

## How to Plant Churches?



*This article by Declan Flanagan first appeared in "Impact", the magazine of Rural Ministries.*

### First count the cost

Jesus warned of the dangers of enthusiastically commencing projects without considering all that may be involved (Luke 14:28). Church planting requires careful preparation. It is always costly. It requires existing churches to release people and resources elsewhere. Without sacrifice church planting is impossible.

Ideally someone will be available to lead the new church, on a part or full time basis. Additional costs may include venue hire, equipment and publicity. A realistic budget is required.

The good news is that a blessing comes to churches that give (Acts 20:34-36). We observe that where churches support others, particularly church plants, there is clear evidence of growth taking place in both the existing and the new churches.

### Identify the motives

People start churches for many reasons and different motives. Church planting is only helpful if it enables us to participate more fully in the mission of God. He

is interested in more people becoming disciples, in prodigal Christians returning and in existing Christians developing and growing.

### Start developing leaders -now

If an existing church considering planting waits to discover surplus leaders, they are unlikely to ever plant churches. All churches need more leaders, children's workers, musicians, preachers, youth workers, administrators, small group leaders etc. Wise leaders will make it a priority to grow leaders for both their current and future work.

### Avoid being married to a model

It is possible to read books or attend conferences and be attracted to a church model that has worked elsewhere. Some principles may be transferable but each place and group of people is unique. Overseas missionaries constantly ask the "who, when, where" of their local context. It's vital to take time to appreciate the particular history and stories within an area. What tends to help is learning from those who have planted churches and do not hide the battle scars.

### Clarify the focus

Without clarity, a new church can exhaust itself by running in too many directions or trying to please everyone. Think about the church's:

- **Beliefs** -What are the foundations?
- **Vision** -What could this church look like in the future?

- **Mission** -What has God called and equipped you to do?
- **Values** -What is really important to you?
- **Strategy** -What are we going to do and when?

Answering these questions and producing a short written summary will help you deal with two types of people likely to appear in a new church: those prepared and sent by God, and others prepared by the enemy to spread discontent or hijack the plant. Church plants struggle when they are too all-embracing and fail to confront people being disruptive.

### **Invest in partnerships**

The common characteristic of successful rural church plants is that they resist a "go it alone" mindset. Church planting is an exercise in kingdom-mindedness. It is always valuable to inform and consult with other church leaders. With so many areas in the UK lacking active churches, unhelpful competition should be avoided.

An over-emphasis on independence can obscure the interdependent nature of churches described in the New Testament. Fellowship in the gospel was a joy shared in more than one geographical location (Philippians 1:5). This enabled churches to go on and plant more churches. Strong rural church plants develop a wide network of friends and supporters. While not all will have the opportunity to be personally active in church planting, we can spiritually invest through prayer, fellowship and financial support.

We can easily forget that every church had to be planted. Pioneers were required - often in face of opposition to take the good news of Jesus Christ to their communities.

*Declan Flanagan, Rural Ministries, January 2010.*