

STARTING CHURCHES THAT REPRODUCE

This article is adapted from a book being written on organic church planting by Neil Cole and Paul Kaak .

Having trouble bringing people to church? Let's go and bring the church to the people!

Most churches today are trying to figure out how to get lost people to come to church. The key to starting churches that reproduce spontaneously is to bring the church to the lost people. We're not interested in starting a regional church, but rather in churching a whole region.

The house church, more than any other model, is best prepared to do just that because it is informal, relational, mobile, not financially encumbered with overhead costs, and is easily planted in a variety of settings. It also reproduces faster and spreads farther because it can be a decentralized approach to a region, nation or people group and is not dependent upon heavily trained clergy.

We have taken our cues on how to start churches from two almost identical sermons delivered by Jesus. One, when he taught the twelve apostles how to reach the lost (Matt. 10), and the other when He instructed the seventy (Luke 10). When Jesus decides to repeat Himself in more than one of the gospel accounts, perhaps we

should pay close attention to what He is saying. Nowhere else does Jesus get more specific in delineating outreach principles.

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We have uncovered five principles to help us in starting churches that reproduce:

1. Practice of Prayer

In both sermons Jesus begins with the same familiar words, “The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into the harvest.” We believe that church is a spiritual entity before it is a physical reality. We have a saying that goes like this: “The church is conceived in heaven before it is born on earth. Pray first, pray last, and in between pray hard!”

2. Pockets of People

Jesus instructs His disciples not to go into the way of the Gentiles or the Samaritans, but specifically to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. He sends the disciples out in pairs to various cities and villages looking for a pocket of people, a community of lost people that are receptive to the message of peace.

When looking for a pocket of people, we have another saying, “Bad people make good soil.” Why is it that a majority of churches in

America today are all trying to reach middle class suburbs? This has to be one of the most difficult and hardest soils to reach, yet all seem to try. We have come to see the poor as the heirs of the Kingdom of God (James 2:5). We find that it isn't those who are well who need a physician, but the sick.

In our experience, coffeehouses have proven to be fertile soil for the gospel. Now, however, we have expanded our vision to other arenas as well. We have churches that reach out to 12-step recovery groups, neighborhood gangs, homosexuals, occult groups, high school, college and university campuses, the homeless, and local bars. Besides homes and apartments, we've had churches that meet in parks, beaches, storefronts, restaurants, faculty lounges, student unions, locker rooms and even church classrooms (aghast!).

3. Power of Presence

Jesus told the disciples as He sent them out that they had authority to do the works of God. They were to announce that the Kingdom of God has come near – whether they were received or not. Where we go, the King goes... and that is POWERFUL!

Jesus, in the Great Commission, said these words, “All authority in heaven and earth has been given to Me...I am with you.” We must not forget this. The enemy is hoping that we will not realize this important truth, because he is vulnerable to us when we learn it.

Someone once asked Rob Ferris, my partner in the start of Awakening Chapels, what the secret is to our seeing so many people come to Christ. He answered, “Two words: Show up.” Non-

Christians aren't fretting trying to figure out ways to get into church. Church is not something that they feel they need, want or are even curious about. Jesus said to the church, "Go." To the lost He said, "Come to Me," not "come to church."

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Jesus also noted that the disciples were not to import resources into the harvest, but to find all the resources they needed in the harvest itself. His instructions were to bring no extra clothes, food or money to sustain the ministry. This is key.

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4. Person of Peace

This fourth principle is one that we are indebted to our dear friend and mentor, Thom Wolf, for uncovering for us. This simple concept has led to many churches being born around the world. Jesus said to look for and even inquire about someone who would be receptive to our message of peace. When we find such a person we are to stay there and reach their entire household (oikos). We are to eat what they eat and stay where they stay. When a person of peace is discovered, the birth of a new church is assumed. When

someone comes to Christ in a new pocket of people, we keep digging until we see the person of peace emerge and a new church born. Three things characterize a person of peace:

a. Receptivity.

They are open to the message of the person of Christ

b. Relational connections.

They know many people and are an important part of the community, for better or worse.

c. Reputation.

They are people of reputation, whether it is a good reputation (like Cornelius or the Ethiopian eunuch) or bad reputation (like the Samaritan woman or the Gergesene demoniac). The person of peace becomes the conduit for the passing of the message of the Kingdom to an entire community of lost people. This person's reputation gives credence to the message and becomes a magnet for a new church.

5. People of Purpose

When the moths are drawn to the light and the person of peace brings several to Christ...a church is born. This is the formation of a people of purpose, born in the harvest, born for the harvest of the nations. Often, though not exclusively, the person of peace has the church meet in their home and may even be the new leader of the emerging church.

A church that starts this way is unique in that it is born out of the harvest, found among the harvest, and bent on a mission to continue to reach the lost. This missional element will be the important drive to reach out and reproduce spontaneously.

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