Why even bother to plant new churches when there is so much evangelism to be done?

While evangelism is virtually always “on the front burner” when a church planter is starting a new church, it is possible for both the planter and the new congregation to lose that “outreach focus.”

The word *entropy* describes the *natural and irreversible tendency toward disorder in any system without an external source of energy*. Applied to evangelism, it is often true that the energy of evangelism in the local church will naturally (and in some cases irreversibly) move toward disorder and dysfunction.

Bruce McNichol, one of the authors of *Ascent of a Leader*, quotes a well-known statistic: A church which is 0 – 3 years old requires 3 attendees to reach 1 person for Christ. A church which is 3 – 10 years old requires 7 attendees to reach 1 person for Christ. And a church older than 10 years old requires 89 attendees to reach 1 person for Christ. In other words, as the church gets older and older, it becomes harder to keep evangelism on the front burner because of all the “compelling issues” that keep pushing it back.

Is it any wonder then that planting 2,000 new churches in the USA by 2017 is a “front burner” goal of the *Ablaze!* initiative? New churches are predictably more evangelistic.

David Brainerd, a missionary to Native Americans in New York, New Jersey and eastern Pennsylvania, 1718-1747, declared: *I care not where I go, or how I live, or what I endure so that I may (through Christ) save souls. When I sleep, I dream of them; when I awake, they are first in my thoughts.*

Perhaps your church is an aging (or aged) church which honors the Lord and His Word, but displays symptoms of evangelism entropy. Do not despair!

First, remember that the Holy Spirit is in the transforming business. Through the Word, he can change all of that at any time, in any place. Remember the vision of the Valley of Dry Bones in Ezekiel 37.

Second, do not overlook the tremendous opportunity for *daughter church planting*. For that same Holy Spirit which brought new life to the bones can also comfort and counsel your congregation in such a way that you are led to give birth to a new mission congregation in your expanding mission field.

Think about it. Pray about it. Talk about it. Then consider just doing it!

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