

How to Build a Church-Planting Team¹

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I. Introduction

- “Church planting is a team sport.”²
- My personal experiences with two church-planting teams.
 - “Cold start” vs. “Hot start” (Malphurs’s description)

II. What Is a Church-Planting Team?

A. Biblical pattern of team ministry.

1. Jesus extends the kingdom through team ministry.
 - Jesus sends the twelve out in pairs (Mark 6:7).
 - Jesus sends the seventy out in pairs (Luke 10:1).
2. Paul models team ministry.

“While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.” (Acts 13:2-3)

“Now Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia. And John left them and returned to Jerusalem.” (Acts 13:13)

“There he spent three months, and when a plot was made against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia. Sopater the Berean, son of Pyrrhus, accompanied him; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; and the Asians, Tychicus and Trophimus.” (Acts 20:3-4)

“And from there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled. And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with

¹ This outline by Craig Cabaniss was presented on March 25, 2011, at Plant, a church-planting conference hosted by Sovereign Grace Ministries. All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version (ESV).

² Gary Rohrmayer, *First Steps for Planting a Missional Church* (ChurchSmart Resources, 2006), 67.

them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. And they remained no little time with the disciples.” (Acts 14:26-28)

3. The benefit of laboring together with others.

“Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up!” (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10)

“Thus the wise person will work side-by-side with another, enjoying a good reward and finding help in times of need.”³

B. Terms for the church-planting team

1. Core team/group

“A core group’s primary role is to become the expression of Christ in the ministry context through the sharing of a common vision, values, mission, and strategy. The core group exercises their gifts in carrying out the Great Commandment and Great Commission in the planting of a church.”⁴

2. Launch team

“A launch team is a group of evangelistic ‘bringers’ who have been selected and trained by the church planter to assist in the first stage of the founding of the church.”⁵

3. Church-planting team

A community of believers led by a pastor(s) who are growing together in life and mission while preparing for the public launching of a church. The church-planting team is a developing church.

C. Models of church planting

Church-planting teams may vary according to church-planting model. Tim Keller identifies the following types of church-planting models (abbreviated from Keller, p. 123)

³ ESV Study Bible on Ecclesiastes 4 (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008)

⁴ *Seven Steps for Planting Churches*, Planter edition, edited by Tom Cheyney, J. David Putman, and Van Sanders (Alpharetta, GA: North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 2003), 31. PDF available at http://www.namb.net/ycomina_101810/.

⁵ Tim Keller, *Church Planter Manual* (New York: Redeemer Church Planting Center), 129.

Type	Description	Leadership gifts needed
Pioneering	Starting a new church from scratch	Entrepreneur/faith
Branching	Hiving core group from parent church	Facilitator/credible with parent church
Adopting	Embracing existing core group	Developer/wisdom
Partnering	Cooperative between churches	Entrepreneur/facilitative/open

III. Life Stages of the Church-Planting Team

Assuming a lot at this stage in the process: God is calling the planter to plant. The planter's wife is enthusiastically supportive. An assessment process has taken place. The planter's elders are sending him. Funding is set or clearly in process. General location is determined. The overall process is far enough along that the planter is ready to gather a team.

A. Gathering the team

1. Pray

“And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” (Matthew 9:35-38)

“Actually the first step is prayer. Before we attempt to plant a church anywhere, it's imperative that we spend hours on our knees in prayer. In fact it would be wise for church planters to recruit personal intercessors...who will pray for them, their teams, and the entire planting endeavor on a constant basis. Church planters, however, should not regard intercessory prayer as the first step because that might influence them to emphasize it only at the beginning of the process. Instead, it must be encouraged *throughout* the process. We can't place enough emphasis on prayer!”⁶

2. Importance of the gathering stage

⁶ Aubrey Malphurs, *Planting Growing Churches for the 21st Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), 118.

“It is essential to note that the gathering process has a huge impact on the formation of the DNA of the church.”⁷

“The most difficult phase comes early, when the church planter is attempting to attract a launch team. At this stage the planter can offer no relationships, no meeting place, no programs, and no music. People have difficulty committing themselves to a dream they can’t see. Recruiting a launch team is challenging but essential. It’s when the planter lays a foundation for the birth of the new church.”⁸

3. Who are the potential church-planting team members?
 - a. Family and friends
 - b. Members of the sending church/churches
 - c. People who currently live in the area of the new church
 - d. Like-minded people who relocate to join the church plant
4. How to gather a church-planting team
 - a. Determine team qualifications. These may differ slightly based on the risks involved (e.g. local vs. relocation). For additional material see article “Qualifications for Participating in a Church-Planting Team,” available at www.SovereignGraceMinistries.org/church-planting/resources. Qualifications include:
 - Motivated by the gospel. Person should live a gospel-empowered life that overflows with grace to others.
 - Growing Christian with godly character.

“The number one qualification for any person on a team is godly character.”⁹
 - Unified vision with the church planter. Shared doctrine and philosophy of ministry. History of living fruitfully in community with others.

“I am convinced that the degree to which you will experience success or failure in your church planting endeavors depends on whether your core people...share the same values.”¹⁰

⁷ Martin Robinson, *Planting Mission-Shaped Churches Today* (Monarch, 2006), 67.

⁸ Ed Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 198.

⁹ Malphurs, 156.

¹⁰ Malphurs, 121.

- If relocation is involved, generally people should have employment and family stability.
 - Humility. Adaptability. Servanthood. Perseverance.
 - Some planters ask team members to make a 1-2 year commitment.
- b. Create means for helping people determine God's will for their participation on the church-planting team.
- Informational meetings that are low on "romance" and high on reality.
 - Application process.
 - Meet with interested people.
 - Speak with their pastor for a reference.
 - Attempt to help people sort out their motives. Dave Harvey mentions three problematic motives for joining a church-planting team. Joining the team is:
 - Not primarily an opportunity to exercise gifts that were stifled at the home church.
 - Not primarily an opportunity to emerge into an unrecognized leadership role.
 - Not primarily an opportunity to build relationship with the pastor which was unrealized in the last church context.
5. Don't gather a team with the goal, "bigger is better." Look for the right people. But **IF** you have the right people, then bigger is often better.
6. Recruit people with differing gifts.

B. Building the team

1. Communicate, communicate, communicate. This is the primary means for building the team.
2. Meet regularly (weekly) for the purpose of growing together as a team.
 - Acts 2:42-47
 - Study and apply Scripture
 - Build together relationally
 - Mutual support and accountability
 - Cast vision for mission
 - Pray
 - Eat together

- Avoid administration. It will dominate if allowed.
3. Building community as a team is vital for the mission of reaching people with the gospel.

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34-35)

“The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.” (John 17:22-23)

Commenting on this phrase “that they may one,” Francis Schaeffer explained, “This is the final apologetic.”¹¹

4. Serve the team by preparing the team. Manage expectations.

- Conflict is inevitable.

“Church planting pushes people to their limits on every level, emotionally, relationally, financially and spiritually and even the best of relationships can break down. It happened to Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:39-40).”¹²

- Disappointment is inevitable.

“Your new pastor and church will eventually disappoint you and let you down. People get into a new church thinking it will be utopia. It isn’t. Even if it is for a while, eventually the glitter rubs off.”¹³

- Change is inevitable.

5. Serve the team by equipping the team.

- Equip the team to serve together.

“Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.” (Philippians 1:27)

¹¹ Francis Schaeffer, *The Mark of the Christian*, 2nd ed., (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1970/2006), 26.

¹² Rohrmayer, 59.

¹³ Luke Simmons, “10 Ways to Be a Great Church Plant Core Group,” *Second Mile Church Blog*, July 31, 2009, <http://secondmilechurch.wordpress.com/2009/07/31/10-ways-to-be-a-great-church-plant-core-group/>. Luke Simmons is an Acts 29 church planter.

- Equip the team in outreach and hospitality.
- Equip the team in the doctrine of the sovereignty of God.
- Equip the team in faith.

C. Deploying the team

1. Define roles and select leaders in preparation for launching Sunday gatherings.

- Decide on minimum roles: worship, children's ministry, financial, small groups.
- If you don't have a leader, don't attempt a ministry. Be patient.

“Don't attempt to institute any ministries unless God has provided the people who are gifted to lead and implement them (don't succumb to the idea that something is better than nothing).”¹⁴

2. Develop systems for the life of the church before launching Sunday gatherings.

“An unborn child must develop different biological systems to enable it to function effectively after birth, and they must be in place when birth takes place for proper development to continue. Same for a new church. Key systems must operate, or the church may not succeed after it's born.”¹⁵

3. In church planting, delegating responsibilities to new leaders is a significant step of faith. But a necessary step that will yield often surprising results as God stretches and equips people to lead.

4. Employ gatherings before the official launch to deploy new leaders.

- Pre-launch meetings
- Preview services

D. Disbanding the team

¹⁴ Malphurs, 175.

¹⁵ Stetzer, 198–199.

1. The church-planting team is a means to an end.
2. Maintaining “the team” after the launch can hinder the new church.
 - Reinforces an insider/outsider mentality
 - Makes it difficult for new folks to serve and lead
3. Help the team disband and integrate throughout the new church family.