



EVERY CHURCH PLANT A CHURCH

The practical steps a church can take to become a church planting church

(June 2009)

The vision of MNA is to see a ***grassroots church planting*** culture emerge in the PCA. This means that we are praying and working towards seeing all the churches and presbyteries of our denomination embrace a ***Great Commission vision*** that includes the planting of new, biblically healthy churches in the many diverse communities of North America. ***The role of MNA today*** is to assist in casting this vision and to come alongside church and presbytery leadership to equip them for this task by providing resources, training, coaching, and consulting to that end.

More specifically, we long to see ***“every church plant a church.”*** That is, to see each church not only embrace a comprehensive Great Commission vision for their church but to actually become involved in planting churches themselves! Only in this way will we see this grassroots church planting culture emerge and we also will see a multiplying movement of new churches that are impacting communities and reaching people with the Gospel of Jesus Christ all across North America.

How does a church actually do that? Well, what follows is designed to provide tangible steps that a church can take to become a church planting church. As you consider them please keep two key perspectives in mind:

- (1) ***Every church plant is a unique, custom designed work of the Holy Spirit.*** Yes, it is important to learn and implement biblical principles as well as to learn from the experiences of others – from their mistakes and their successes. However, each situation involves unique factors and dynamics that each church must recognize and respect. There is always a tension between being prepared and trained, and at the same time totally dependent on God in prayer.
- (2) ***Bigger is not necessarily better.*** Small and medium size churches are highly valuable. You do not need to think that only the larger churches are truly successful church plants. As a matter of fact, recent studies show what many of us sense intuitively --that small and midsize churches are often healthier and more effective in such things as evangelism, discipleship, community life, and ministry participation of their members than large and mega churches. On top of that, most men have the gifts, personality, and experience to plant the small and medium size church. There is certainly an important place for larger churches! But don't fall into the trap of thinking that only the larger church is healthy and successful. We hope to see the landscape of a region dotted with many churches of 150 as well as some of 500 or 1500.

So, what then are these key practical considerations or steps?

1. **Pray for a vision for the harvest, for God's provision of church planters, and for a vision for church planting in your church.** Pray for God's guidance and enabling, for God to make clear the actual target location(s), for God to open doors and generate contacts in the community, for God to raise up the church planter (see below), and for God to use this work to bring glory to His name, to bring the Gospel to the lost, to bring His Kingdom in greater fullness, to “build his church” (Matthew 16:18). Right from the beginning prayer of this nature affirms that this is all about GOD and what HE wants to do.

2. **Build outreach and ongoing church planting into the culture, the DNA, of your church.** Before a church can plant other churches it must be biblically healthy itself. This necessarily includes fruitful outreach, evangelism, mercy ministry, and service to the community. Take your own temperature and ask yourself, “Do these things characterize our church now?”
 - “GO!” Build relationships with people in your network of relationships – with friends, neighbors, co-workers, fellow students, community figures and pray for them regularly. Find ways to engage and serve your community in deeds of loving and meaningful service.
 - Look over the document “Becoming an Evangelistic Church” which is found on the MNA website in the *Church Planter Recruiting Guide*.
 - Know your community! “Lift up your eyes and see how the fields are ripe for the harvest.” (John 4:35) Talk to people, all kinds of people, to learn who is really there, what the needs and issues are, who’s already doing what. Couple this with demographic studies that may surprise you with what they reveal.

3. **Focus on lay leadership: encourage and mentor lay leaders to take the lead in church planting.**
 - a. **Prepare** your congregation, especially the leaders, for church planting. It usually takes two years of preparation before your congregation is ready to take on a church planting apprentice or begin actually planting a church.
 - Cast vision through biblical preaching, congregational meetings, retreats, etc. Make church planting a part of your DNA.
 - Educate. Take advantage of *MNA Church Planter Training Conferences* and other *MNA gatherings* (www.pca-mna.org). Read books (the MNA website offers many suggestions) and do your own research by talking to others who have already done it.
 - Budget. Begin to set aside significant funds for a future effort into your church’s mission budget.
 - b. Identify and study the **target community**.
 - Demographic studies are a standard but also do a needs assessment of the community: talk to community leaders and members of the general populations to identify why people live there, what they perceive are the key needs and issues, what they think a good church should be like and how it should respond to those needs, and even what their attitudes are towards churches.
 - Put together a **SITE PROFILE**. See the MNA website for a suggested template.
 - Begin to reach out and serve this area in meaningful and practical ways. This not only generates awareness but creates positive perceptions, open doors, and establishes an outward face and a servant mindset for the core group. Start a Bible Study in the community. Do prayer walks and hold prayer meetings for the community and for the plant.
 - c. Identify your **strategy**. There are many ways to start a church in the community:
 - Multisite: essentially starting a second or third service but instead of having it in your own building have it in another part of the community.
 - Daughter: Develop a group of people out of your congregation who will work together under a church planting leader to start a brand new congregation.
 - Sponsor: Whether or not you are in a position to start a congregation out of your church, you still might support a church planter in starting a new church in your community, somewhere nearby, or even clear across the country!
 - Partner: You may not be in a position to start a new church yourself, but you can work with another church – or two or three – to do so. Strategic partnerships, which often take the form of a church planting network, can be a great way to start new churches.

4. **Recruit and mentor church planters.** See the *Church Planter Recruiting Guide* on the MNA web site, for details of this process, as well as for materials you may find useful in recruiting and mentoring church planters yourself.

- You might call *a fully qualified church planter* who is gifted, called, and ready to plant a new church immediately but you might also consider *a church planting apprentice*. An apprentice is someone who has been provisionally recommended by the MNA Church Planter Assessment Center (see below), which means he needs more experience in practical ministry based in a healthy, biblical church before he plants. These men usually qualify for MNA Timothy Fund grants, which are repaid by the church that is eventually planted once it begins missions or benevolence giving. You might also consider *a ruling elder or staff member* to at least get the group pulled together and moving forward until it gets to the point where it can afford to support its own church planting pastor.
- Take advantage of the *MNA Church Planter Assessment Center* which provides an in-depth evaluation and recommendations based on a candidate's readiness for church planting in terms of their (that is, both husband and wife) calling, character, and competencies (giftedness). See the MNA website for more information.

5. **Develop the ongoing vision for churches who plant churches who plant churches.** Take the long view and **develop future leaders** who might become future church planters.

- Pray for more laborers for the harvest, men who can plant churches as well as men and women who will be part of church planting efforts (cf. Matthew 9:38).
- Offer year-long and summer internships for seminary and college students especially if they are from your church. Include high school students!
- Identify and invest in men and women who show godly character, ministry passion, and appropriate giftedness. These are the folks who will be the vast majority of the elders and deacons God raises up, the ministry staff that you hire, and even out of which will emerge the occasional church planter.

As you began in prayer, continue in prayer. Continually bathe everything in prayer. This is God's work. Prayer meetings, prayer walks, prayer as a key component of every leadership and congregation meeting you have. Build prayer into every area of your church life and ministry. Make it part of your church's DNA! Remember it's all about what God desires and enables us to do!