

Hello Pastors/Leaders:

Despite the church planting boom in the United States (and in the SBC) over the last several years, there can still be resistance to planting among existing churches. I addressed some of the common objections to church planting in a previous article. However, with this article I want to address church planting from a more positive stance - that is, what are the reasons for church planting? I'm going to provide several "factors" that give the rationale for starting new churches. The first factor is...

1. ***The Biblical Mandate Factor*** - Although the phraseology "church planting" is not mentioned in the New Testament, the concept is certainly assumed and practiced. The Great Commission Mandate to "make disciples" was fulfilled by the starting of new churches. Many of those churches would send out others to plant new congregations.¹ Unless we're convinced that our present number of churches are sufficient to reach the lostness in NWI, then we need to start new churches. Why? Because it is necessary for us to be obedient to the biblical mandate to "make disciples"!
2. ***The Evangelism Effectiveness Factor*** - The late missiologist C. Peter Wagner claimed, "Planting new churches is the most effective evangelistic methodology known under heaven."² Numerous studies have shown that new churches are more effective in evangelism for its growth. In fact, studies have revealed that church planting has replaced crusade evangelism as the preferred and most effective means to evangelize.³ The fact of the matter is that new churches are more effective in reaching younger people, new residents, and the de-churched/unchurched than existing churches. It's not that existing churches cannot reach these demographics, it's just that new church plants, for a variety of reasons, have an evangelistic efficiency not present in most established congregations.
3. ***The Survival Factor*** - If we believe our movement is important - if we believe that the modern Southern Baptist Convention with its theological, educational, and missiological directives are worth preserving and propagating, then we must plant new churches. More specifically, if we want to have a Northwest Indiana Baptist Association of churches to continue to exist, and more importantly, to have significant gospel impact in NWI, then for our future survival we must plant new churches!
4. ***The Kingdom-Focus Factor*** - The sad reality is most churches are only concerned about their own turf and institutional survival. However, the church is not the "end" in and of itself,

¹Ed Stetzer, *5 Reasons Established Churches Should Plant Churches*, available at:<https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2014/june/5-reasons-established-churches-should-plant-churches.html>

² Bill Hogg, *Rekindling our Evangelistic Flame*, available at:<https://www.sendinstitute.org/rekindling-evangelistic-flame/>

³ Ed Stetzer, *5 Reasons Established Churches Should Plant Churches*

but she exists for the advancement of the Kingdom of God. Our churches must strive for health, but health will require that they become more Kingdom-centric and that will include, among other things, a focus on seeing new churches started. Charles Spurgeon had this Kingdom mindset. He said:

“It was really disgruntling that any brother should be frightened about another chapel coming within a mile of him in such a city as London. They might go and put up a whole street of them around the Tabernacle, if they like.” C.H. Spurgeon

If we really see our churches as the means to the ultimate end - the advancement of the Kingdom, then we must infuse church planting into our DNA. That leads to the next factor.

5. ***The Healthy DNA Factor*** - A healthy DNA of *reproduction* needs to be infused into our churches. This new reproduction DNA needs to be instilled in our members individually, but also in our churches corporately. Just as in many churches we have not included reproduction as an expectation in the discipling of our members, so we also have failed to see the need to include it in the mission of our corporate expression. This absence of reproducing DNA has resulted in a less vibrant church as could have been. In a PhD dissertation researching 624 SBC churches that had planted a church, attendance rose 21.5% for the five years after a church plant. Additionally, monetary growth was favorable in 7 of the 8 variables tested, including designated gifts (77% increase) and tithes (48%).⁴ Kingdom focused reproduction will be accompanied by spiritual health in the sending church.

6. ***The Flexibility Factor*** - Flexibility is the great challenge to established churches. We all know the difficulty of leading an established church entrenched in its preferences through change. However, that is not the problem with a church plant. A new church start, due its limited financial and human resources, must be creative, innovative, and flexible in order to flourish. In fact, church plants often are incubators of excellent ideas that benefit other established churches. The freedom to create from scratch a ministry blueprint absent all the prohibitors contained in an established congregation is a tremendous benefit.

Church planting is an absolute necessity for the health, progress, and continuance of the churches of the Northwest Indiana Association. We cannot ignore the need to extend God’s Kingdom in NWI through the starting of new churches and expect that our presence will continue indefinitely. Church planting will not diminish our existing congregations, but rather will ensure our survival, relevancy, and vibrancy. But far above the “survival” motivation, we should be propelled to move forward in church planting by our missional mandate - making disciples!

⁴ Scott Thomas, *Five Reasons for Church Planting*, Available at: https://www.churchplanting.com/five-reasons-for-church-planting/?doing_wp_cron=1547659291.7591829299926757812500#.XEI_5S2ZPfZ

In Northwest Indiana, church planting will not happen without more of our pastors and churches on board. Our NWIBA Church Planting Team have met several times over the past few months to develop a comprehensive strategy. In our February Pastors Roundtable, we will present our strategy, consider ways of involvement, and have an open discussion regarding church planting. It is crucial that we have our pastors and church leaders present.

Let me finish with this quote from Tim Keller concerning the value of planting. Although it pertains to planting in an urban context, I believe it applies equally in our setting. He wrote:

“The vigorous, continual planting of new congregations is the single most crucial strategy for (1) the numerical growth of the body of Christ in a city and (2) the continual corporate renewal and revival of the existing churches in a city. Nothing else — not crusades, outreach programs, parachurch ministries, growing megachurches, congregational consulting, nor church renewal processes — will have the consistent impact of dynamic, extensive church planting.”⁵

In His Service,

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⁵ Tim Keller, *Why Plant Churches?*, Available at: http://download.redeemer.com/pdf/learn/resources/Why_Plant_Churches-Keller.pdf