THE STATE OF CHURCH PLANTING IN THE UNITED STATES: RESEARCH OVERVIEW AND QUALITATIVE STUDY OF PRIMARY CHURCH PLANTING ENTITIES

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The launching of new Protestant churches in the United States, widely known as church planting, plays an increasing role in today's ecclesiastical landscape. This article summarizes salient findings from existing literature (multiple church planting studies, 54 doctoral dissertations, 41 journal articles, and over 100 church planting books and manuals), giving particular attention to a 2007 study by Leadership Network, which itself involved fresh research among more than 200 church-planting churches, over 100 leaders from 40 denominations, 45 church planting networks, 84 organic church leaders, 12 nationally known experts, and 81 colleges and seminaries. The Leadership Network findings review the contributions and impact of four primary church-planting entities on the American church-planting industry: denominations, church planting networks, church-planting churches, and house churches. The most important conclusions of the Leadership Network study report that around 68 percent of church plants still exist four years after having been started, and that the assessment, preparation, and coaching processes for the pastoral leader have a dramatic impact on both the well being of the planter and the vitality and survivability of the new church.

INTRODUCTION

There has been a proliferation of studies and interest in the starting of new churches across denominations in the United States.[1] However, in spite of increased interest in church planting ventures, there has yet to be a documented church planting movement (CPM) which involves the rapid multiplication of churches rather than the simple addition of churches. David Garrison defines a CPM as "a rapid and multiplicative increase of indigenous churches planting churches within a given people group or population segment" (Garrison 2004, page 7).

The present study was undertaken to generate and consolidate information on the current state of church planting in the United States and to provide insight into the lack of church multiplication. Roland Allen first addressed the issue in his book *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church and Causes Which Hinder It* (1927). By examining the strategies, training processes, and support networks available for church planters, it is possible to discern what scenarios are ideal for an enduring church plant and what might facilitate an entire CPM.

The researchers presuppose that the intention of Jesus Christ is for his followers to live communally as the *ekklesia*—those who are called out. The church has two expressions—the larger invisible church and the local, visible church. Others have explored the definition of the church (Blomberg 1992; Grudem 1994; Tidsworth 1992).

The concern of this study is that healthy local churches would be planted. Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson first proposed that healthy churches are indigenous and thereby, self-supporting and reproducing and others have researched the premise (Allen 1962; Tippett 1969; Brock 1994).[2] This study is focused upon the formation and expression of the local visible church when it references the planting of churches. This study is not denomination-specific, as such the definition of “church plant” is not specific

to one theological system. For the purpose of this study, church plants are defined as *newly organized localized gatherings of followers of Jesus Christ which identify themselves as churches, meet regularly to engage in spiritual activity, and would broadly be defined as Protestant*. The authors' bias is that the church is central to the goal of evangelization.[3] They acknowledge that what constitutes a church involves how the newly formed fellowship perceives itself, adding a subjective element to the definition of church. Jesus sent his followers to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 1:8). Central to the task of being Christ's witnesses is the proclamation of the Gospel message (Hesselgrave 1980). The task of believers is to bear witness to the power and love of Jesus Christ and to invite others into fellowship with Jesus and his church.

METHODOLOGY

This project included analysis of the research of others, both partnering with other organizations on research (named later in this article), and creating new research. Quality church-planting research is difficult to find. The bulk of current evidence is based upon the anecdotal observations of experienced practitioners. After a review of multiple church planting studies, 54 doctoral dissertations, 41 journal articles, and over 100 church planting books and manuals, a few relevant studies are included in the research and literature review for this article.

The original qualitative study for this report was conducted by a team of researchers who surveyed over 200 church-planting churches, over 100 leaders from 40 denominations, 45 church planting networks, 84 organic church leaders, 12 nationally known experts, and 81 colleges and seminaries. The results convey the contributions and impact of four primary church-planting entities on the American church-planting

industry: denominations, church planting networks, church-planting churches, and house churches.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH

Health and Survivability of Church Plants

Until recently, there was little research that addressed the health and survivability of new churches. Several oft-quoted statistics, such as those indicating an 80% failure rate for new church plants, seem to have no basis in actual research.[4] Other pertinent church planting studies address issues of church plant survivability, health, and the factors which contribute to both.

Vineyard Study

Todd Hunter, former director of church-planting at the Vineyard Church, USA, conducted a study of 20 church planters, using a unique survey method (Hunter 1986). Hunter designed questions for program overseers which were narrow enough to require accurate and specific information but were broad enough to allow for descriptive responses. Hunter examined failed church-plants as well as successfully planted churches for the purpose of understanding the most important characteristics for lead planters.

Hunter concluded that the primary indicators for church-plant failure rested with the disposition of the lead church-planter. Hunter's research indicates that a passive approach to ministry is prone to failure; however, church planters with an aggressive strategy for penetrating the community and gathering those who would be leaders for the kingdom more frequently results in successful church-plants.[5] Hunter also concluded that effective church-planter recruiters better recognize divinely chosen and gifted leaders for church-planting. He also noted that proper site location for both the city and facility is necessary for success. A third and obvious conclusion was the need for training,

education, oversight and improved relationships with area and regional overseers (Hunter 1986). As Hunter has mainly identified personal weaknesses as the cause for church plant failures, he sees the training of the planters as having great importance.

Philpott Study

Jeff Philpott completed a qualitative analysis as part of an unfinished dissertation at Columbia International University. His sample, he explained, came from "ten interviews within each of the three denominations: the Christian and Missionary Alliance, the Presbyterian Church of America, and the Southern Baptist Convention." He concluded that:

1. Spousal support is a must…
2. The importance of casting vision cannot be overemphasized…
3. Material resources are less important than one might believe…
4. Coaching plays a significant role in the life of the planter…
5. Have a plan for both developing leaders and involving them as soon as possible…
6. Church planters need to be sure of their calling.

Since his research utilizes quantitative analysis, his conclusions are helpful and lead to the more empirical research in the NAMB study.

NAMB Study

In an effort to determine the survivability, health and evangelistic effectiveness of new churches, and to inform this project, Leadership Network, in Dallas, TX, participated in a study with the North American Mission Board (NAMB) of the Southern Baptist Convention of over 1,000 churches (from eleven evangelical networks and denominations) to discover the factors leading to church plant survivability and health (Southern Baptist Convention 2007).

Church Plant Survivability

The research revealed that around 68 percent of church plants still exist four years after having been started. The graph below displays the survivability by year [INSERT Table 1. Percent Church Plants Survived by Year]:

Over 100 factors were tested for statistical significance in relationship to survivability. A handful indicated a statistically significant relationship to survivability. They concluded that the chance of survivability increases by over 400 percent when the church planter has "realistic" expectations of the church-planting experience. Odds of survivability increase by over 250 percent where leadership development training is offered in the plant. When there is a proactive stewardship development plan within the church plant, survivability is increased by 178 percent, and chances of survivability increase by 135 percent when the church planter is meeting with a group of church planting peers.[6]

Church Plant Baptisms or Conversions

The expectation is that the mean number of baptisms or conversions would have a strong correlation to the evangelistic effectiveness of new churches. The mean number of baptisms or conversions of the participating groups was 10 baptisms the first year, 11 the second year, 13 the third year; and 14 the fourth year. [INSERT Table 2 here.]

There are some factors that, when present, correlated with higher baptisms. Over 100 factors were tested and the following were found to be statistically significant: engaging in ministry evangelism (i.e., food banks, shelter, drug/alcohol recovery); starting at least one daughter church within three years of the church plant; having a proactive stewardship development plan enabling the church to be financially self-sufficient; conducting a mid-week children's program; conducting a children's special event (i.e., Fall Festival, Easter Egg Hunt); sending out mailers for invitation to services

and church events; conducting a block party as an outreach activity; conducting a new member class for new church members; conducting leadership training for church members; receiving church-planting training in terms of a boot camp or basic training by the church planter; working full-time over part-time as the church planter; being assessed prior to the beginning of the church plant as the church planter; delegating leadership roles to church members (Stetzer and Connor 2007).

Church Plant Attendance

One of the more obvious indicators of new church health is size. The typical church plant does not pass 100 in attendance after 4 years. The graph below shows the mean attendance by year [INSERT Table 3 here].

There are some factors that, when present, correlated with higher attendance. Over 100 factors were tested, and several factors proved to be statistically significant, primarily those factors pertaining to leadership, location, and activities aimed at gathering (Stetzer and Connor 2007).

Gray's Research

Researcher Stephen Gray studied factors which helped churches pass the 200 attendance mark quickly (in less than three years).[7] As can be observed from the statistics in Table 3, that growth rate is rare. Yet there is strong interest in the "launch large" approach.

Steve Gray conducted a study that began on January 7, 2007. He sent 336 questionnaires out to church-plants, inviting them to participate in this study. Equal amounts of fast-growing and struggling church plants were included in the invitation to participate. The purpose of this study was to explore the factors that differentiate fast-growing, dynamic church plants from slower-growth, struggling church plants. The data

is based on a three-year period, from the day of the church plant's public launch and reveals which factors lead to a greater likelihood of producing a dynamic church plant. Statistical data compiled serves as the skeleton of this study on launching large.

Gray's study aimed to ascertain the significance of the church planter's score on the Ridley Assessment, to determine the impact of the support provided by the sponsoring agent, to observe any differences in the methodologies employed by fast-growing church plants and struggling church plants, and to decide what combination of factors led to a higher probability of producing a fast-growing, dynamic church plant. (The Ridley Assessment, created by Charles Ridley is tool based around 13 essential characteristics in a behavioral interview used to determine the effectiveness of a church planter.)

Gray's study had some significant findings that differentiate fast-growing church plants from struggling church plants during the three-year period from public launch. This enabled him to create an objective list of factors that increase the odds of producing a faster growing church plant.

As this study has shown, most new churches start and remain small. However, an alternate course is available and some would say that it is preferable and biblical (Easum and Cornelius 2006).[8] Ron Sylvia is one leader who believes "launching large is congruent with the best of missionary theology and with the methods of Jesus" (2006). Such large starts lead to momentum, credibility, and status as self-supporting will soon follow.

Gray's study discovered common characteristics in fast-growing churches. For this study, Gray compared 60 fast-growing church-plants and 52 struggling church-plants and found important differences. In successful church-plants: 88% had church planting teams; 63.3% had a core group of 26 to 75 people; 75% used a contemporary style of

worship; 80% put ten percent or more of their budgets toward outreach and evangelism; 16.8% had a higher rate of full-time pastors than struggling church-plants; 63% of fast-growing plants, compared to 23% of those that were struggling, raised additional funding. He also found that:

1. Planters leading fast-growing church plants revealed a higher Ridley Assessment Score than those leading struggling church plants.
2. 78.3 percent of fast-growing church planters were full-time rather than bi-vocational. Only 61.5 percent of struggling church planters were full-time.
3. Only 8.8 percent of fast-growing church planters were given salary support past three years. On the other hand, 44.3 percent of struggling church planters were supported past three years.
4. 75 percent of fast-growing church planters were given additional financial support from a sponsoring agency. Only 48.1 percent of struggling church plants were given additional financial support.
5. While receiving additional funding, a majority of fast-growing church plants received from $1,000 to $25,000 extra over a one to two-year period.
6. 63.3 percent of fast-growing church planters raised additional funding for the church plant. Only 23 percent of struggling church planters raised additional funding.
7. Planters leading fast-growing church plants were given more freedom to cast their own vision and choose their own target audience, and they had more freedom in the spending of finances.
8. 88.3 percent of church planters involved in fast-growing church plants were a part of a church planting team. Only 11.5 percent of planters involved in struggling church plants had a church planting team.
9. Fast-growing church plants had multiple paid staff. Two paid staff members was a majority among these church plants.
10. A majority of fast-growing church plants utilized two or more volunteer staff as part of the church planting team prior to public launch.
11. Fast-growing church plants had a larger number of individuals involved in the core group prior to launch. While struggling church plants had twenty five or less in a core group, fast-growing church plants had between twenty-six and fifty.
12. Fast-growing church plants utilized more seed families than struggling church plants.
13. Fast-growing church plants used both preview services and small groups to build the initial core group.
14. Fast-growing church plants that used preview services used three or more of these services prior to public launch. A large contingent of these churches used over five.
15. 75 percent of fast-growing churches had over 101 attendees at their first service. By contrast, 80.4 of struggling church plants had 100 or less.
16. Fast-growing church plants had children and teen ministries in place at time of ministries and offered at least three ministry opportunities to first-time attendees.

17. Fast-growing church plants used a contemporary style of worship far more often than struggling church plants.
18. 56.7 percent of fast-growing church plants taught financial stewardship during the first six months from public launch. By contrast only 38.5 percent of struggling church plants taught financial stewardship.
19. 80 percent of fast-growing church plants gave 10 percent or more of their monthly budget toward outreach and evangelism. Only 42.3 percent of struggling church plants give over 10 percent of their monthly income to outreach and evangelism.

Analysis of Research on Church Plant Survivability

The research shows that church-plant leadership impacts the survivability of the new church. It also reveals that a strong commitment to evangelism creates an expectation of new life and growth and generates enthusiastic commitment to the church. Creating biblical community, coupled with systems of accountability (including systematic giving) within the body, spreads the workload and fosters a sense of commitment to the church. Leadership development is critical for sustained growth and reproduction. Reproducing churches had the expectancy of reproduction built into their original strategy documents and ethos—or so-called DNA.

Best Practices Systems Research

Models of Ministry—Joel Rainey Study

One important study sought to understand the impact of the church-plant model on the people group being reached (Rainey 2005). Rainey found that there was a high conversion rate among all church plants, but Purpose-Driven model churches experienced conversion growth primarily among Caucasian populations with 91% of people converted being white. Churches reported less than 2% of their conversion growth in each of the other ethnic categories (Rainey 2005). Rainey also concluded that churches focused on reaching the unchurched tend to grow more slowly than those which are not.

Church Planter Support Systems

Review of Studies

Prior to the 1990s, most church-planting groups showed little interest in focusing on the church planter's abilities, training, or involvement in support networks. Church-planting books failed to address personhood issues. There is currently a shift toward emphasizing the nurture and support of church planters.

Most networks and denominations are developing similar systems for church planting (Logan 2001).[9] In an interview with several church planting leaders, one explained, "85% percent of church planting takes place in districts with systems in place."[10] The leaders stress the ABCs: Assessment, Boot Camp, and Coaching as the key systems. Every Nation, an international church planting organization, also described a "3-step process (assessment center, school and coaching network)."[11] Church planting has emerged into a systems-based enterprise focused on finding, assessing, coaching, and supporting church planters. As part of this project, research available from over 100 books and 54 dissertations on the efficacy of such systems is highlighted here.

Assessment

Assessment, popularized for church planters by Charles Ridley in the 1990s, has been a significant issue in church planting for over a decade. John Shepherd, in his dissertation on the subject, includes several common approaches to assessment (Shepherd 2003). He studied successful and unsuccessful planters and discerned 48 important qualities of effective planters. The most critical qualities have been widely used.

The Assessment Center Model originated during World War II and in American industry by AT&T in 1954. They sought to identify potential managers. In 1983, Thomas Graham of the Center for Organizational and Ministry Development was the first to apply the assessment center process to help identify church planters. According to published reports, the assessment center process improved the success rate of church plants

(Shepherd 2003). Assessment centers involve multiple candidates, assessors, exercises, tests, simulations, and competencies. A church planter's personal, professional, and interpersonal competencies are assessed. In addition, a church planter spouse's personal, supportive, and interpersonal competencies are assessed.

The Self-Assessment Model was popularized by Jim Griffith, founder of Griffith Coaching Network (www.griffithcoaching.com), through a process of assessing, training, and coaching church planters. This method consists of three major components: a thorough pre-screening and application process, an assessment packet of four instruments, and a formal debriefing interview. The Gallup online system contains similar strategies, though with a different underlying system.

Several research projects have been done since then to validate Griffith's methodology and at least two have proposed alternative approaches. Most assessment systems are based on the Ridley process, with the exception of the Presbyterian Church of America. Shepherd's research shows a connection between assessment and more effective church planting (Shepherd 2003).[12] He believes that the Behavioral Assessment Model can be relatively inexpensive, is easily reproducible, adapts to fit different local contexts, provides a helpful church planter selection process, focuses on past behavior, improves the stewardship of limited resources, and can increase a candidate's self-awareness; however, he and others have noted that there are limitations to the model (Shepherd, 2003 and Payne, 2001).[13]

Terry Geiger was one of the early proponents and developers of the assessment center approach. When head of Mission to North America, the Presbyterian Church in America's domestic mission agency, he developed a system that is still in use today. Today, many organizations run such assessment centers, some built around or including Ridley.

The strengths of the assessment center approach include, but are not limited to, the following: multiple means of screening, assessing, and selecting church planters; multiple people observe the candidates; it provides a good developmental tool for the candidate in competencies; and it may help provide a realistic preview of actually planting a church (Shepherd 2003). The potential weaknesses of the assessment center are as follows: it is very costly because of travel and accommodations; it is very time intensive with preparation, event, and follow-up; it requires great skill and energy from the assessors; and it virtually eliminates lay and bi-vocational church planters (Shepherd, 2003). There are many different approaches even in assessment centers.[14]

Some assessments are relational. For example the website for Acts 29 Network indicates that the process has two aspects—a series of exams and building relationship.[15] Others include specific activities and interactions. The Mission to North America involves "simulated church planting exercises, small group experiences, teaching modules, evaluation instruments and personal interviews."[16] The Evangelical Covenant Church either accepts, declines, or conditionally recommends church planters who complete the assessment process.[17]

Self Assessment

Self-assessment models are developing in popularity. In the Self-Assessment Model developed by Jim Griffith, if an applicant completes the pre-screening process without any major concerns, the planter is then asked to complete an assessment packet which includes a DiSC Inventory, Team Profile Inventory, the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument, and a Church Planter Assessment Workbook (Shepherd, 2003).[18]

Stetzer Study

In a 2003 study, Edward Stetzer examined the assessment of 601 church planters. The study was an analysis of the impact of certain factors on attendance. Since this was a qualitative exploratory study, each factor is analyzed by the same standard—attendance over four years. For assessment, the results were as follows [INSERT Table 4 here]:

Assessment and Attendance

Stetzer discovered an observable attendance increase among the assessed church planters. At each year, the church planters who were assessed led churches that are approximately 20 percent larger than those who were not assessed (averaged over a four year period). The third year is the most substantial with a 27 percent difference in church size.

The assessment surveys also evidenced some statistical findings via inferential statistics. In year three, the two-tailed significance test reads .016 when equal variances are assumed. Not only are there clear differences in the means, but there are also underlying factors implying proportionality. These are not addressed in this exploratory study. However, the presence of such an indicator should be explored further.

Assessment seems to be a strong indicator of evangelistic effectiveness. For example, those who have been assessed have a substantially higher mean of conversions in their new church as illustrated below [INSERT Table 5 here]:

In Steven Gray's study mentioned earlier, he sought to define the effectiveness of the Ridley process. The Ridley Assessment was used by Gray to score the church planters on thirteen characteristics commonly found in church planters. The results are shown in Table 5. The scores reported by the planters of fast-growing churches were on the whole higher than those of the planters of struggling churches. The difference of scoring between the two groups is further illustrated by his tables below [INSERT Tables 6 & 7 here]:

The mean for planters of fast-growing church plants was 4.26 while the mean of those in the struggling church plants was 3.82, a difference of .44. The t-test revealed a $p\leq$ value of 0.00. Standard t-tests indicate that anything below 0.05 is significant.

Wood Study

Stan Wood (2006) reported his methodology of 704 effective new church planters. The effective "New Church Developers" were polled in a focus group regarding needed characteristics of a lead church planter. Almost half of responders indicated that catalytic, visionary leaders were necessary in the first seven years of new church development. The Catalytic Innovator category, the highest ranked, is broken down as self-starter, risk taker, charismatic leader, tenacious perseverer, and flexible adaptor (Wood 2006). Wood points out that effective church planters believe there are certain gifts that make effective church planting possible.

Shepherd Research

John Shepherd analyzed the Ridley Behavior Assessment as used at the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. He concluded that the assessment system was an "accurate predictor of future church planting behavior, as measured by the outcomes of average worship attendance and baptisms from conversions for the first two years, and progress made toward constitution" (Shepherd 2003). Furthermore, the study indicated that 75.7 percent of assessed candidates had led their churches to constitute, compared to 17.5 percent of non-assessed planters. The trend from this study clearly shows that assessed candidates lead their churches to be self-supporting, self-governing bodies at a higher rate than non-assessed planters. Furthermore, the assessed candidates reported 3.4 average baptisms from conversions in year 1, compared to 3.8 for non-assessed candidates. This represents a decrease of 11.8

percent. However, in year two the assessed candidates reported average baptisms of 11.0, compared with 7.5 for non-assessed planters. This represents an increase of 46.7 percent. Although the assessed candidates reported a lower number of average baptisms in year 1, they surpassed their non-assessed colleagues in year two (Shepherd 2003).

Assessment Best Practices

Assessment can be and is done in many different ways. There is no way, with the data currently available, to determine what is the *best* type of assessment. The Assembly of God approach to assessment represents one example. The Assembly of God assessment includes tools looking for call, character, competency, consistency (emotional), cultural compatibility, and compatibility (with the movement).[19]

Assessment is not always the help it can and should be. It is often a question of cost. Rick Morse serves with the Disciples of Christ / Christian Church, which may be the most aggressive church planting organization in the mainline denominations. Morse explained, "If I was spending $100,000 on a project, the assessment would be cost effective."[20] In other words, higher resources rightly require higher assessments—but most of those involved in church planting have only one assessment model.

Assessment is a selection process, not a validation process.[21] It is notable that when looking for the statistical significance of assessment, it was found that only the Presbyterian Church in America assessment showed statistically significant results in the NAMB Best Practices Study. Although other assessments have shown impact on attendance, only the PCA assessment indicated statistical significance.

Boot Camps / Basic Training

There is less research on the widely practiced approach known as boot camp training. Such training tends to be 3-5 days in the systems of church-planting. Stetzer's

2003 study compared the mean attendance of those who participated in Basic Training (the Southern Baptist version of Boot Camp) to those who did not. This means comparison is made over four years. Results indicated that at years two through four, the churches led by those who have completed Basic Training are larger than churches led by those who have not completed the training. In year two, the gap is 6 percent; in year three it is 30 percent; and in year four it is 27 percent. Furthermore, year three indicates statistical significance. In year three, the two-tailed significance test reads .045 when equal variances are not assumed. However, no boot camp proved to provide statistically significant results in the NAMB Best Practices Study.

Coaching and Mentoring

Coaching is growing in popularity in the business world, and it is now finding a significant place in ministry. Because there are such massive shifts in how ministry is done in our changing world, coaching is being seen as "the most effective means of empowering missional leaders in a changing world" (Ogne and Roehl 2005: Abstract). Coaching is frequently emphasized in changing mission paradigms, ministry contexts, coaching missional teams and learning communities.

Stetzer (2003) compared the mean attendance of those who met regularly with a mentor or supervisor and those who had not. The results were as follows [INSERT Table 8. here]:

The noticeable gap between those who did and did not meet with mentors began in year one with the gap being 12 percent. By the second year, that gap expanded to 16 percent. Year three saw a decrease of the gap to 13 percent. Finally, year four evidenced the greatest gap at 25 percent.

The mentoring factor evidenced some statistical significance. In year four, the two-tailed significance test reads .056 when equal variances are assumed and .046 when they are not assumed. Not only are there clear differences in the means, but there are also underlying factors implying proportionality. Stetzer's evidence showed that increased frequency of meeting with mentors is related to worship attendance. The results are displayed in the table below. It is important to note that the results are statistically significant at all levels [INSERT Table 9. here]:

By the fourth year, those who meet with a mentor weekly led churches that were more than twice the size of churches whose planters did not have mentors. One reason for the effectiveness of coaching is the emphasis it places on relationship over programming. When coaches interface with planters, “The most important thing a leader or coach can do to create a high-performance team is to provide a significant aggressive challenge” (Ogne and Roehl 2005: 269).[22]

Church Planter Peer Groups

There is even less research regarding the involvement of church planters in peer-learning communities. Stetzer’s study conducted in 2003 compared the mean attendance of those who participated in a Church Planters Network with those who had not. This means comparison is made over four years and the results are reflected in Table 10 [INSERT Table 10 here]:

There is a clear difference between the bars, but the results are unclear. If there is a positive impact, it seems to decrease over time. By the fourth year, there is little difference. The difference is statistically insignificant at each year.

However, in the NAMB Best Practices Study, the Foursquare Church peer process produced a statistically significant impact (Stetzer and Connor, 2007). This process involved more than just a peer network, including both supervision and coaching.

They seek the birth and nurture of a Parenting Culture in the movement through assessments, coach training, and church planter cohorts and boot camp training.[23] Coaches submit meeting reports online and receive payment for their ministries once this step is completed.

Scott Thomas of Acts 29 illustrated how coaching and peer networks can and do overlap. He explained, "We've just started doing coaching, and we're going to develop the regions of coaching networks. These networks will coach each other. So, Bill Clem will coach those coaches first and get them started. We want to bring 10 guys at a time (1 per quarter, 40 a year) and deal with issues such as 'how to break the 100 barrier', 'gathering a core', etc."[24]

Funding

Finding and funding viable church plants—and planters—is crucial to their success. The research suggests that it is best for an agency or denomination to fund a qualified and well-trained church planter with a modest funding package over a relatively short period of time (3 years or less). The goal is for the planter to seek aggressively to build the church and it should be short-lived to ensure that the newly-developing church does not become dependent on outside income.

Aggressive and highly effective church planters tend to be entrepreneurial and find creative means of funding the plant other than with direct assistance from denominational or church-planting agencies. Beyond salary assistance, church planters prefer assistance with

STUDY RESULTS

To contribute to the growing body of research reviewed above, following are the findings of the study conducted in 2007 by Leadership Network which explain the impact

of denominations, church planting networks, church-planting churches, and house churches on the state of church planting in the United States.

Denominations

Our research team surveyed over 40 denominations (34 national and 75 regional leaders), and conducted 30 in-person interviews, 12 phone surveys, and 72 online surveys. The survey was designed to discover holistically how they recruited, trained, supported, and reproduced church planters in their organizations.

Denominations have an inescapable impact upon church plants and church planting in the United States. Most church plants are denominationally connected at some level, and most denominations have developed or partnered to develop resources to help their church planters.

Based on this survey, many denominational and regional agencies are struggling with how to train church planters more effectively and consistently. For example, church planting networks tend to be focused in one cultural group, whereas denominations are far more multicultural. This often represents the multicultural transformation of the denomination, as is slowly occurring in the Disciples of Christ. Although their church planting production and ethnic diversity is more than almost any other mainline denomination, it does represent a trend found in almost all interviews. Rick Morse explained they "have started 452 congregations since January 2001. 88% of those congregations are sustainable. They break down like this: 20% Anglo, 30% Hispanic, 12% African American, 10% Asian and Pacific Islander, 22% Haitian, and 6% multi-cultural and other."[25]

Recruitment & Training

Our study found that 68 percent of national and regional denominational agencies have a formalized church-planter assessment system in place. The Assemblies of God (Springfield, Missouri) report, “We use the Ridley behavioral assessment interview, plus personality tests and typical interviewing processes.” Most denominations use a system that has emerged out of the Ridley Behavioral Assessment.

The increased success rate of church-plants in the last decade is directly correlated to the advent of assessment, training and coaching incorporated into national and regional strategies.

63% of regional initiatives report having a defined process or procedure for developing a church-planting strategy. The Presbyterian Church of America utilizes a program entitled Mission to North America. Once approved to become a planter, candidates are offered denominational training, ongoing coaching, and a standardized training system called LAMP—Leadership and Ministry Preparation, through the American University of Biblical Studies.

Figure 1 indicates there has been a major thrust toward church-planter training systems in the last ten years. Of the 104 denominational leaders we surveyed (national and regional levels), 55% agreed (or strongly agreed) with the statement “We have a defined strategy in place for training church planters.” Specific training systems for church planting were discovered in 65 percent of the denominations surveyed. Online training resources are currently available from 40 percent of those surveyed. Additionally, 13 percent of the groups provide church-planter internships. [INSERT Fig. 1 here]

When looking at the denominations’ requirements for church planters, 62 percent required no formal education at all. Only 11 percent required a minimum of a Bachelor’s degree and 19 percent required a Master’s degree, and 8 percent gave no answer.

In terms of leadership approach, four categories were identified: Team, Pioneer, Cluster, or some combination of the first three (survey respondents were given a list of choices and an option for "other"). The Team Approach was the preferred method, with 38 percent of those surveyed saying they used it as a strategy. The Pioneer approach was used by 23 percent whereas 19 percent used the Cluster approach. The rise of team church-planting is a significant finding of this study.

Regarding their ministry approaches, 63 percent of those responsible for regional initiatives report having a defined process or procedure for developing a church-planting strategy. The most common model being utilized is that of “Purpose Driven,” modeled after Saddleback Church led by Rick Warren. It was used by 46 percent of the churches participating in the study. Among response options offered, respondents indicated that the “Simple” and “Parachute” models were employed by 31 and 30 percent respectively. Other models used were “Hiving,” “Apartment,” and “Satellite.”

The amount of staff leadership also has an effect on subsequent church planting. The more paid staff an organization had assigned to church planting, the more likely they were to be involved with other partners and providers and the more churches they reported having planted.

The study also revealed that 13 percent of regional initiatives provide church planter internships. This is significant because denominations with an emphasis on church planting are seeking to discover leadership through multiple avenues.

Funding

A number of significant church-planting factors that relate to financing the work by denominations were uncovered. Church-planting emphasis, including funding, is shifting from the initiative and oversight of a national or regional agency to that of local church and church planter initiation. National agencies are retooling to come alongside

regional and local church-planting efforts to provide help in recruiting, assessment, training, and coaching with lesser amounts of funding than in the past.[26] Typically, the national and regional agencies provide no more than 33% (or often less) of funding needs.

There also appears to be a trended correlation between the amount of money the national agency contributes to each church plant and the number of parent churches in that denomination. *More money from the national agency correlates with a* lower *percentage of churches that become parent churches.*

The financing of individual church plants is also in flux. On average, church planters reported that they received financial support from a denomination for 32 months. The Leadership Network study found that 7 percent of planters are fully funded without any personal fundraising required (funding could come through national, regional, and local efforts). While 7 percent of respondents reported that their planters raise all of their own funding, the majority (55 percent) reported that their planters receive denomination funds *and* raise their own support. Typically, planters were expected to raise one-third to one-half of the support they needed. Those who were required to raise all of their financial support numbered 27 percent. Consequently, there is a rise in bi-vocational church planters.

The average regional denominational church-planting budget is reported at $246,346. However, this figure is skewed because some regions reported administrative budgets in their figures, while others left that figure out. The average regional budget provided for direct support of church planters and/or church plants ranges from $75,000 to $125,000.

Analysis

It appears that although denominations are reporting a marked overall increase in church planting and in parent churches, regional leaders indicate that there are still only 15% of that denomination's local churches who are actually parenting churches. The majority of church-planting is being done by a very small percentage of that denomination's churches, or the parent church only participating from a distance. However, the 15% statistic will likely increase with time, but only a small percentage of already established churches account for the church-planting growth within a denomination.

Some denominations are actively reproducing churches. For example, the Church of the Nazarene reports that since 1994 they have registered almost 1,300 new churches. In the early years of their NewStart initiative, they began 20 churches per year. A NewStart work is identified as any ministry started with the intent of becoming a church. Of 1,222 organized churches and NewStarts (since 1994, according to their website), 520 are organized churches and 702 are NewStarts. Four years running, they are over 100 starts a year. In 2005, they started 140 new churches.

Several denominations stated that their most effective and successful church plants are among ethnic groups, with a large number mentioning Hispanic church planting as both highly effective and prevalent. Most obvious are the church planting efforts among immigrants. Sixty-three percent of regions report a modified process for ethnic church planters to develop their strategies in a more contextually appropriate manner.

Despite the work and heightened emphasis, the research nevertheless uncovers that many denominations have yet to realize a net growth rate, even while seeing record levels of church planting. Many denominations and regions have recognized this problem and are concerned about overall denominational church health and how to address this

issue. It appears that the majority of national (and regional) agencies keep very poor records as to the growth and success rate of their denomination's church-planting efforts.

Training has become a vital part of the denomination's aid to church planting. The work of selective recruitment and required training is adding to the success rate of planting in the U.S.

Even though many denominations are seeking to plant more aggressively, the less a church is tied to its denominational church-planting structures the more likely it seems to aggressively plant churches. This fact is offset, however, by the move of denominations to activate local congregations as the main financial supporters of church-plants.

It should also be noted that the manner in which churches are currently planted is changing as well. Team approaches and multiple overlapping strategies are more prevalent. For example, it is more likely for a team to plant a church using the Purpose Driven model than for a planter to do a parachute drop with no plan in place.

Church Planting Networks

Leadership Network conducted surveys of 45 church planting networks around the United States. There were 24 in-person interviews and the remainder were via phone.

The interviewers observed that local churches traditionally place a value on planting churches similar to themselves and tend to do so through direct "mothering" or sponsorship. Denominational agencies (whether national or regional) place a value on reproducing common denominationalist churches. In contrast, many independent church-planting organizations were started by catalytic leaders (mostly pastors) who think beyond local church planting and think differently than denominations.

The interviews surfaced the knowledge that networks were formed for a variety of reasons: ideology, theology, independence, entrepreneurial spirit, kingdom mentality, frustration with existing systems, vision, calling, or the seeming necessity of a different kind of church for the community. The church planting networks surveyed varied in their scope of theology, methodology, and ecclesiology, but they all shared a common passion for planting churches of what they call "similar DNA." A church planting network, for the purpose of this study, is defined by the survey group as "a group of churches that have publicly acknowledged that they are intentionally working together for the purpose of church planting and have a cooperative strategy to accomplish that goal."

Relationships as Catalyst

The trademark characteristic of church planting networks is the ongoing emphasis upon the relationship between the planter and church-planting entity. This relational bond is emphasized over their financial relationship (which often still comes through traditional denominational or other channels).

In the last few decades, a "cottage industry" of organizations and support ministries has developed around church planting. It is clear that networks have helped raise awareness, create healthy discussion, stimulate new ideas and forms, and develop new integration solutions. Networks are working diligently at connecting the wider body of churches to one another regardless of their denominational status. It is not so clear, however, that networks are as effective at actually multiplying churches.

The church planting networks studied could be grouped into two major types: inter-denominational and intra-denominational. Intra-denominational networks operate as a sodality to assist denominational/movement churches, helping them partner together for best practices and best resources. They typically have common values and common pools

of resources. Ultimately, however, they are built around a common theology. Stadia is an example of an intra-denominational network. The Missouri Synod Lutherans partner with the U.S. Center for Missions as an outside influencer. “When the denomination can’t get the job done, that’s when these organizations start to pop up… because the mainline denomination wants to but just can’t do [church planting]… It is a sociological principle.”[27]

Inter-denominational networks often form around a common ministry paradigm. Groups in this category include Vision USA, Church Planting Network, and Infinity Alliance. They tend to have a common theological statement that is broader and allows cooperation in spite of ideological differences on issues perceived as secondary.

Some networks emerge from a local church. For example, GlocalNet was birthed from Northwood Church in Keller, Texas, and Global Outreach was birthed from Spanish River Church in Boca Raton, Florida. Often, they are birthed out of the heart of the lead pastor and have been adopted by the congregation. The network tends to be identified with the local church pastor who founded it.

Assessment and Training

Over 75 percent of the networks studied have defined processes for assessment, training, and assisting the church planter with a new plant. This is seen not only in the surveys the networks completed, but also in the large number of churches and denominations reporting that they rely on networks for certain key elements in the planting process (most notably training and coaching).

In dealing with applicants, networks generally accept 20 percent of those who apply to their church-planting programs. The networks averaged 20 applicants a year but only 5 approvals. Ron Sylvia, from Purpose Driven Church Planting, explained,

“Everyone looks at people who are called to do it and want to do the same, even if they are not called. If I can talk guys out of it, I can save them a lot of hardship.” Scott Thomas of the Acts29 Network explained that they have 150 men in the process of training and “approximately 50% make it through the online and phone interviews with around 50% of those being declined during the face-to-face interview.”[28] In other words, approximately 25 percent go on to plant Acts29 churches.

Networks tend to emphasize relationship between the planter and others in the network, philosophical connectedness with the network, ongoing connectedness, and network chemistry over theological compatibility, boot camp coaching or possible funding. There is a trend among many networks to provide separate coaches and mentors to planters. “Coaches” deal with the practice and strategies of planting. Meanwhile, “mentors” focus on the spiritual development of the pastor—and often his wife. These are not just two functions, but frequently they are two separate people.

Ministry Paradigm and Style

Missiology is a common term and a driving force with many networks. They want to plant church-planting churches from the outset. GlocalNet says, “Don’t plant a tree, plant an orchard.”[29] These networks aim to plant churches that will adopt the vision of partnering or pioneering in planting other churches in the future.

No prescribed formula or style was required by most networks, but most indicated that they were a local expression of the community in which the church was planted. The language reflects a missiological outlook historically prevalent only among international missions practitioners; however, such missiological perspective is now indispensable for U.S. church planting. Networks wanted the church to grow numerically, but they also wanted it to grow through impact and expression in the community. However, it was very common for churches to look more like that network than their community.

Networks that appear healthier and more vibrant tend to be led by charismatic leaders who attract other leaders. Many of these leaders are emerging from local church contexts. Therefore, the strength of these networks is often seen through the establishment of relational communities. Planters are provided at least some monetary support, relational connectedness, encouragement and inspiration, along with the conviction that they are part of something greater than themselves. Therein lies the seed of movement-mindedness.

There is a growing kingdom-mindset expressing itself in the form of networks that cross traditional and denominational boundaries. Time will tell how well leaders and the organizations they serve will set aside personal agendas and be willing to collaborate and partner together for the purpose of joining God in his world mission.

Budgets and Funding

There is an obvious difference between the budgeting of church-planting networks and denominational agencies and church-planting churches. The average annual budget for a church-planting network is $592,133. However, this number is skewed since the average annual budget for 90 percent of church-planting networks surveyed is $182,500. The average among those in the remaining 10 percent of networks is $1,775,000.

The average amount of funding for a new church plant for all networks was $172,200. When reporting their funding numbers, most networks mixed the total funds a church plant received (funding from the network plus the planter's personal fundraising efforts) rather than just the amount provided directly to the plant from the network. In other words, many times the networks also relied on the church planter to raise funds in addition to those provided by the network. For example, the Kairos Church Planting

group in Portland, Oregon, reports that planters both receive funding and must also personally raise funding. Typically, this network will support a church plant financially for 48 months.[30]

Just under half of the networks reported that although coaching is not required for planters, they attempt to make it a priority for them. In some cases, the network funds the coaching (or arranges for a network coach) as part of the network relationship. Thus, some networks reported their fee for personal coaching through the planting process. Griffith Coaching Network's cost of coaching a church planter for 12-18 months varies from $2000-$6000. The availability of the coach includes 24/7 phone calls, emails, and site visits.

Reproduction

Networks surveyed indicated that the average number of new church starts per network per year has gradually increased over the past 6 years from 1.9 to 6. This increase is attributable to several factors: 50 percent of existing networks are gradually increasing the number of churches they plant each year; a large number of new networks have started since 2003; and new networks are planting more churches and growing more per year than the existing networks.

Glenn Smith, of New Church Initiatives, believes that it is from new church-planting approaches among some of the new networks that more effective methods will be learned. He explained, "In other cultures, multiplication is just normal. They just think so radically different than we do. Some of what multiplication should look like is happening in places like Latin America. We need to simplify church planting . . . We think in masses—mass education. Multiplication does not work that way."[31]

The analysis reveals that reproduction is accomplished well among church-planting networks because of a strong emphasis placed on team planting. Many groups do

not permit a lone pastor, but there is still a primary focus on having a lead planter within the team. Some networks require the entire team to be assessed, while others require only the lead planter, and then they let him develop his own team. Still, the obvious implication is that a team plant will more quickly reproduce lead planters.

Networks report that 93 percent of the churches they plant become established churches

which have an average attendance of 143 by the 1-year anniversary of the plant. This is an encouraging sign of effectiveness among the work being done by church planting networks.

Analysis

Networks spend more time on assessment than on formal training. They actively screen planting candidates with a great deal of diligence. Many denominations also have a rigid recruitment and screening process, but it seems even more prevalent in the networks studied.

It should also be observed that church planting networks have become an industry unto themselves. As with most cottage industries, they are niche industries, not the primary industry. These networks have also created support systems. They create healthy discussion, provide networking environments and learning platforms, stimulate new ideas and forms, and develop new integration solutions. The primary industry, however, still remains the denomination.

Financing a church plant from a network is a unique proposition for each network. Though many are quite generous, there is an expectation that the church will become self-sustaining and then reinvest into the network.

In denominationally-driven church plants, theology and denominational identity are often the defining forces that shape church planting. However, church-planting

networks are more often born and sustained by friendships, sense of partnership in ministry, and shared relationships. They discover what is missionally effective in their respective fields of planting.

Church Planting Churches

Over 330 churches completed the church-planting church survey, and 173 of the responses were analyzed. Churches which qualified as a "church-planting church" reported directly planting at least two other churches *and* identified a specific church-planting strategy and activity in their survey responses. Eleven in-person interviews were conducted with church-planting churches. The remaining 319 were either completed over the phone or on-line. Initially, 30 known church-planting churches in the U.S. were contacted by phone, email or in person with a survey request.[32]

With an increased emphasis on church planting, there is a corresponding increase in the number of self-replicating churches. The survey indicates that for many of these churches, the adoption of the conceptual strategy of planting "reproducing churches" is a recent phenomenon—primarily in churches founded within the last twenty years.[33]

Budgeting and Funding

Churches that aggressively pursue church-planting have a number of financial factors in common. These churches expect new church planters to raise a sizeable amount of the church-planting budget (50 percent-80 percent was common). They also rely on their respective denominations. However, the majority of funding responsibility is trending toward the parent church and church planter with the denomination providing no more than 33 percent of needed funds.

Surprisingly, it appears that most of the aggressive, reproducing churches provide less financial support than do less-aggressive churches. There was a clear pattern that emerged—the more money a parent church put into a single church plant, the fewer

number of churches they actually planted. For example, CrossPointe Church in Orlando donates 12 percent budget toward church planting. On average, $25,000 is budgeted for each church plant. They have participated as a sponsor church in 5 plants directly and three others as a part of a network. Many of the more aggressive parent churches assigned 10% or more of the budget to domestic church-planting. Translated into dollars, the actual amount of money from some of the larger churches was from $100,000 annually to over $1,000,000.

Staffing and Partnerships

Churches that aggressively plant churches operate differently than other churches. One-third of larger churches had paid staff assigned to church planting. Even though that was their assignment, most of those staff spent less than 50 percent of their time focused on church planting. Nevertheless, there is a positive correlation between the number of staff who assist with church planting and the number of churches planted by that church. For example, Royal Oak Vineyard Church of Minnesota provides administrative support, including financial oversight until the church plant is administratively viable.

There was a direct correlation between the senior pastor's commitment to church planting and the church's ability to plant successfully. Paid staff also affects partnership outside of the church. With the increase in staff assigned to church planting, the trend is for the church to become more involved with other partners and providers.

Another cause for aggressiveness of church planting is rapid growth. It was discovered that the more rapidly a church grows, the more likely they seem to initiate or become involved with a parachurch church planting network.

Church Planting Indicators

In the realm of church planting, churches that were 200 or less in attendance were four times more likely to plant a church than churches of 1000 or more in attendance

while churches between 200–500 in attendance were twice as likely to plant a church than their larger counterparts. The Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches reported that 50% of their church plants were planted by churches with attendance less than 200 in the decade of the 1990's. They also reported that only 25% of new churches were planted by larger churches. The remaining number were planted without a parent church. This is an exact correlation with the national averages found in our studies.

[INSERT Table 11 here].

All of the recent church plants that have reproduced a daughter church see church planting as part of their DNA from the beginning, often having it written into their chartering documents or taught in membership classes. We also discovered that the more partners and service providers a parent church worked with the more churches they planted.

Recruitment, Assessment, and Training

As with church-planting networks, there is a consistent requirement for involvement in certain systems. Churches that reported aggressive church-planting results viewed assessment, training, encouragement, coaching, and mentoring as more important and strategic than financial support. In many cases they required it for their involvement. As already shown, church-planting churches rely on the planter to raise most of his funding. Their self-perceived role is to prepare the planter for the work in the field and to press him to self-sufficiency. There is a lot of freedom given to church planters to determine methodologies and form.

Beyond recruitment and assessment, church-planting churches seek to do well in the training of their planters. Many of the churches have training systems unique to themselves. Most senior pastors approached the level of training on a case-by-case basis

and were confident in their evaluation of the church-planting pastor because of their on-the-job training and their hands-on experience in church leadership.[34]

A shared trait among this segment of church leadership is the importance of articulating the vision and value of church planting to the church body through multiple levels of mass communication. Success is conveyed in terms of personal involvement by its membership through prayer, financial giving and being sent out as a part of the planting core group. The value of church planting is expressed as the most effective means of evangelism that a church can participate in for the expansion of God's Kingdom and the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

Networking appears to increase capacity. The more partners and service providers a parent church worked with, the more churches they planted. A "reproducing, multi-staff, high-impact style" church plant seems to be more popular with larger churches, and parallels the number of partners and providers with whom they associate.

The relationship to their respective denominations also had an effect on their planting purposes. Being tied to a denomination would include claiming denominational attachment, involvement with denominational associations or fellowships, or following denominational programs and processes for church planting. The *less* a church was tied to her denominational church-planting structures, the *more* likely she seemed to plant churches aggressively.

Analysis

Church-planting churches are a determined group. They are independent thinkers and aggressive by nature. They consistently told us their goal was to create self-sufficient church planters and churches. Thus, most of them do not fund heavily. Rather, they place the planter into a great amount of training. As noted, although these churches often assign staff members to direct church-planting, these staff members often spend less than half of

their time directing church-planting. The more rapidly a church grows, the more likely they seem to initiate or become involved with a parachurch church-planting network.

Support not only comes as a benefit to the church plant but also to the sending church. *Significantly, all surveyed churches have experienced growth in their own attendance as they faithfully continued to pursue outreach and mission as the priority for their existence.*

House Churches

Methodology

We surveyed 97 organic-church leaders who either attended the 2007 organic church conference in Long Beach, California in January or who were in Neil Cole's network of contacts. The survey tool elicited information about house church definition, the church-planting movement, and key values of house churches. The tool requested information about how the church was started and what type of training those who began the church received.

Observations

With the advent of the internet and email, communication has become much easier for individual house church congregations to exchange information with one another and alert others of their presence in a community. The growing influence of house churches has been shown through the Leadership Network study along with those done by Barna Research[35] and the Center for Missional Research.[36] Neil Cole gave permission for Church Multiplication Associate conference attendees to participate in this survey. The consensus of the conference attendees reflected that their house church was a small gathering around the life of Jesus. Some phrases included "where real life happens" and, "a home-based church that is missional rather than attractional." Overall, the

participants characterized these faith communities as being based on relationships and seeking authenticity. Thus, there is an equality of all participants for the purposes of God's Kingdom.

House church attendees communicate certain values with a high occurrence. For example, 97 percent of those surveyed stated that the "relationship with Christ" was a key value of their church. The same percentage also stated the importance of prayer in their meetings. Maturing as a disciple was a key value of 86 percent of those responding and 85 percent identified reading the Bible as a key value. A pervasive and common perception among respondents is that a personal, intimate relationship with God is the driving force within house churches. Bill Tenny-Brittian described the life of his house church as, "Small groups of Christians gathered together for discipleship, accountability, and to act on the commands of Jesus."

Evangelism as a key value ranked significantly lower than the internal value of personal growth in faith with 60 percent stating personal evangelism was a key value to the church. Looking at specific elements of evangelism reveals the emphases of house churches. Mission service was mentioned by 35 percent. Starting new churches was seen as a key value by 26 percent, and the study further expands the look at church replication in the next section. Group evangelistic work was reported as key by only 18 percent within our study. This lowered emphasis on evangelism versus personal spiritual growth may reveal why there is not a greater rate of growth in the organic church.

Starting New Churches

The house-church model produces a simple paradigm that is easily replicated, having a greater influence on people without a cumbersome structure. This key goal was reflected by many respondents in our study in their desire for the "growth of Christianity via decentralized church by reproduction of small house churches." One respondent—

Keith Giles of California—stated that the church is to be a "God-designed, family-based model of 'being the Church' that emphasizes the value of each person and provides for the discipleship of everyone as they follow Jesus in their actual life."

Reproduction is perceived to be a function as strategic and natural as worship. Rather than reproduction being seen as strategic, it is identified as a necessity. Dick Patterson of Montara, California states, "We believe we will need 300 simple churches to embed the coming harvest in Montara—to that end, we continue to train interns and internationals who come to us for a season. We have moved our entire team into the town, and all 3 houses are now functioning."

A shared hope among many of this movement is for rapid intentional expansion. Alyson Hsiao stated the need for organic church planting as "massive spontaneous expansion of simple church gatherings." Bill Tenny-Brittian wants to see "rapidly multiplying churches comprising unaffiliated or networked small bands of Christians." These respondents to our study illustrate a common theme in the movement.

House churches are started for a number of reasons and in a variety of ways. Numerous people reported leaving traditional or mega-churches specifically in order to begin a house church. Half of the respondents said that their church helped start one or more new house churches during the previous five years. Of those who said their churches helped start new churches in the last five years, 30% have started six or more new churches while 22% have started at least one new church.

Training

The most common assistance offered to house churches is leadership training. However, both personnel and financial resources were offered but in much smaller numbers.

Leadership training focused upon simplicity in form and praxis, validation for the house church model, and permission to press forward with organic models of ministry. The great majority of leaders, 82 percent, were mentored and/or coached by other individuals. In addition, 79% of respondents indicated that local-church discipleship was significant and 70% of leaders indicated they have had at least some Bible college or seminary training. However, even with the elevated emphasis on church reproduction, only 55 percent answered 'yes' to the question: "Do you have any previous specific training in church planting/multiplication?"

Analysis

The house-church movement is growing in influence in the United States. Two of the more influential and effective networks are Church Multiplication Associates led by Neil Cole and House2House led by Tony & Felicity Dale. Observing these two organizations will provide others the insight into what is occurring among this movement.

According to Barna Research of January 8, 2007, the rapidity of this movement is shown in the fact that half of the people (54%) currently engaged in an independent home fellowship have been participating for less than three months. Barna Research also revealed a high level of satisfaction among those in the house-church movement. A majority (59%) said they were "completely satisfied" with the spiritual depth they experience in their house-church setting.[37]

The pervasiveness of this form of church should not be understated. In 2006, the Center for Missional Research of the North American Mission Board conducted a survey of 3,600 Americans. In it, 26.3% indicated that they meet weekly with a group of 20 people or less to pray and study scriptures as their primary form of spiritual or religious gathering. Of those who identified themselves as born-again Christians, 42.1 percent said

that they met weekly with a group of 20 or less people as their primary form of spiritual or religious gathering. CMR discovered that 50 out of the 3,600 adults surveyed attend a group of 20 or less, but “rarely” or “never” attend a place of worship. This accounts for almost 1.4 percent of the American population and may represent the purest measure of those who are not involved in an organized church, synagogue, or mosque but still are involved in some alternative faith community like, in the Christian faith, a house church.

Though it was often stated that there is a high emphasis on replication, much of the inner workings of house churches do not lend themselves to this ministry. There seems to be a great gap between the emphasis placed on spiritual growth and personal or group evangelism. Without a significant weight placed on some type of evangelistic work, reproduction will languish.

CONCLUSION

The energy and enthusiasm about church planting in North America is at an unprecedented high. More resources (books, funding, potential planters and sponsor churches) are available today than at any other time in our history. Contemporary church-planting organizations display a heart of cooperation and a “kingdom mentality” by sharing resources. In addition, the energy of successful church planting is moving quickly from denominational structures to the more hands-on local churches and networks.

Many church planters are finding fulfillment as their God-given dreams come to fruition. Yet many more struggle with the personal and professional demands of planting a church and nurturing it to mature, healthy, reproducing viability. Through multiple studies and extensive research, it requires tenacity and teamwork, perseverance and passion, commitment and common-sense to plant churches. The most successful church-planters are aggressive and outwardly-focused. They lead by example and engage their culture in relevant, life-changing ministry.

The proper preparation (boot camp, assessment, and other strategies mentioned above) and partnerships (coaching, mentoring, peer networks, and spousal support) make a dramatic difference in the well-being, self-image and potential of the planter and the church plant. Though denominations may provide help, the most effective strategy clearly seems to be local churches planting other churches—which in turn have church-planting DNA ingrained in them from their inception.

Supervision and accountability have also proven to be valuable to the planting entity, the planter, and the church plant. There are other key factors in successful church planting, such as appropriate funding and an adequate core group; organizational simplicity and an effective evangelism strategy. However, there's no single *model* that works in every context. But there are principles that are useful, applicable and transferable. The hope of the authors is that the current emphasis on church planting will grow exponentially and that the work of former and current church planters, missiologists, researchers, strategists and academicians will provide the resources for future planters to be among those who not only survive, but succeed for the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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NOTES

1. In the 2004 survey *Church Planting Observations on the State of North American Mission Strategies* by the North American Mission Board, of 124 organizations,

denominations, and churches involved in church planting all but two groups indicated an increased interest in church planting and no entities indicated a decreased interest in church planting.

2. Indigenous church planting has chiefly been the concern of missiologists; however, the goal of missions was to transplant the gospel into a new community, and then allow it to become established or indigenous to that community in form and expression. The focus upon indigeneity is a valid one for North American church planting as well.

3. Church plants are differentiated from church *starts*. Churches may be started by a variety of means, such as a church split. *Planting* a church requires the "soil of lostness" and presumes the evangelization of unbelievers and the addition of those believers to the community of faith. This study is also concerned with church multiplication which involves a broader focus—i.e. not just planting a tree but planting an orchard.

4. Undocumented statistics for church-plant failure are widely reprinted. The Purpose Driven brochure (http://pddocs.purposedriven.com) reads, "Over 70% of church plants fail in the first year." Nelson Searcy and Kerrick Thomas write: "The majority of new churches fail within the first year." George Hunter and Bob Whitesel report that "80 percent of church plants die within five years," and the Acts 29 Network (www.acts29network.org) also says, "Nearly 80 percent of church planting attempts fail."

5. Hunter (1986) reports what he describes as some "surprising statistics." Even though recruitment and training of leadership ranks as a top priority for Hunter, forty percent of his success cases stated they were not adept at this skill set. However, Hunter offers a "possible explanation" for this issue. He believed successful church planters "did it intuitively without the language or conceptual basis for it," where the failures struggled because they did not have the intuitive skill.

6. Email correspondence received from Alan Avera to Ed Stetzer, March 9, 2007, helped affirm that survivability was similar in almost all denominations, both inside and outside of the NAMB study. Avera, Executive Director of Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, indicated that if survival is measured after 5 years in the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (which was not included in the NAMB study), then the success rate over the last 30 years has been 67%. However, if the criterion is not mere survival, but rather being an organized, self-supporting church, the success rate drops to 42%. For church-plants with an assessment approved church planter, survivability goes up to 77%.

7. Stephen Gray can be contacted at fastgrowingchurchplants@yahoo.com. Stephen Gray, Director of National Missions, 100 Stinson Dr., Poplar Bluff, MO 63901, 573-785-7746.

8. Bill Easum and Bill Cornelius (2006: 7) conclude "Acts 1 and 2 tell us that the early church went from 120 believers to 3,120 believers overnight… In the first year after Christ's death, the number of believers went from 120 to 20,000."

9. Bob Logan, long-time writer on church planting and head of www.coachnet.org, recently compared the Evangelical Free Church's seven church-planting systems with the ten principles found in his C^2M^2 system. (C^2M^2 stands for Cultivating Church

Multiplication Movements). Moreover, the system identifies the components of most contemporary church-planting systems (with varying degrees of implementation).

10. These responses were generated from personal interviews with Bob Rowley, October 19, 2006; Bruce Redmond, personal interview, October 19, 2006; an email from David Houston to Ed Stetzer, Feb. 11, 2007; and Mickey Noel, a personal interview, January 15, 2007. This survey was a focus group of the Evangelical Free Church which convened at Dallas Seminary.

11. Email from David Houston, Director of the School of Church Planting and Pastoral Training, to Ed Stetzer, Feb. 11, 2007.

12. Shepherd (2003) did an evaluative project, explaining that Ridley's process involved four phases or components: pre-screening potential church planter candidates; interviewing potential church planters; evaluating the information from the interview; and writing a report on the interview and evaluation. It also involved seven principles of selection interviewing: the presupposition that past behavior is the best indicator of future behavior; the quality of a person's work in the behavior setting is more important than work experience; focus on a group of behaviors rather than just a single behavior; systematic inquiry can recreate a picture of the candidate's past behavior; delay making a decision about the potential ability of the candidate until all essential information has been collected and analyzed; the assessor and the candidate can reach a mutual decision; and an effective selection process will help match the best person with the right job. He also says Behavioral Assessment Models: do not define an "effective church planter;" are limited with regard to the quality control of assessors; were developed at a time before major cultural shifts took place in North America from modernism to postmodernism; appear to be limited in scope related to the inclusion of different kinds of church planters in the original study (gender, ethnicity, social status, education, bi-vocational, lay planters); become the first filter of church planting candidates with a high rejection rate; lack rating norms for each behavior category; and may hinder the development of church multiplication movements.

13. Payne (2001: 240-41) cautions, "Through the implementation of the Assessing Church Planters system, the possibility of creating an ethos which advocates only the best church planters pass through the system tends to exist. This ethos continues to foster the professional church planter mentality, and many church members will continue to believe that the laity cannot plant churches; and those that can plant churches must be screened through the assessment process… By requiring the oversight of professional church leaders to screen candidates, the reproducibility of the Assessing Church Planters system is diminished. As long as the church depends on the professional clergy for church planting, North American church planting will always be by addition. By limiting the assessment process to a screening process, a significant portion of potential church planters will be eliminated."

14. See http://www.vision4usa.com/index.cfm?page=5 for a summary of the benefits of the assessment process at VisionUSA.

15. See http://www.acts29network.org/DF/PrintablePage.aspx?XslPath=\Content.xslt&ObjectTypeName=Simple%20Content&ObjectName=Assessment%20Process&Mode=Values.

16. See the Presbyterian Church America's assessment at http://www.pca-mna.org/planting%20ministries/assessment%20center.htm

17.See http://www.covchurch.org/cov/news/item3542.html for the Evangelical Covenant Church's procedures.

18. Shepherd, 2003, believes the strengths of Griffith's Self-Assessment model include: the candidates become vital partners in the decision-making process; encouragement of candidates to draw conclusions and then consult with the supervisor, reducing potential conflict and negative outcomes; time saved for church planting leaders; adaptability to a contextual, indigenous system; relatively low cost; the interview is shorter and less adversarial than Ridley's. The weaknesses of Griffith's model are that it is designed primarily for middle class, highly-educated church planting candidates which may leave out lay and bi-vocational planters. It also places less emphasis on the behavioral interview.

19. Steve Pike, personal interview, October 13, 2006.

20. Rick Morse, personal interview, November 30, 2006.

21. Dave Olson, personal interview, December 18, 2006 at the Evangelical Covenant Church explains that 40% of church-planting candidates are fully approved for church-planting; 30% are conditionally approved for church planting; and 30% are not recommended for church planting

22. Ogne and Roehl 2005 Ogne related six keys to coaching and leading high-performance teams: invest in the development of individual team members; develop clear models of how the team will function; continually cast a shared vision of a preferred future; constantly maintain a high-performance challenge; encourage personal commitment to one another; integrate team performance and team learning.

23. Rod Koop, of the Foursquare Church, personal interview, November 2007.

24. Scott Thomas of Acts 29, personal interview, October 5, 2006.

25. Email from Rick Morse to Ed Stetzer, Dec. 20, 2006.

26. The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod illustrates the current trend. Funding typically includes national and judicatory (regional) portions. The judicatory funding could be up to $50,000 per year and national funding could be $30,000 over three years. Whereas local entities are designated to keep track of church planting funds, circuits (a level under the district) also help to accomplish the funding. For 2006-2007, the District New Partnerships/LCMS World Mission National Mission gave $605,000 toward "Ablaze! New Congregation Development Grants." They gave $25,000 to 17 projects and $15,000 to another 12 projects. Typically, it costs LCMS $1600 per week to train one church planter. Within the system, the calling entity provides the salary and benefits to new planters. Typically, a new church is sponsored financially for three years with the goal of the new church's self-sufficiency at the end of that period. However, most of the judicatories go 3-5 years. Church planters have to fill out reports to the judicatory for accountability purposes. The LCMS is actively funding churches but is aggressively seeking local congregations to support the local work of church planting.

27. Mike Ruehl, personal interview, November 1, 2006.

28. Scott Thomas of Acts 29, personal interview, October 5, 2006.

29. GlocalNet was started in Keller, Texas at Northwood Church (www.northwoodchurch.org) for the Communities under the leadership of Pastor Bob Roberts.

30. On the high end of funding, Sovereign Grace Ministries provides $110,000-$120,000 for the average church plant. Of that, $60,000 comes from the Sovereign Grace mission fund and the remainder is provided by tithes and offerings of the founding church families. SGM normally sends out large groups of people to plant a church. SGM also offers one-year complete support and then evaluates whether help should be extended for a longer time period.

31. Glenn Smith (www.newchurchinitiatives.org) is a church planting consultant from Sugarland, TX.

32. All in-person interviews were done with churches in this list. The first contacts were made from a list of U.S. megachurches that Leadership Network provided (megachurches have weekly worship attendances of 2,000 and higher). All churches on this list with email addresses were emailed with a survey request. The list was narrowed to the top 200 megachurches that indicated some degree of church-planting involvement. All 200 were called at least twice and emailed another 3 times until they completed a survey or communicated that they would not be participating in the survey. Finally, in an effort to contact as many churches as possible, a team member gathered large numbers of church email addresses from the internet and emailed general requests to those churches asking them to participate in the survey if they were a church-planting church

33. Fellowship Bible Church in Little Rock, Arkansas, is an example (www.fbclr.org). Bill Wellons serves as the full-time director for FBC's church planting efforts via Fellowship Associates, founded in 1999. A majority of his time—approximately 75 percent—is directed toward this goal. The church has 4 staff members directly involved in the Residency program and 10 church staff mentors who invest in training for specific ministry areas. The church has planted in Barcelona, Spain and Poland as a result of the Residency Program. Their program includes a 10-month residency program, their national church leadership conference, and personality assessment training. This level of local church involvement has been difficult to find in decades past.

34. Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City (www.redeemer.com) is a prime example of the training offered. It developed a "Partner Program." Church planters entering the RCPC program are exposed to teachers who have planted churches, enjoy camaraderie with fellow church planters, and have access to peers from different denominational backgrounds. The content of the training is taken from the Redeemer Church Planter Manual. The program covers a 9-month period. Learners do assignments related to their specific church plants rather than doing generic work that might be useless on their fields of ministry. RPC even offers the training in English and Spanish. The topics addressed are call and competencies of the church planter; vision, values and mission of the church; research of demographics and ethnographics; contextualized

philosophy of ministry; action plan; leadership structures; linking the Gospel to your community; renewal dynamics for church planting and growth; small groups; and preaching in the context of church planting.

35. *The Barna Update*, "Rapid Increase in Alternative Forms of The Church Are Changing the Religious Landscape," October 24, 2005, www.barna.org.

36. "New Research on the Rise of House Churches and Alternate Faith Communities," December 18, 2006, http://www.namb.net/site/apps/nl/content3.asp?c=9qKILUOzEpH&b=1594385&ct=2194513

37. http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=255

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Table 1. Percent Church Plants Survived by Year

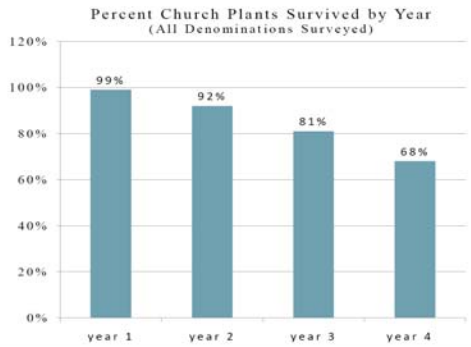

Table 2. Baptisms per Year

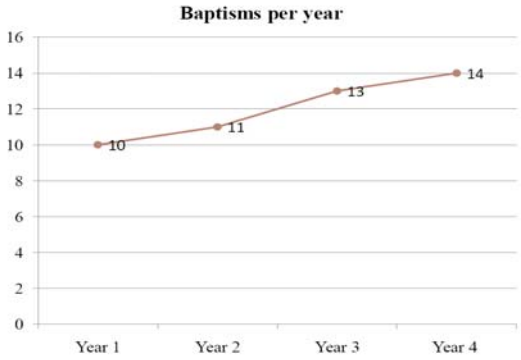

Table 3. Mean Attendance per Year

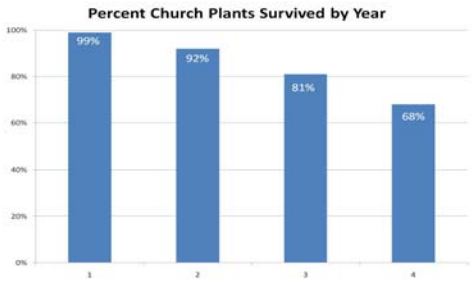

Table 4. Attendance and Assessment Over 4 Years

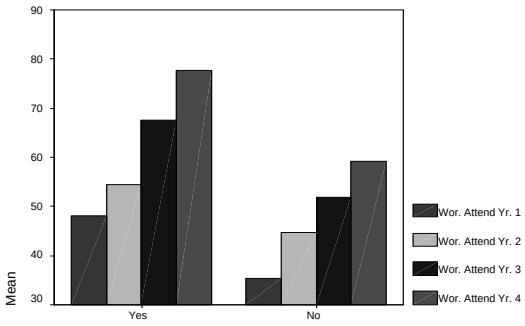

Table 5. Assessment and Mean Conversions

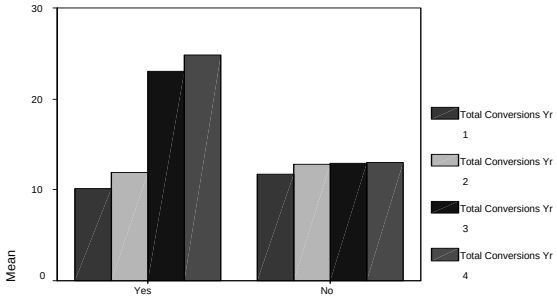

Table 6. Ridley Scores Reported

Church Planters	Total Responding	Scores Reported	%
Fast-growing	60	47	78.3
Struggling Plants	52	38	73.1
Total	112	85	75.8

Table 7. Ridley Assessment Scores

	Fast-growing (n=47)		Struggling (n=38)			
Assessment	M	SD	M	SD	t	p≤ .05
Ridley Scores	4.26	.21	3.82	.34	6.95	0.00*

* Indicates a significant difference discovered

Table 8. Attendance and Meeting with a Mentor

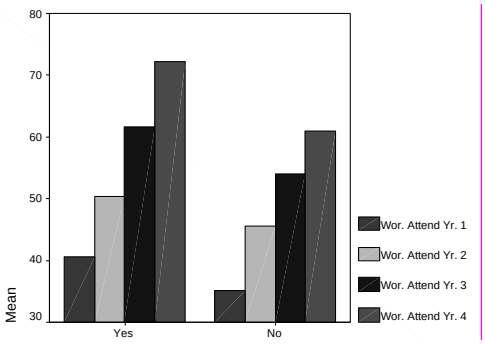

Table 9. Attendance and Frequency of Meetings with a Mentor

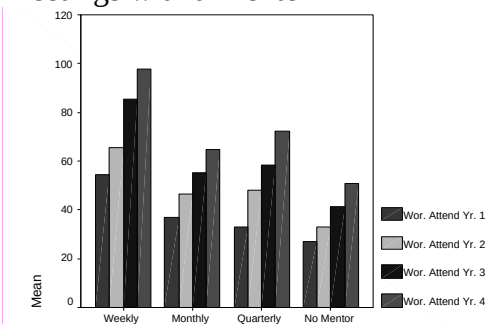

Table 10. Peer Group Affiliation and Mean Church Attendance

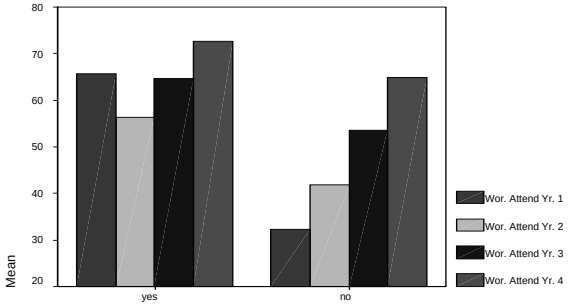

Table 11. Church Size and Planting

Responding churches	Ave attendance in group	Total plants in group	Average plants/ church	Median plants/ church	Mode plants/ church
38	1-199	271	7.13	3	2
39	200-499	279	3.23	4	2
19	500-999	126	1.727	5	3
77	1000+	1109	1.695	7	2