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# DEVELOPING A CHURCH PLANTING GROWTH STRATEGY FOR GROWING METROPOLITAN COMMUNITIES IN THE UNITED STATES

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DEVELOPING A CHURCH PLANTING GROWTH STRATEGY FOR GROWING  
METROPOLITAN COMMUNITIES IN THE UNITED STATES

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BY

AARON BURKE

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DISSERTATION COMMITTEE SIGNATURE PAGE

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*under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Committee and approved by all members of the Committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Divinity in the Barnett College of Ministry and Theology at Southeastern University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Ministry.*

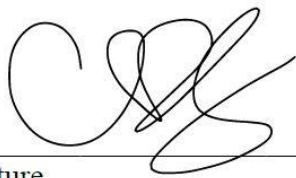
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## ABSTRACT

The United States is becoming increasingly urbanized. The metropolitan areas are thriving with new residents and new industries. While the cities are growing, the church is declining. The church has a problem to solve. How do we plant rapidly growing churches in growing metropolitan areas?

The focus of this doctoral dissertation is to present rapidly growing church plants as a solution to the declining church attendance in the metropolitan areas of the United States. Not only do new churches need to be planted, but these new churches need a strategy for growth. I found this strategy by researching five rapidly growing church plants in five of the fastest growing metropolitan areas of the United States.

This dissertation an in-depth theological study of the growth of the church as well as current literature review on the subject of church planting. The project concludes with qualitative research of rapidly growing church plants and how this research can be applied to future church planters in metropolitan areas.

*Dedication*

This project is dedicated to my wife, Katie,  
and my four beautiful children,  
Lily, Annabelle, Kai, and Elise.

### *Acknowledgment*

Thank you to the staff and members of Radiant Church. You have been my inspiration for this project. I am honored to be your pastor. Thank you for giving me the time away to focus on my education so that I can lead more effectively.

Thank you to my doctoral mentor, Dr. Jamie Stewart. You made this project a priority in your already busy life. I am forever grateful. I have learned so much from our time together.

Thank you, Dr. Jim Vigil and Dr. Alan Ehler from Southeastern University. I am inspired to be a better leader and a better Christian every time I am around you both.

I want to thank my grandma, Nancy Fogle. Her heart for education has been passed down from herself, to my mother and now towards me.

Lastly, I want to thank my pastor, Dr. Evon Horton. It was your example of pursuing excellence in everything that was the catalyst for pursuing my doctorate. I am thankful for you.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### THE PROJECT INTRODUCED

As greater numbers of people than ever before move into cities, as the world is becoming increasingly urbanized. Strategist Bret Boyd wrote: “The United Nations in 2009 and the International Organization for Migration in 2015 both estimated that around 3 million people are moving to cities every week. Approximately 54 percent of the world’s population now resides in cities, up from 30percent in 1950. Sources estimate this will grow to 2/3 of the world population in the next 15-30 years.”<sup>1</sup> In the United States, the largest 20 cities account for 33percent of the total US population.<sup>2</sup>

Leaders of America’s cities, such as mayors, city council members, developers, and city planners, are strategizing about how they can create environments for people to live, work, and play, all within the core of their cities. Millennials, those born between 1981 and 2000, are the primary demographic moving to cities. A study developed in 2019 by the Georgia Institute of Technology found that, “delayed lifecycle events including marriage and child-rearing among today’s young adults, combined with the pursuit of higher education, lead to living in amenity-rich central cities where rental units and public transportation are readily available.”<sup>3</sup> In the city of Tampa, only 10 percent of the population in the 1980’s was comprised of young adults aged 20-34. Twenty years later, that number has skyrocketed to 33 percent.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Bret Boyd. “Urbanization and the Mass Movement of People to Cities,” accessed February 1, 2019, <https://graylinegroup.com/urbanization-catalyst-overview/>.

2. Yongsung Lee, Bumsoo Lee, and Md Tanvir Hossain Shubho, “Urban Revival by Millennials? Intraurban Net Migration Patterns of Young Adults, 1980–2010,” *Journal of Regional Science* 59, no. 3 (2019): 541.

3. *Ibid.*, 540.

4. *Ibid.*

The large influx of people moving into cities creates a huge opportunity for the church to reach people in metropolitan areas. In the article mentioned above, Bret Boyd highlighted the milestone reached in 2007, wherein, for the first time in human history, more people now live in urban areas than in rural areas. According to Boyd, “Within ten years the world will have nearly 500 cities of more than 1m [1 million] people. Most of the newcomers will be absorbed in a metropolis of up to 5m [5 million] people. But some will live in a mega-city, defined as home to 10m [10 million] or more inhabitants.”<sup>5</sup> The future relevance and impact of the church rests in its ability to plant and grow churches within metropolitan areas.

Unfortunately, while cities are growing, many churches are dying, or in decline. Thom S. Rainer, President and CEO of Lifeway Christian Resource, estimated that “between 6,000 and 10,000 churches in the U.S. are dying each year. That means around 100-200 churches will close this week.”<sup>6</sup> Church researcher, David T. Olson, explained the crisis in the American church when he wrote, “United States church attendance since 1990 has stayed the same and since 1990 in no single state did church attendance keep up with the population growth.”<sup>7</sup> As the number of people moving into cities rises exponentially, why are churches not experiencing the same rapid growth restaurants, housing, coffee shops, and entertainment, are experiencing? There is a disconnect between people migrating to those cities and people migrating to churches.

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5. Boyd, “Urbanization and the Mass Movement of People to Cities”.

6. Thom S. Rainer. “Hope for Dying Churches,” accessed June 18, 2019, <https://factsandtrends.net/2018/01/16/hope-for-dying-churches/>.

7. David T. Olson, *The American Church in Crisis: Groundbreaking Research Based on a National Database of over 200,000 Churches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 36–37.

There is a clear connection between the increase of millennials moving into cities the decline of churches. The Pew Research Center predicts that “39 out of every 100 Evangelical kids will leave the church by the time they are 35.”<sup>8</sup> According to the Pinetops Foundation, by the year 2050, “the overall Christian percentage of the (US) population will drop to 54 percent, from today’s 73 percent.”<sup>9</sup> These numbers reflect a large problem that must be solved in order to effectively build God’s church in The United States, especially as “the American church has been the largest contributor to world missions and biblical translation”<sup>10</sup> in recent history. The influence goes even further with the impact the American church has made on global health, humanitarian aid, Christian education, and the advancement of Christian media. The church in the United States is at a crucial crossroad, and in order to thrive in the future the church must create a strategy to grow in the metropolitan areas of America.

Although many churches are in decline or are closing, new churches are opening across the United States with fresh strategies and practices to reach people for Christ. Statistics show that 40 percent of those attending a new church plant are from unchurched or recently unchurched backgrounds.<sup>11</sup> These new, thriving churches must be evaluated to see what they are doing successfully, in the twenty-first century, to reach new people within growing metropolitan areas. This project will focus on rapidly growing church plants found in developing metropolitan cities in the U.S. to discover the best practices they employ that can be duplicated in other large cities. From the findings of the qualitative research that will be done, I plan to create a manual of

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8. Joshua Crossman, “The Great Opportunity,” Pinetops Foundation, 2018, 26, accessed September 4, 2019 <https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/4245467/The%20Great%20Opportunity.pdf>

9. Ibid., 19.

10. Ibid., 24.

11. Ibid., 32.

best practices in order to better equip the next generation of church planters to reach people for Christ.

### *Relationship to the Ministry of the Researcher*

Since committing my life to Christ at the age of 16, I have had a heart for unreached people and a desire to bring them to Christ. This passion remains a driving force in my life. I entered full-time vocational ministry when I was twenty-one. Three weeks after graduating from Southeastern College in 2005, I moved to South Asia as a short-term missionary to the country of Sri Lanka.

After spending a year on the mission field, I moved to Pensacola, Florida in May of 2007 in an attempt to help fundraise for my missions work overseas. From 2007 until the beginning of 2013, I actively managed a business, oversaw our missions' work in South Asia, and served as a youth pastor at Brownsville Assembly in Pensacola. It was during my final year of ministry in Pensacola that the Lord started to impress in my heart a passion for starting a church in a large city. My wife, Katie, and I wanted to find a thriving city that we could commit our life to making an impact on.

On May 22, 2012, John Romano wrote an opinion article in the Tampa Bay Times that grieved our hearts. The article highlighted the fact that Tampa Bay was ranked one of the least religious cities in America: "Of the 51 metro areas of at least 1 million residents, Tampa Bay placed 50th in its percentage of worshipers."<sup>12</sup> In Romano's opinion, "Only Portland [Oregon], stands between us and eternal damnation."<sup>13</sup> In comparison to the dismal response to worship and

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12. John Romano. "Tampa Bay Ranks Low in Religion Census," accessed February 15, 2019, <https://www.tampabay.com/opinion/columns/tampa-bay-ranks-low-in-religion-census/1231306>.

13. Ibid.

religion, Tampa has experienced explosive growth over the last decade. In recent years, Tampa Bay was ranked as the 9th fastest growing metropolitan area in the United States. In a single year, 2018, the population of Tampa Bay increased by 51,438 people.<sup>14</sup>

Tampa Bay's mayor, Bob Buckhorn, created a strategic plan to transform Tampa's run-down inner-city community into a thriving area for millennials. According to an interview with Buckhorn, "The city had turned its back on the water. At the time, the waterfront was filled with broken-down wharfs, and was more industrial than pedestrian. There was no Riverwalk, and Harbour Island, a neighborhood now home to 10,000 people, was a phosphate-dumping pit filled with weeds and rats."<sup>15</sup> The mayor made a massive change and found investors to transform downtown Tampa. According to Dodge Data and Analytics, "Tampa's waterfront is a magnet for investment: the city's downtown has become the locus of a wave of construction projects that will bring an estimated \$13 billion of investment to the Tampa region through 2022."<sup>16</sup>

With a large jump in population and infrastructure, one would think the church in Tampa Bay would be thriving. While Tampa is home to many great churches, the area is still feeling the negative impact from church scandal, splits, and multiple failed church plants. In the early 1990's a church was planted in the South Tampa community that quickly grew to thousands in attendance. The church received national recognition because of the rapid growth and impact on the local community. After multiple financial and marital scandals were revealed, the church

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14. The United States Census Bureau. "Counties in South and West Lead Nation in Population Growth," accessed June 14, 2019, <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2019/estimates-county-metro.html>.

15. Patrick Sisson, "How a Multibillion-Dollar Downtown Development Boom Is Reshaping a Florida City's Waterfront," Curbed, last modified June 5, 2018, accessed November 11, 2019, <https://www.curbed.com/2018/6/5/17428974/tampa-real-estate-development-water-street>.

16. Ibid.

collapsed and went bankrupt. Thousands of attenders were left without a church home in the Tampa Bay area.

The South Tampa community was left devastated after the collapse of this thriving church plant. The South Tampa Community is home to over 100,000 people, and despite the large population, church plants struggled to gain traction from the early 2000's until Radiant Church was launched in 2013. In 2012, Craig Altman, Lead Pastor of Grace Family Church in Lutz, Florida, referred to South Tampa as "a graveyard for church plants."<sup>17</sup> Multiple churches have attempted to start in the area around downtown and South Tampa, but none have experienced significant growth at a rapid pace. A large, local mega-church from North Tampa planted a satellite church near the downtown community with a plan to reach many of the new people flooding into the city, but within 3 years it was closed because of a lack of interest. The Acts 29 network<sup>18</sup> has also launched multiple churches in the early 2010's that have struggled to get over 100 people in attendance in their services.

In January 2013, my family moved to Tampa, Florida with a dream from God to reach unchurched people within this growing metropolitan area. What drew my family to Tampa was not the growth of the population, the urban amenities, or even the beautiful beaches, but the large number of unchurched people living there. Our family moved with the desire to influence the growing population with the transformational message Jesus brings, and reverse the negative trend of people who are far from God and not attending church. When my family moved to Tampa, we were surprised by the lack of interest people placed on attending church. The malls

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17. Comment made during our conversation in November of 2018, in which I asked him where he thought it was best that we plant a church. He suggested South Tampa because of the lack of churches there.

18. The Acts 29 network is about one thing: church planting. We exist to encourage, resource, facilitate, support and equip churches to plant churches that will plant church-planting churches. <https://www.acts29.com/>

and parks bustled with activity on Sunday mornings, while many churches struggled and were empty.

My wife and I spent nine months recruiting friends and family to join us in the launch of our new church in the heart of South Tampa. During that time, we had as a mission to be an unavoidable presence in this community. We made it a point to attend as many community events as possible so that we could share the vision of our church plant. Our first launch team meeting was on March 17th, 2013, with 17 adults in attendance. We worked diligently to mobilize this group of team members to help reach the thousands of lost people in South Tampa.

After nine months of preparation, our launch team grew to forty-five adults, who helped to officially launch Radiant Church on September 15th, 2013. On that first Sunday, 348 people attended, and thirty people raised their hand as a sign to commit their life to Christ. To the best of my knowledge, Radiant Church was the first successful church to be planted within the city limits of Tampa in the last decade. Once the church was launched, it was imperative to develop an effective strategy to reach people at a pace that could keep up with the growth rate of the city.

By God's grace, Radiant Church has continued to grow. The Apostle Paul writes about church growth by saying, "What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow."<sup>19</sup> The leadership at Radiant Church, which will be presented fully in a following chapter, has worked hard at getting a strategy from the Lord to ensure rapid growth each year. We have measured year-by-year growth

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19. 1 Corinthians 3:5-7

off of our anniversary service each 2nd Sunday of September. The growth can be seen year over year, as shown in the following table.

## ATTENDANCE BY YEAR

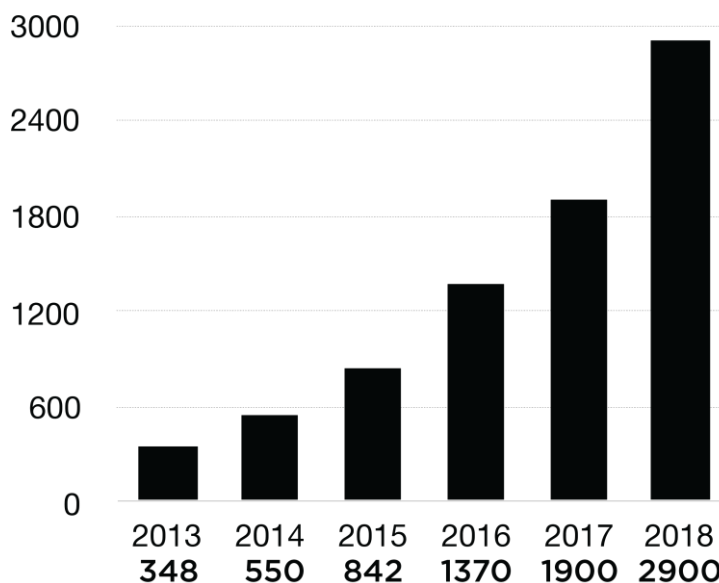


Figure 1: Attendance by Year

In November of 2018, *Outreach Magazine* recognized Radiant Church as the thirteenth fastest growing church in America.<sup>20</sup> The trend of rapid growth has continued and, in August of 2019, *Outreach Magazine* recognized the church as the fourth fastest growing church in America.<sup>21</sup> This growth demonstrates that it is possible to plant a growing church in a rapidly growing metropolitan area of the United States. The leadership of Radiant Church has a vision to reach 10,000 people in Tampa Bay by the 10-year anniversary of Radiant Church. As a church

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20. Nadra Kareem Nittle “Spiritual Growth by Design: Radiant Church,” accessed July 11, 2019, <https://outreachmagazine.com/church/radiant-church>.

21. “Outreach 100: Fastest-Growing Churches in America,” accessed August 30, 2019, <https://outreach100.com/fastest-growing-churches-in-america>.



planter, my desire is to evaluate not only what has made Radiant Church effective in reaching people in a large U.S. city, but also to examine and assess other thriving, and rapidly growing church-plants in growing metropolitan areas of the United States. The desire is to find trends that are consistently working across America, which can hopefully help future church planters.

After experiencing the rapid growth of Radiant Church, I was asked to serve in helping other church planters reach unchurched people in their cities. In 2015 I started serving on the Lead Team of the Church Multiplication Network (CMN), the church planting arm of the Assemblies of God denomination, and as a church planting coach with the Association of Related Churches (ARC). Both organizations have a vision to continue planting thriving churches in cities across North America.

According to statistics compiled by the Pinetops Foundation from 2018, “four thousand new Protestant churches are planted each year. However, 3,700 churches also close each year. The net number of new churches is therefore very small, with only 300 additional churches added in the U.S. per year.”<sup>22</sup> This is an alarming statistic and should motivate us to plant more churches. My passion in helping CMN and ARC is to plant healthy and thriving churches in the cities of the United States that will flourish as the population continues to grow in these metropolitan areas.

### *Contextual Scope and Limitations*

It would be impossible to evaluate every growing church plant in large cities across the U.S. There are simply too many denominations, ministries and churches to consider. However, the focus of this doctoral project will be to evaluate growing church plants in five of the ten fastest

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22 Joshua Crossman, “The Great Opportunity,” *Pinetops Foundation*, 2018, 22.

growing metropolitan areas in the United States. Of the top ten growing metropolitan areas in the United States, I plan to identify church plants in the following five cities:

<b>Metropolitan Area</b>	<b>Annual Population Growth</b>
Dallas-Fort Worth- Arlington, TX	+131,767
Houston-The Woodlands-Sugar Land, TX	+91,689
Greater Orlando, FL Area	+60,045
Seattle-Tacoma- Bellevue, WA	+54,894
Riverside-San Bernadino-Ontario, CA	+51,934
Tampa- St. Petersburg-Clearwater, FL	+51,438 <sup>23</sup>

There are growing church plants in each of these cities. However, my goal is to research church plants launched around the same time as Radiant Church, that is, in 2013. The benefit of this research is twofold: first, for Radiant Church to strengthen its strategy for reaching people in the greater Tampa Bay area; second to assist future church planters in metropolitan areas of the United States by providing best practice information about church planting. While the best practices that will be presented may not work in every city, the goal is to find the values and/or strategies that could help future church planters.

I believe the research for this doctoral project is important because it will potentially be a tool to help plant churches that will grow within urban centers of North America. Ed Stetzer,

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23. US Census Bureau, "Counties in South and West Lead Nation in Population Growth," The United States Census Bureau, accessed March 2, 2020, <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2019/estimates-county-metro.html>.

leading expert on church planting, revitalization and innovation, as well as theology and mission, points to the strategy of the apostles, who planted churches in urban settings as the reason “the early church exploded across the Roman Empire during the decades following the resurrection of Christ.”<sup>24</sup> Based on the rapid urbanization of the world’s population, it is safe to assume that a continuation of that New Testament/Early Church strategy is more critical today than ever before.

Limitations to this project are numerous. There are multiple church planting strategies, cultures, and teachings, but not all focus on church growth. Arguably there are healthy micro-churches, house churches, coffee shop churches, and other styles of churches that focus on different evangelism strategies. While I appreciate the roles they play in reaching people for Christ, this project will focus on the *large launch model* of church planting.

Pastor Rick Warren, who implemented a large launch strategy with momentum that helped him reach 205 people at the grand opening of Saddleback Church on Easter Sunday, April 6, 1980, popularized the large launch model for church planting.<sup>25</sup> He wrote, “You grow a church from the outside in, not the inside out. This is opposite the advice given by most books on church planting.”<sup>26</sup> This strategy consist of a six to twelve-month preparation time that eventually leads to a large public grand opening. This strategy helps a church start strong by creating the critical mass and momentum necessary to grow at a rate necessary to keep up with the population. Ed Stetzer argues, “Biblically speaking, many practitioners of this model would point to Acts 2 and

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24. Ed Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2006), 52.

25. Richard Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth without Compromising Your Message & Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub, 1995), 44.

26. *Ibid.*, 139.

argue that the church of Jerusalem was a *large launch church planting* model. They had a launch of over 3,000 people and kept growing.”<sup>27</sup>

The *large launch* model appealed to us because of the strong emphasis on reaching unchurched people and presenting a clear gospel/salvation message in every Sunday gathering. The *large launch* model also creates sustainability and positions the church for financial independence. Sunday services are created to be life giving, which means they are enjoyable and uplifting, even for nonbelievers in attendance. This model encourages church members to be missional by inviting friends who are far from God. The churches presented in this research are not perfect models, as many churches grow for a variety of reasons, and many large launch strategies have not worked in different settings.

When evaluating church growth, it is important to caution pastors about the destructive infatuation with numbers and counting followers, which has led to an unhealthy level of competition and comparison between church planters. The tendency would be to over-correct by shifting the focus off of external growth and towards internal discipleship. A healthy church should aim to grow deep through discipleship, while still having a desire to grow wide through evangelism. Andy Stanley, pastor of Northpoint Church in Atlanta, reiterates this truth by saying, “It’s a shame that so many churches are married to a designed-by-Christians-for-Christians-only culture. A culture in which they talk about the Great Commission, sing songs about the Great Commission, but refuse to reorganize their churches around the Great Commission.”<sup>28</sup> The large

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27. Ed Stetzer Bio, “Finding the Right Church Planting Model: Launch Big Model (Part 3),” *The Exchange / A Blog by Ed Stetzer*, accessed November 11, 2019, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2015/august/finding-right-church-planting-model-launch-big-model-part-3.html>.

28. Andy Stanley, *Deep & Wide: Creating Churches Unchurched People Love to Attend* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 96.

launch model is not just about numbers, but it is about finding ways to fulfill the Great Commission by reaching as many people as possible.

### *Goals and Objectives*

The purpose of this project will be to evaluate successful church plants with a goal of identifying best practices that can be adopted by church plants in other cities in the United States. The first step will be an evaluation of past and current literature on the subject of church planting. I will be exploring the theological foundation of church planting, and explain God's desire for the growth and expansion of His kingdom. I will start by evaluating the first century church in order to see how they effectively changed the world through church planting. In the remainder of this section, I will review current literature that has been written about church planting and church growth.

The second step will involve a targeted focus on the fastest growing metropolitan communities in America. Since the United States is comprised of hundreds of large cities, I believe the best focus is to narrow the research to five among the ten metropolitan cities that have grown in the past year (as listed above).

Step three will involve identifying ARC or CMN church plants that have been established since 2013 and have grown to at least 1,000 people in weekly attendance in these five metropolitan areas. Rapid growth of this magnitude is uncommon; researching these churches will give me the ability to narrow the research focus to discover the best practices being used by these church plants.

Step four will report on interviews conducted with the founding pastors of each church plant to discover what they believe are the strategies that have been implemented, which resulted

in incredible growth in a rapidly growing community. The interviews will take place by phone, and the following questions will guide the discussion:

1. Describe the growth of your church plant since launch.
2. To what do you attribute this rapid growth?
3. How does your church plant differ from other churches in your metropolitan area?  
What are you doing differently?
4. Has your church growth remained at a constant, or have you noticed an ebb and flow to what has happened? What factors have influenced this?
5. Describe your personal leadership best practices that have influenced the church growth.
6. What is at the foundation of your community practices that have influenced the church growth?
7. What would you change if doing this again? What advice do you have for future church planters in growing metropolitan areas?

As well as answering these questions, I will gather personal information on each of the pastors, describing their training, experience, background, family, personal Christian journey, denominational affiliation, and any other factors that contributed to their rapid church growth. Lastly, once the interviews are completed, I will evaluate the responses provided by these pastors in light of what I have experienced at Radiant Church. It is important in this step to identify common characteristics that are working to reach people in growing metropolitan areas.

### *Research Methodology*

Church planting is a broad subject with multiple, different, and effective strategies. To narrow down the research, I have decided to focus on best practices that produce growth. The research starts with God's desire for growth and expansion throughout the scriptures. The research will continue by looking at current writings from church planters and church planting experts that have helped shape both Radiant Church and other rapidly growing church plants.

Once the research is done from the literature review, I will identify and research five rapidly growing church plants, as well as Radiant Church. The church plants identified will not necessarily be the fastest growing churches in their cities. Some of the more recent rapidly growing urban churches have been planted by globally recognized church brands, such as Hillsong, or planted by "celebrity pastors" who have tens of thousands of social media followers. While these are seemingly successful, I am looking to identify variables that can be reproduced outside the global brands and popular pastors by an average church planter in a growing metropolitan area.

Because every church plant is unique, I will interview each church planter, and with their permission, reveal their identity and church in this project. The interviews will be done by phone and will be recorded with the permission of the interviewee. The data will be compiled and compared with approaches and strategies for church planting as found in the New Testament. I will look for similarities between what is happening in the 21st century with what the apostles did in the 1st century church.

My experience in ARC and CMN will give me a better perspective on what to look for in these rapidly growing churches that, in turn, will help the upcoming church planters and possibly help with current church plants within metropolitan areas. After evaluation of church plants

across the United States, I will overlay my findings on the practices that have produced consistent growth at Radiant Church for the first six years since launching in 2013. A clear evaluation of all systems and growth initiatives will be part of the research for this doctoral project.

### *Conclusion*

As the world becomes urbanized, the church must learn to effectively plant and grow churches within metropolitan areas. The past six years of church planting in Tampa Bay have positioned me with passion and experience to research what is effectively working across the United States to reach people far from Christ. The information gathered in this doctoral project could be used to train and equip the next generation of effective church planters in America.

In the coming years, numerous church planters will make the bold, faith-filled decision to follow God's leading to a community in order to build his church. Church planting is hard work. The training and equipping of these church planters are of vital importance for their success. When comparing fast-growing and struggling church plants, Ed Stetzer said, "Fast-growing plants and planters were engaged in substantially more training, with statistical significance at every level."<sup>29</sup> The greater the training, the better the church plant.

To best equip these future church planters, I will develop a model based on the common traits discovered within the five church plants. A manual of this sort would have been invaluable to me when I planted Radiant Church. The qualitative research collected will serve as a way to articulate the best practices being used to reach people.

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29. Ed Stetzer and Warren Bird, *Viral Churches: Helping Church Planters Become Movement Makers*, 1st ed. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 145.



Church missiologist, C. Peter Wagner stated, “The single most effective evangelistic methodology under heaven is planting new churches.” As church attendance continues to decline in America, church planting is the hope of the future of Christianity in our nation. Tim Keller, author, church planter, and Senior Pastor of the 5000 member Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City, explains the importance of church planting when he said, “The vigorous, continual planting of new congregations is the single most crucial strategy for (1) the numerical growth of the body of Christ in a city and (2) the continual corporate renewal and revival of existing churches in a city.”<sup>30</sup> When new churches are planted, cities are transformed. The data collected in this doctoral project could play a crucial role in equipping church planters to fulfill their dream to build God’s church in America’s cities. This is not a new idea. In the next chapter, we will see how God has always had an intention for His kingdom to expand to the very ends of the earth.

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30. Timothy Keller, “Why Plant Churches-Keller.pdf,” 2002, 2009  
[https://download.redeemer.com/pdf/learn/resources/Why\\_Plant\\_Churches-Keller.pdf](https://download.redeemer.com/pdf/learn/resources/Why_Plant_Churches-Keller.pdf). Accessed November 11, 2019.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE PROJECT IN PERSPECTIVE

#### *Expansion from the Beginning*

The growth of God’s kingdom and of his people has been a priority from the very beginning. In the book of Genesis, God gave the command to men and women to do the following things: “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”<sup>31</sup> This passage contains some significant key words: fruitful, increase, fill, subdue, and rule. These words describe the central focus of the current project, as God wants his kingdom to grow. God entrusted Adam and Eve with the assignment to expand his kingdom and manage his planet. This assignment was quite extraordinary!

A few chapters later, after the Great Flood, God gave this same command to Noah: “Be fruitful and increase in number; multiply on the earth and increase upon it.”<sup>32</sup> Bruce Waltke reiterated this point in his Genesis commentary, stating: “Humanity is given a twofold cultural mandate: to fill the earth and to rule the creation as benevolent kings.”<sup>33</sup> Psalm 8:5-6 emphasized the authority and assignment to rule and to increase, declaring: “You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor. You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet.”

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31. Genesis 1:28 NIV – All scriptural references are from *The Holy Bible: New International Version* (London, England: Hodder & Stoughton, 2011).

32. Genesis 9:7

33. Bruce K. Waltke and Cathi J. Fredricks. *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2001), 63.

The word used for “increase” in both of the references passages from Genesis is the Hebrew word, “רָבָה *râbâh*”.<sup>34</sup> Throughout the Old Testament that word has been translated as: increase, multiply, greater, enlarge. When describing the flood, the author used the same Hebrew word to describe the water overtaking the earth.<sup>35</sup> The increase was such that it engulfed the entire planet. This picture of God’s desire for his people on the earth is a beautiful. There is not just a desire to reside on the earth but to rule it.

Genesis goes on to show us the promise of God for Abraham: “When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, ‘I am God almighty. Walk before me and be blameless. I will establish my covenant between me and you, and I will multiply you exceedingly.’”<sup>36</sup> It was through Abraham that God would establish a people on the planet that would establish his kingdom. “The call of God to Abraham is the sneak peek preview for the rest of the Bible. It is a story of God bringing salvation to all tribes and nations through this holy nation, administered first by the Mosaic covenant and then by the Lord Jesus Christ through the new covenant.”<sup>37</sup> Isaac continued in his father Abraham’s footsteps when he was given the promise from God for multiplication and increase in Genesis 26, “I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through

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34. "H7235 – rabah," *Strong's Hebrew Lexicon (KJV). Blue Letter Bible.*  
<https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=H7235&t=KJV>. Accessed Nov. 12, 2019.

35. Genesis 7:17-18

36. Genesis 17:1-2

37. Bruce K. Waltke, Cathi J. Fredricks, and Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, UNITED STATES: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2001), 57, accessed November 12, 2019,  
<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/seu/detail.action?docID=5397854>.

your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed.”<sup>38</sup> The impact promised to Isaac was to reach all nations, and not just his local community.

When Joseph found favor in Egypt, God’s people began to reside in this country, and the scriptures tell us, “Jacob said to Joseph, ‘God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and there he blessed me and said to me, ‘I am going to make you fruitful and increase your numbers. I will make you a community of peoples, and I will give this land as an everlasting possession to your descendants after you’.”<sup>39</sup> The proliferation of God’s people became a threat to the leader of Egypt, and the Israelites were put into slavery. The persecution of the Israelites only caused them to multiply even more. Exodus 1:12 states: “But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread; so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites. The theme of multiplication in the midst of persecution is found throughout the scriptures. Old Testament scholar Victor Hamilton showed the parallel with the first century Church, writing, “Pharaoh’s harsh measures directed at the Israelites have the opposite effect from what he was hoping. They continued to thrive and multiply, their severe conditions notwithstanding.

God raised up a deliverer, Moses, who was given a promise from God at the burning bush. God said, “I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am the Lord.”<sup>40</sup> In the subsequent chapters, the Lord delivered the Israelites from Egypt, and they started the journey to the land God has promised them.

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38. Genesis 26:4

39. Genesis 48:3-4

40. Exodus 6:8

The Promised Land was not given to the Israelites automatically. Throughout the story, there were contingencies and battles necessary to subdue the land that was promised. When Moses received the commandments from God on the mountain, God spoke to him and said, “I will look on you with favor and make you fruitful and increase your numbers, and I will keep my covenant with you.”<sup>41</sup> The expansion of God’s people was a promise, but it was also given with an expectation of obedience to God’s commands. The promise also came with many conflicts. When Joshua succeeded Moses and became the leader of Israel, God promised him growth and expansion, declaring: “I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses.”<sup>42</sup>

Jabez, a highly honored man in the Old Testament, used the Hebrew word, “רָבָה *râbâh*” in 1 Chronicles when he asked the Lord to “enlarge my territory.”<sup>43</sup> This statement perhaps sounds selfish, but not when considering it is God’s desire for his people. Ralph Klein wrote, “he (Jabez) wanted the expansion of his territory, a particularly appropriate petition within a genealogy so focused on geography and also appropriate for the relatively confined space of postexilic Yehud.”<sup>44</sup> It would seem that God is waiting for his people to ask him to expand and multiply their territory for the sake of God’s kingdom.

The expansion of God’s kingdom throughout the Old Testament continued with the leadership of the Judges and then transitioned to the leadership of Israel’s kings. God gave the following promise to David, Israel’s most popular king: “Now I will make your name great, like

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41. Leviticus 26:9

42. Joshua 1:3

43. 1 Chronicles 4:10

44. Ralph W. Klein and Thomas Krüger, *1 Chronicles: A Commentary, Hermeneia - A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006), 132.

the names of the greatest men on earth. And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people will not oppress them anymore, as they did at the beginning.”<sup>45</sup> God continued, declaring to David: “I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom.”<sup>46</sup> There is a continual promise of establishing a lasting dynasty through God’s people on the earth. It is carried down from David to his son Solomon.

Solomon expanded God’s kingdom by constructing the Temple. The scriptures tell that, “Solomon gave orders to build a temple for the Name of the LORD and a royal palace for himself. He conscripted 70,000 men as carriers and 80,000 as stonecutters in the hills and 3,600 as foremen over them.”<sup>47</sup> Bible scholar David Dockery wrote, “The sanctuaries God instructed Israel to build reiterated God’s intention to be Immanuel, God in their midst.”<sup>48</sup> The constructing of the Temple gives a precedent to establish buildings for God’s presence to dwell and work among people.

Israel, God’s people, did not steward their position and assignment well. By the end of the Old Testament, Israel was in rebellion towards God. God spoke through the prophet Hosea saying, “Israel was a spreading vine; he brought forth fruit for himself. As his fruit increased, he built more altars; as his land prospered, he adorned his sacred stones. Their heart is deceitful, and now they must bear their guilt. The Lord will demolish their altars and destroy their sacred stones.”<sup>49</sup> Hosea looked back on Israel’s prime, the prosperous days under the leadership of

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45. 2 Samuel 7:9-10

46. 2 Samuel 7:12

47. 2 Chronicles 2:1-2

48. David S. Dockery, *Holman Bible Handbook* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 1992), 249.

49. Hosea 10:1-2

David and Solomon, and showed how the Lord had forsaken this country. The prophet had harsh words for Israel, despite their desire to build a temple and nation for the Lord. James Limburg explained the problem by saying,

The issue is not architecture, but rather the attitude of those assembled in these multiplying places of worship. These impressive projects are rejected because the hearts of those engineering them beat more in rhythm with Baal than with the Lord. To use Hosea's imagery, the worship carried on in these places is similar to a wife making love to her husband, but all the while thinking of another lover to whom she owes her real loyalty.<sup>50</sup>

We see from the very beginning God's desire was to expand his kingdom. The Hebrew word, רָבָה *râbâh*, meaning to multiply and expand,<sup>51</sup> is found 226 times throughout the Old Testament. The impact of God's presence and his people are to be felt throughout the globe. His kingdom was to never be isolated to a location, but to spread throughout the world. Although the Old Testament provided the story of a people who would forsake God and reject his will, we will see through the New Testament that Jesus established a church that would be unstoppable.

### *Jesus Establishes the Church*

Jesus' ministry was about expanding the work of God throughout the globe. When evaluating the life of Christ, theologian Jurgen Moltmann wrote, "Jesus' own concern was, and is, God's kingdom."<sup>52</sup> Matthew wrote, "Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the

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50. James Limburg, *Hosea--Micah, Interpretation - A Bible commentary for teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta. GA: John Knox Press, 1988), 37.

51. "rabah - Strong's number H7235 - Hebrew Lexicon | Bible Tools - Messie2vie," 2013, ==> this date is at the bottom of the linked page <https://www.messie2vie.fr/bible/strongs/strong-hebrew-H7235-rabah.html>. Accessed January 30, 2020.

52. Jürgen Moltmann, *Jesus Christ for Today's World* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994), 7.

people.”<sup>53</sup> This “good news of the kingdom” was the central theme of Jesus’ teachings, parables, and miracles. Moltmann wrote, “Jesus promised God’s kingdom to the poor, and bestowed God’s power on the sick; and in the same way he brought God’s justice to people who knew no justice and to the unjust—to the people the Bible calls ‘sinners and tax collectors’. He demonstrated this publicly through his companionship with them.”<sup>54</sup> It was a message for everyone. Jesus came to reveal the kingdom in dynamic clarity for all of humanity to see. Jesus commands his disciples to “seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”<sup>55</sup> The kingdom of God was a clear priority to Jesus and his disciples.

In order to advance his church on earth, Jesus enlisted the help of twelve men called “the twelve disciples.” These men were called out of their jobs as fishermen, tax collectors, and other normal careers of that day. “The Twelve were called to leave all and follow Jesus around—including leaving family, profession, and property—as a training time for their future role in the church.”<sup>56</sup> Jesus performed on-the-job training with these disciples during the three years of his earthly ministry.

The disciples prove that God’s plan for the advancement of his church happens through imperfect people. When Jesus saw the vast crowds, he told his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his

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53. Matthew 4:23

54. Moltmann, *Jesus Christ for Today’s World*, 15.

55. Matthew 6:33

56. *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Walter A. Elwell, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 176.



harvest field.”<sup>57</sup> The only perfect worker of the harvest was Jesus; his disciples became the examples of the people that God sends to advance his church.

When it came to the establishment of the church, Jesus asked his disciples a simple question noted in Matthew 16: “Who do people say the Son of Man is?”<sup>58</sup> The disciples gave a variety of answers, but it was Peter who made the statement: “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”<sup>59</sup> Jesus acknowledged the importance of what Peter declared and responded with, “on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.”<sup>60</sup> Jesus called the church, “my church”. It is a church that is built on Jesus being the Messiah, and it is a church that is unstoppable. This church would be the vehicle to gather, equip and send the harvest workers. The establishment of the church brought provided additional validity to Jesus’ ministry. Theologians Albright and Mann stated, “A Messiah without a Messianic Community would have been unthinkable to any Jew.”<sup>61</sup> It would be through these disciples that Jesus would establish a church, a messianic community that would eventually transform the entire globe.

On multiple occasions Jesus sent the disciples out to proclaim the message throughout the known world. After describing the twelve disciples, Matthew recounted, “These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, proclaim this message: ‘The

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57. Matthew 9:37-38

58. Matthew 16:13

59. Matthew 16:16

60. Matthew 16:18

61. W.F. Albright and C.S. Mann, *Matthew*. The Anchor Bible 26 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982), 195.

kingdom of heaven has come near.”<sup>62</sup> It was a message first for the Israelites and eventually for the whole world. The way to make it spread was to recruit some people in order to tell all.

The ultimate commissioning would happen at the end of Jesus’ earthly ministry. He gathered his disciples together and said, “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”<sup>63</sup> Jesus’ final assignment for the advancement of his church is called the Great Commission. “Through this commission Jesus focuses his followers on the ongoing importance of discipleship through the ages, and declares the responsibility of disciples toward the world: they are to make disciples of all the nations (Matt. 28:16–20).”<sup>64</sup> The assignment was not just in the disciples’ immediate area. Jesus challenged the disciples to “Be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”<sup>65</sup>

The disciples were assigned to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. Wilson said, “To stay in Jerusalem and build a bigger and bigger church would have been an addition strategy that replaced multiplication. Jesus intends to have a local addition strategy and a global multiplication reach.”<sup>66</sup> It was this strategy that would bring about the first church planting movement in history, as seen throughout the book of Acts.

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62. Matthew 10:5-7

63. Matthew 28:19-20

64. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 177.

65. Acts 1:8

66. Todd, Wilson, *Multipliers: Leading Beyond Addition* (Atlanta, GA: Exponential Publisher, 2017), 41.

*The Birth of the Church at Pentecost*

When researching church planting, the best place to start is the book of Acts. In *Planting Missional Churches*, Ed Stetzer referred to the book of Acts as “the most important book ever written on the subject.”<sup>67</sup> Acts provides examples from the New Testament era where the believers, although harassed and persecuted, continue to multiply.<sup>68</sup> Acts begins where the book of Luke ended. Arthur Patzia described the Book of Acts as “a history (albeit condensed) of the early church. Acts provides an invaluable bridge between the Gospels and the letters of Paul.”<sup>69</sup> The disciples were commanded to “not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about.”<sup>70</sup> Jesus set the precedent in Acts 1 for believers to “receive power” before they attempted to fulfill the mission of expanding God’s kingdom “to the ends of the earth.”<sup>71</sup> John Stott wrote that, “in order to fulfill the mission of expanding the kingdom, believers must be empowered by the Holy Spirit. So they must wait, but not till God has fulfilled his promise and they have been ‘clothed with power from on high’, can they fulfill their commission.”<sup>72</sup>

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67. Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches*, 37.

68. Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 10.

69. Arthur G. Patzia, *The Emergence of the Church: Context, Growth, Leadership & Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), Kindle Location 823-824.

70. Acts 1:4

71. Acts 1:8

72. John R.W. Stott, *The Spirit, the Church, and the World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 36.

After Jesus ascended to heaven, the scriptures tell us that 120 believers gathered in an upper room in Jerusalem. Between the ascension of Christ and the arrival of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, the followers of Jesus were waiting for ten days. These ten days must have been full of confusion and disappointment. Stott said: “The apostles’ hope, however, had evidently been rekindled by the resurrection. They were still dreaming of political dominion, of the re-establishment of the monarchy, of Israel’s liberation from the colonial yoke of Rome.”<sup>73</sup> But what happened next would not be the establishment of a new political kingdom, but the establishment of the church that would eventually reach to the far ends of the earth.

Acts 2 describes the events that took place on the Day of Pentecost, which was a celebration of the completion of the annual harvest. The Greek word *pentēkostos* means fifty.<sup>74</sup> It was a celebration of the harvest season, and some Jews even celebrated it as the giving of the law on Mount Sinai, “because this was reckoned as having happened fifty days after the Exodus.”<sup>75</sup> The disciples gathered and the scriptures say, “they were all together in one place.”<sup>76</sup>

The scriptures go on to tell that, “suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.”<sup>77</sup> This phenomenon was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the disciples, and writers noted, “All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit.”<sup>78</sup>

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73. Ibid., 41–42.

74. Ibid., 62.

75. Ibid.

76. Acts 2:1

77. Acts 2:2

78. Acts 2:4

What happened to those believers would transform the entire globe. William Willimon wrote: “At Pentecost the power of God, made manifest at the resurrection and ascension of Christ, is bestowed upon the people of God.”<sup>79</sup> The disciples experienced the same power that Jesus experienced at his baptism. This power is necessary for any believer wanting to expand the kingdom of God. Stott wrote, “Just as the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus when John baptized him, so that he entered his public ministry ‘full of the Holy Spirit,’ ‘led by the Spirit,’ ‘in the power of the Spirit’ and ‘anointed’ by the Spirit (Lk. 3:21–22; 4:1, 14, 18), so now the same Spirit came upon the disciples of Jesus to equip them for their mission in the world.”<sup>80</sup>

God would not leave his church powerless. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost provided God’s people with the tools they needed to “be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”<sup>81</sup> Stott wrote: “Pentecost brought to the apostles the equipment they needed for their special role. Christ had appointed them to be his primary and authoritative witnesses, and had promised them the reminding and teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit (John 14–16). Pentecost was the fulfillment of that promise.”<sup>82</sup>

The church was started on the Day of Pentecost. What happened on the Day of Pentecost was God’s way of initiating the building of his church. Willimon wrote: “The Spirit is the power which enables the church to ‘go public’ with its good news, to attract a crowd and . . . to have

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79. William H. Willimon, *Acts, Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1988), 28.

80. John R. W. Stott, *The Spirit, the Church, and the World* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 60.

81. Acts 1:8

82. John R. W. Stott, *The Spirit, the Church, and the World* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 60.

something to say worth hearing.”<sup>83</sup> Once the Holy Spirit was given to the disciples, the first act was to share the good news to the people in Jerusalem. Peter was the first: “Peter stood up with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd.”<sup>84</sup>

Peter explained to the crowd that what they were seeing was the fulfillment of what the prophet Joel wrote: “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my spirit on all people.”<sup>85</sup> As soon as Peter was done quoting Joel, he transitioned his focus to Jesus. Scott wrote: “The best way to understand Pentecost, however, is not through the Old Testament prediction, but through the New Testament fulfillment, not through Joel but through Jesus.”<sup>86</sup> Jesus was the focus of Peter’s sermon. Peter went into incredible detail of Jesus’ life and ministry, his death, his resurrection, his ascension into heaven, his offer for salvation, and finally his church. Peter ended this sermon with a public call for salvation and a call to join the church.

The fruit of Peter’s message was immediate: “those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.”<sup>87</sup> The church grew from 120 to over 3,000 in a single day. These new followers were not merely people inspired by the message, but baptized believers who were called to make a public stance for their faith in Christ. According to Stott, “Peter was not asking for private and individual conversions only, but

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83. William H. Willimon, *Acts*, Interpretation, a Bible commentary for teaching and preaching (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 33.

84. Acts 2:14

85. Acts 2:1

86. John R. W. Stott, *The Spirit, the Church, and the World* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 75.

87. Acts 2:41

for a public identification with other believers. Commitment to the Messiah implied commitment to the Messianic community, that is, the church.”<sup>88</sup>

What followed was the commencement of the discipleship process modeled by Jesus with the twelve, as “they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship and to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”<sup>89</sup> The church was established, and it was a place of fellowship and unity. “Some have remarked that the real miracle of Pentecost is to be found here—that from so diverse assemblage of people “from every nation under heaven” (2:5) a unified body of believers is formed.”<sup>90</sup> The Greek word used to describe what the church does in Acts 2 is *κοινωνία* (*koinōnia*). *Koinōnia* is defined as “A relation between individuals which involves a common interest and a mutual, active participation in that interest and in each other.”<sup>91</sup> The unity among the new believers was unparalleled as recorded, “All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts.”<sup>92</sup>

The church started as a unified body of believers. The result of their unity was that “the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”<sup>93</sup> Stott made an important point when he said, “Those first Jerusalem Christians were not so preoccupied with learning, sharing

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88. John R. W. Stott, *The Spirit, the Church, and the World* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 78-79.

89. Acts 2:42

90. William H. Willimon, *Acts, Interpretation, a Bible commentary for teaching and preaching* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 40.

91. Marvin Richardson Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament: The Writings of John, the Gospel, the Epistles, the Apocalypse*, vol. 1 (New York, NY: Sagwan Press, 2015), 456.

92. Acts 2:44-46

93. Acts 2:47

and worshipping, that they forgot about witnessing. For the Holy Spirit is a missionary Spirit who created a missionary church.”<sup>94</sup> The church empowered by the Spirit results in salvations, and as evidenced in Acts, in church growth. In evaluating the growth of the church from Pentecost, Stott wrote, “We need to recover this expectation of steady and uninterrupted church growth.”<sup>95</sup>

For hundreds of years, Jewish people gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the harvest; now Pentecost would take on a new meaning. The Holy Spirit was given to God’s church. Power was available to accomplish the mission of taking the Gospel message across the globe. The focus of Pentecost would no longer be a previous harvest but a potential harvest of salvations with God’s power. Stott wrote, “There is no need for us to wait, as the hundred and twenty had to wait, for the Spirit to come. For the Holy Spirit did come on the Day of Pentecost and has never left his church.”<sup>96</sup>

#### *The Expansion of the Church in the years following Pentecost*

Ed Stetzer described the church in the book of Acts as, “born in prayer, immersed in the Spirit, and bathed in the miraculous.”<sup>97</sup> The combination of these three elements created a church that rapidly grew to influence the Roman Empire. In Acts 3, Peter and John encountered a man who had been lame from birth. Peter spoke to the man saying, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.”<sup>98</sup> The man was healed and

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94. Stott, *The Spirit, the Church, and the World*, 86.

95. *Ibid.*, 87.

96. *Ibid.*

97. Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches*, 47.

98. Acts 3:6



resulting in a large crowd listening to Peter and John. Scriptures gave us the result of Peter and John’s sermon: “The number of men who believed grew to about five thousand.”<sup>99</sup> There is a connection between miraculous signs and wonders and the rapid growth of the church. “Signs and wonders occurred fourteen times in the book of Acts in conjunction with preaching, resulting in church growth. Further, on twenty occasions church growth was a direct result of signs and wonders performed by the disciples.”<sup>100</sup>

The church was rapidly growing through the first few years after Pentecost despite the heavy persecution of believers. In Acts 5, the church had grown to such a substantial size that it became a threat to the religious community. In Acts 6, “the disciples were increasing”<sup>101</sup> and a new challenge for increased leadership in the burgeoning church was presented. The twelve got together and made a call to appoint seven additional leaders, “full of the Spirit and wisdom.”<sup>102</sup> The result of the multiplied leadership was “The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly.”<sup>103</sup> Stott wrote: “the two verbs ‘spread’ and ‘increased’ are in the imperfect tense, indicating that both the spread of the word and the growth of the church were continuous.”<sup>104</sup> Growth was the norm in the first century church.

One of the reactions to this rapid church expansion was persecution resulting in many of the apostles being arrested.<sup>105</sup> Despite attempts to silence them, the apostles used their testimony

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99. Acts 4:4

100. Stott, *The Spirit, the Church, and the World*, 101–102.

101. Acts 6:1

102. Acts 6:3

103. Acts 6:7

104. Stott, *The Spirit, the Church, and the World*, 123.

105. Acts 5:18

in front of the Sanhedrin to present the message of Christ. “They called the apostles in and had them flogged. They ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.”<sup>106</sup> The leaders of the church could not remain silent and the message spread. Scriptures declares: “The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.”<sup>107</sup>

The church would enter a period of enduring persecution for centuries to come. Stott writes: “The devil has never given up the attempt to destroy the church by force. Under Nero (AD 54–68) Christians were imprisoned and executed, including probably Paul and Peter.”<sup>108</sup> Despite persecution, the church continued to grow and was no longer just meeting in public synagogues but in houses throughout Jerusalem.

After Stephen’s stoning, the scriptures tell us, “great persecution broke out in Jerusalem and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.”<sup>109</sup> It was the desire of the religious leaders to “destroy the church” and Saul, a persecutor of the church, “dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.”<sup>110</sup> The result of the intense persecution was that the church dispersed throughout the region. The scriptures note, “Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.”<sup>111</sup> Willimon remarks about Acts 8:4: “It is ironic that the

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106. Acts 5:40

107. Acts 5:41-42

108. Stott, *The Spirit, the Church, and the World*, 119.

109. Acts 8:1

110. Acts 8:3

111. Acts 8:4

violent pogrom which was supposed to put the troublesome Christians in their place has only served to put them out in Samaria.”<sup>112</sup> Peter was critical about the expansion of the gospel, not just outside of Jerusalem, but also outside of the Jewish world. In Acts 10, Peter has a realization, “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.”<sup>113</sup> Arthur Patzia writes, “In his sermon to the Gentiles in Caesarea-sometimes referred to as ‘the Gentile Pentecost’- Peter affirmed the universality of the gospel: all nations can receive the forgiveness of sins (Acts 10:34-43).”<sup>114</sup>

The church was driven out of Jerusalem and expansion began when these persecuted followers of Christ established the first major group of believers outside of Jerusalem in Antioch. Arthur Patzia mentions four major reasons why the start in Antioch was significant to the expansion of the local church:

First, it describes the stage of expansion that Luke envisioned in Acts 1:8: the church moving beyond Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria. Second, it depicts how the church shifted from a rather rural movement in the smaller communities of the provinces to the large cosmopolitan center of Antioch, which at this time was the third largest city in the Greco-Roman world (after Rome and Alexandria). Third, it demonstrates how God (the Spirit) gradually broke down religious, social and ethnic barriers, enabling Christianity to move out of its Jewish context and embrace people on the fringes of Judaism, including Gentiles. Fourth, it affirms that by the time Christianity became established in Antioch, believers had their own identity as "Christians" (Acts 11:26).<sup>115</sup>

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112. Willimon, *Acts*, 67.

113. Acts 10:34-35

114. Arthur G. Patzia, *The Emergence of the Church: Context, Growth, Leadership & Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 995.

115. *Ibid.*, Kindle Locations 925-929.

Stetzer wrote, “Under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, the Antioch church became the first great missionary-sending church (Acts 13:3).”<sup>116</sup> It was the church at Antioch that would send the Apostle Paul on his first missionary journey. Paul became one of the greatest church planters and church builders in the first century.

### *The Apostle Paul’s Conversion*

The author of Acts pauses the focus on the growth of the church, and in Acts 9 the story of the conversion of Saul becomes the central focus. Patzia attest that Saul/Paul’s conversion happened approximately 3 years after the initial outpouring of the Holy Spirit.<sup>117</sup> Paul’s conversion and ministry are crucial to the formation and the growth of the church across the known world.

Paul grew up in an educated and deeply religious home. Paul described his upbringing: “though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.”<sup>118</sup> Paul was an intelligent and religious man. Oswald Sanders wrote, “All the formative years were calculated to prepare him to be an eminent Pharisee and rabbi, like his greatest mentor, Gamaliel.”<sup>119</sup> Paul himself declared: “Under Gamaliel I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers.”<sup>120</sup>

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116. Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches*, 50.

117. Patzia, *The Emergence of the Church*, Kindle Locations 907-908.

118. Philippians 3:4-6

119. J. Oswald Sanders, *Paul the Leader* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1984), 15.

120. Acts 22:3

Paul's youthful zeal for adherence to Jewish law drove him to persecute the new religious sect of Jesus' followers, called "The Way."<sup>121</sup> He described his role in the killing of one of the very first Christian martyrs, Stephen, saying: "And when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him."<sup>122</sup> In Acts 8 Saul was on a full-scale mission to "destroy the church."<sup>123</sup> The author of Acts uses the Greek verb *lumaínomai* to describe the actions of Paul. Stott says, "'*lumaínomai*' expresses 'a brutal and sadistic cruelty'."<sup>124</sup> Saul was a serious threat to the believers of that day.

Saul's life was transformed on the road to Damascus, where he was traveling "to convince the synagogues there to turn over their Christians to him."<sup>125</sup> While on this journey, Saul had an encounter with Jesus that would forever change his life. Jesus himself appeared to Paul and convinced him that He was the Messiah. Sanders says, "The crucial importance of Paul's conversion in the history of the church is attested to by the fact that the Holy Spirit caused three full-length, complementary accounts of that event to be preserved in the Scriptures."<sup>126</sup> One cannot understand the importance of Paul's ministry without seeing the crucial importance of his conversion.

Soon after his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, Ananias came to visit Paul. "When Paul resided in Damascus, he met with a group of disciples (Acts 9:1 9b) and

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121. Acts 22:4

122. Acts 22:20

123. Acts 8:3

124. Stott, *The Spirit, the Church, and the World*, 145.

125. R.R. Losch. *All the People in the Bible: An A-Z Guide to the Saints, Scoundrels, and Other Characters in Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 335.

126. Sanders, op. cit., 21.

personally began his own ministry of proclamation (*kērussō*) to Jews and Greek sympathizers (Acts 9:20-22).<sup>127</sup> It was during Paul’s three years in Damascus with Ananias that Paul would begin to understand his ministry calling. Ananias said to Paul: “The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. You will be his witness to all people of what you have seen and heard.”<sup>128</sup> It was during a time of prayer that Paul heard this calling directly from God when the Lord said, “Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.”<sup>129</sup> Paul devoted his life to taking the Gospel message to the Gentiles around the known world through planting and building local churches. According to Ascough and Cotton, “Most of his letters deal with the challenges of building cohesive and viable communities.”<sup>130</sup>

Paul’s first major assignment came during his ministry in the city of Antioch. The book of Acts accounts, “Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.”<sup>131</sup> Antioch, the capital city of Syria, was a significant city in that day.

It was from Antioch that Paul was sent along with Barnabas, by the newly established church on a mission to expand the church. The leadership in Antioch lay their hands on Paul and

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127. Patzia, *The Emergence of the Church*, Kindle Locations 1033-1034.

128. Acts 22:14-15

129. Acts 22:21

130. Richard S. Ascough and Charles A. Cotton, *Passionate Visionary: Leadership Lessons from the Apostle Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006), 17.

131. Acts 11:25-27

Barnabas and scripture says: “the two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus.”<sup>132</sup> It is hard to imagine that the leadership in Antioch knew how important a role Paul would end up playing in the planting and building of many local churches. Ryan Lokkesmoe wrote: “By the early 50s AD, Paul was becoming one of the most well-known voices in the fledgling Christian community,”<sup>133</sup> Paul would spend the rest of his life building the church around the Mediterranean Sea. Willimon tells us, “It is estimated on the basis of the accounts in Acts that Paul traveled over ten thousand miles.”<sup>134</sup> It was on these ministry journeys that Paul was involved in some of the most pivotal years in church history.

### *Paul’s Role in Church Planting*

It is impossible to study church planting and church growth without looking into Paul’s life. Paul focused his time and attention on planting, building, strengthening, and correcting church plants in cities around the Mediterranean. Paul was the ideal church planter. Ascough and Cotton stated: “Almost two thousand years later, the heritage of the communities he founded continues in the faith communities of the Christian tradition.”<sup>135</sup> Stetzer provides nine reasons why Paul was an effective church planter.

1. Personally prepared for his church planting ministry
2. An evangelist
3. An entrepreneurial leader.

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132. Acts 13:4

133. Ryan Lokkesmoe, *Paul and His Team: What the Early Church Can Teach Us about Leadership and Influence* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 2017), 99.

134. Willimon, *Acts*, 123.

135. Ascough and Cotton, *Passionate Visionary*, 10.

4. A team player.
5. A flexible, risk-taking pioneer.
6. Caring for people.
7. Empowering others.
8. Committed to fulfilling God's calling and vision even at the cost of extreme personal sacrifice.
9. Willing to let go of his church plants and move on to plant more.<sup>136</sup>

On his first missionary journey, Paul was instrumental in developing the church in the following major cities: Pergamum, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe and Attalia. It is believed that Paul worked in these churches over a period of a year from A.D. 47-48.<sup>137</sup> After returning to Antioch, Paul was led to go on another missionary journey to the region of Northwest Asia Minor. It is believed that Paul planted the church in the city of Troas, a main seaport for travel from Asia to Macedonia (see Acts 20:6-12; 2 Cor 2:12-13; 2 Tim 4:13).<sup>138</sup> Paul had a very strategic plan of evangelism, which he reveals in his letter to the Roman church: "It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation."<sup>139</sup> His heart for reaching people and building the church would guide him the next eight years as he traveled on two separate missionary journeys across the Mediterranean.

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136. Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches*, 45-46.

137. Patzia, *The Emergence of the Church*, Kindle Locations 1165-1166.

138. *Ibid.*, Kindle Location 1205.

139. Romans 15:20



Paul's strategy for church planting was not random. Over the next few years, Paul focused his attention on influential cities such as Philippi, Thessalonica (the Capital of Macedonia), Berea, Athens, Corinth, and Ephesus. N.T. Wright writes: "Paul tended to concentrate on major population centers, relying on the movement of people and trade in and out of the great cities to help spread the word."<sup>140</sup> Paul chose to focus his attention on cities that would affect the surrounding regions, as Ascough and Cotton explains: "It seems that for Paul, proclaiming the good news in these cities, and establishing Christian communities in many, would ensure that the message would radiate outward into the surrounding towns and villages."<sup>141</sup> In evaluating Paul's strategy, Oswald Sanders said, "He (Paul) bypassed villages and small towns in order to concentrate on the more strategic large cities, since they exercise more influence on the culture and habits of people. Only in this way could consistent growth be ensured."<sup>142</sup> When the cities are reached, the world around them is impacted. Alan Ehler, Dean of the Barnett College of Ministry and Theology at Southeastern University, explained the case for urban ministry in the first century in a lecture entitled, "*Cities in Motion*." Ehler said, "New Testament evangelism focused on cities. The Apostle Paul seemed to intentionally conduct his outreach in the largest and most influential cities in the regions he visited."<sup>143</sup>

Philippi is a great example of Paul's approach. This area was an unreached metropolitan area with no Jewish synagogue.<sup>144</sup> "Philippi is one of the better preserved of Paul's cities, and

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140. N.T. Wright, *Paul: A Biography* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2018), 104.

141. Ascough and Cotton, *Passionate Visionary*, 31.

142. Sanders, *Paul the Leader*, 107.

143. Alan Ehler, "Cities in Motion: Ministry in Light of Demographic Shifts" (presented at the 47th Annual Conference, Cleveland, TN, March 9, 2018), 29.

144. Wright, *Paul*, 178.

one can still see the layout of streets, a fine theater, and the Via Egnatia going by on its way from Rome in the West to Byzantium in the East. It is, in other words, right on one of the major routes for civic and trading purposes.”<sup>145</sup> Acts 16 gives us the insight into the first convert in the city, a lady named Lydia. After Paul finished speaking, the scriptures say: “The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message.”<sup>146</sup> Scholars believe that Lydia was not only the first convert in Philippi but also the first convert in all of Europe.<sup>147</sup>

Paul traveled from the influential city of Philippi to the even more significant city of Thessalonica. Wright describes the city as, “On a main crossroads, and its role as a port at the head of the Thermaic Gulf to the west of the Chalcidice Peninsula guaranteed it prosperity. It was the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia.”<sup>148</sup> Paul’s unique approach to ministry is seen in his letters to the church in Thessalonica, which were written around A.D. 50 or 51.<sup>149</sup> Paul writes, “We worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you.”<sup>150</sup> In today’s culture, Paul would have been considered bi-vocational. He was doing ministry and working a job in order to support himself rather than being reliant on the fledgling church. This is very common in urban settings, as will be examined later in the literature review.

Another great example of Paul’s focus on urban settings was his ministry in Ephesus, from AD 53 to AD 56.<sup>151</sup> It was a large and thriving city during Paul’s day, a true metropolis with

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145. N. T. Wright, *Paul: A Biography*, FIRST EDITION. (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2018), 178.

146. Acts 16:4

147. Patzia, *The Emergence of the Church*, Kindle Location 1220.

148. Willimon, *Acts*, 185.

149. Wright, *Paul*, 185.

150. 2 Thessalonians 3:8

151. Wright, *Paul*, 266.

a population of over 200,000 people.<sup>152</sup> The city served as a central hub for multiple trade routes. Patzia writes: “Ephesus was a port city on the mouth of the Cayster River in western Asia Minor, situated at the crossroads of several important land routes. All this made it the most important center of international trade in the region.”<sup>153</sup> A thriving church in Ephesus would in turn become a hub for Christianity in the entire region.

The city of Ephesus was also known for its ability to impact culture and religion. People traveled from far away to visit Artemis’ temple there, which was one of the Seven Wonders of the World.<sup>154</sup> Wright wrote: “Ephesus was famous as the home of all kinds of magic, the dark and powerful arts that were always popular on the edge of mainstream paganism.”<sup>155</sup> Paul’s impact on the city was so severe that a silversmith who built idols for the temple created an uproar. The silversmith, named Demetrius, declared, “There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited; and the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty.”<sup>156</sup> Scriptures go on to say that the people responded with a riot.<sup>157</sup>

Paul’s desire to build the church in Ephesus starts with him teaching in the synagogue for three months, but he was soon frustrated with the results and “He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. This went on for two years, so that all the

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152. Lokkesmoe, *Paul and His Team*, 167.

153. Patzia, *The Emergence of the Church*, Kindle Locations 1372-1374.

154. Willimon, *Acts*, 152.

155. Wright, *Paul*, 241.

156. Acts 19:27

157. Acts 19:28-29

Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.”<sup>158</sup> Patzia explained this "lecture hall of Tyrannus" as “a private room for lectures owned or used by Tyrannus, and Paul either rented it or had it donated for his ministry.”<sup>159</sup> Paul was a portable church planter in a rented facility in the midst of an urban community. Paul created a model in Ephesus that can be duplicated throughout the world.

Wright describes how substantial the work Paul did in Ephesus was when he wrote, “Ephesus, even more than Corinth or the cities of northern Greece, was turning into a living example of what the gospel could do, not just in a few individuals here and there, but in an entire community.”<sup>160</sup> What occurred in Ephesus impacted the surrounding region. Ephesus became the epicenter of kingdom expansion through church multiplication, impacting countless surrounding cities.

Paul was also a pivotal voice in the development of the highly influential church in Rome, although he did not plant the church there. “During the first century CE, Rome was the capital city of an enormous military power and cultural center of the entire Mediterranean world.”<sup>161</sup> The book of Acts does not provide a history of how the church started in the city of Rome. One theory is that "visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes who were present in Jerusalem on Pentecost (Acts 2:10) were converted and took the gospel back to Rome as early as AD 40.”<sup>162</sup> Paul impacted the church in Rome with his letter written to the Romans from the city

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158. Acts 19:9-10

159. Patzia, *The Emergence of the Church*, Kindle Locations 1423-1424.

160. Wright, *Paul*, 247.

161. Ascough and Cotton, *Passionate Visionary*, 31.

162. Patzia, *The Emergence of the Church*, Kindle Locations 1513-1514.

of Corinth around AD 57.<sup>163</sup> In reference to Paul's letter to the Romans, Losch wrote: "The Christianity we know today is primarily the product of Paul's development of the teachings of Christ."<sup>164</sup> The book of Romans is seen as the most important theological book ever written. Paul strategically wrote this letter knowing how influential the city of Rome was to the entire world. What was written to the Romans was quickly spread through the church in Rome and the surrounding communities.

Paul's journeys during his ministry, lasting over twenty years, took him throughout the Mediterranean into many of the major cities of his day. It is impressive to think that even without the convenience and luxury of modern transportation, Paul traveled over 10,000 miles and planted multiple churches. It can be argued that Paul's greatest legacy was not only the churches he planted, but also the letters he wrote. His thirteen epistles<sup>165</sup> have been instrumental in guiding the church over the past 2000 years in aspects of theology and leadership.

### *Church Planting Principles from Paul's Experience*

The church has benefitted greatly from the fact that Paul used written communication to explain his interactions with the Christian communities in these growing and influential cities. Paul's letters are filled with insight about theology, as well as wisdom on pragmatic church issues and growth. Paul's experiences provide incredible insight for church planters who want to plant in growing urban environments. The subsequent subjects serve as a guide.

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163. Ibid., Kindle Locations 1529-1530.

164. Losch, *All the People in the Bible*, 332-333.

165. The authorship of Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Philemon, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, Ephesians, Colossians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus have been attributed to Paul.

### *Evangelism*

For their churches to grow, early church leaders were intentional about evangelism. Jesus' commission to "be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth"<sup>166</sup> drove the church. Like today, the tendency of local churches was to keep its focus inward, so church leaders, including Paul, Peter and James, had to strategically keep the church on a mission to reach more people for Christ. At the Council of Jerusalem, the Apostle James emphasized the importance of evangelism when he said: "It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God."<sup>167</sup> This heart for the unbeliever was the fuel behind the rapid growth happening in the 1st century.

Paul also had an undeniable passion for evangelism. In speaking about unbelievers, Paul wrote, "I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race, the people of Israel."<sup>168</sup> He would have given up his own salvation just to see the people of Israel reached. For Paul, evangelism was not an option; it was a command by God. He spoke in Antioch to the Gentiles describing the command of God on his life by saying, "I have made you a light for the Gentiles that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth."<sup>169</sup> Evangelism was a priority for the churches Paul established. According to Wright, "Paul's communities were essentially outward looking and that the face they turned outward was the face of active care."<sup>170</sup>

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166. Acts 1:8

167. Acts 15:19

168. Romans 9:2-4

169. Acts 13:47

170. Wright, *Paul*, 425.

Paul modeled this lifestyle of evangelism during his ministry. To the believers in Corinth, he wrote:

To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.<sup>171</sup>

The depth of what Paul is communicating is significant, as noted by Wright: "How could Paul become 'like a Jew'? He was a Jew. The answer must be that when seeking to work with Jewish communities or individuals, he would behave more like a Jew, taking care to observe restrictions of the law for the sake of his work, not because he believed God required it of him for his standing as part of the messianic family."<sup>172</sup>

One of the greatest attempts at evangelism by Paul happened in the city of Athens. Stetzer wrote: "Much like the North Americans today, the Athenians were people in search of spiritual truth."<sup>173</sup> It was on Mars Hill in Athens that Paul attempted to share the gospel with the pagan religious leaders, where "Paul took the revolutionary step of starting where the people were, 'I see that you are very religious' (Acts 17:22). Beginning at the point of their search, Paul provided them with a reasoned witness about the truth of Christ."<sup>174</sup> Several themes emerged from the ministry and writing of Paul, which I will not present.

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171. 1 Corinthians 9:20-22

172. Daniel J. Harrington. "A Master of Metaphor," in <https://www.americamagazine.org/issue/culture/master-metaphor>. Accessed April 13, 2019.

173. Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches*, 51.

174. *Ibid.*

## *Unity*

Unity was essential for church growth in the New Testament. The call for unity is found throughout the book of Acts and was a central theme in Paul's letters. Paul tackled the subject of unity in almost every letter he wrote. Wright referenced: "He knows only too well that a community composed of people from very different social, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds will find all sorts of interesting reasons for divisions, perhaps over seemingly unrelated issues."<sup>175</sup> Paul looked at the unity of the church as a witness to the world and as a force for the governing authorities to take their message seriously. Wright wrote, "The unity he so passionately advocated was not just a pleasant ideal. It was vital for the coherence of his own mission. It was also, as he had said in Ephesians, the way in which God's wisdom in all its rich variety would be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places."<sup>176</sup>

In Philippians we read:

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.<sup>177</sup>

Paul challenged the church in Ephesus to be unified. He said, "make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as also you

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175. Wright, *Paul*, 272.

176. *Ibid.*, 324.

177. Philippians 2:1-4



were called in one hope of your calling.”<sup>178</sup> In reference to this theme, Martin wrote: “unity is a divine gift, but it must be cultivated and cherished as Christians live together in harmonious relationships. Such unity is ‘made fast with bonds of peace’ forged by Christ’s reconciling work.”<sup>179</sup>

In Colossians, Paul again challenged the believers to become peacemakers. He wrote, “Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace.”<sup>180</sup> Martin said, “To give a social expression of their identity Christians are called first into “peace with God” through Christ (Rom. 5:1) and then into a peace-creating society.”<sup>181</sup>

Paul’s plea for unity was a clear theme of his letter to the church in Corinth. Wright described Corinth as being “proverbial for its morals, or rather the lack thereof. It was a classic port city.”<sup>182</sup> The church was comprised of a small group of believers trying to fight the wicked lifestyles within Corinth. Paul understood that a church would not make an impact without having unity. Roy Ciampa and Brian Rosner described unity as the central theme of 1 Corinthians, and they reiterated the point: “Unity in a local church cannot be based on race,

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178. Ephesians 4:4

179. Ralph P. Martin, *Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon, Interpretation*, A Bible commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1991), 48.

180. Colossians 3:13-15

181. Martin, *Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon*, 125.

182. Wright, *Paul*, 210.

class, or social or economic circumstances. The only common factor in otherwise diverse Christian congregations such as Corinth is every member's relation to Christ."<sup>183</sup>

Paul opened his letter to the people at Corinth saying, "I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought."<sup>184</sup> Paul continued his pursuit for unity by challenging the church to be mature in faith by not having "jealousy and quarreling among you."<sup>185</sup> Using the church metaphor as the Body of Christ presented by Paul in his letter to the church in Corinth has continued to help spur on unity for numerous local churches. Paul says, "As it is, there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!' And the head cannot say to the feet, 'I don't need you!'"<sup>186</sup> Ciampa and Rosner wrote, "It is important to stress that the body metaphor or analogy is not used to impose uniformity upon the church. There is unity in plurality, but not uniformity. Individual integrity remains. Indeed, Paul's insistence that a functioning body needs diverse body parts ... reminds us of the need to distinguish and not equate solidarity and sameness."<sup>187</sup>

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183. Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010), 75.

184. 1 Corinthians 1:10

185. 1 Corinthians 3:3

186. 1 Corinthians 12:20-21

187. Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 590.

### *Vision Casting*

Clear vision was a central proponent for church growth throughout the New Testament. It is important to recognize that without clear vision, people will not thrive.<sup>188</sup> Jesus was the ultimate vision caster with his commission at the end of his earthly ministry. He gave his disciples the following vision: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”<sup>189</sup> The Great Commission is God’s vision for the church. Throughout the New Testament, church leadership was constantly sharing vision and direction with the church.

It was a vision in Acts 10 that compelled Peter to speak boldly to the people at Cornelius’ house. The scripture states, “Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. He said to them: ‘You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean.’”<sup>190</sup> Thus, a realistic vision was given by God to move the gospel beyond the Jewish nation and into the rest of the world. The vision given to Peter eventually opened the door for Paul’s impactful leadership.

Paul was a man of great vision. After his experience on the road to Damascus, the first miracle in his life was restored vision. While the vision he received impacted him physically, it was also symbolic of the spiritual vision that Paul continually gave to the local communities of faith. When distractions came, Paul constantly talked through tough issues and kept the main vision of advancing the gospel as the focus. In the midst of distraction, Paul kept the focus on the

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188. Proverbs 29:18

189. Matthew 28:19-20

190. Acts 10:27-28

vision by saying, “I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”<sup>191</sup>

Paul often received direction from the Lord. While ministering in Corinth, “One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: ‘Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city’.”<sup>192</sup> Willimon remarked that this vision from God brought about reassurance of the “promise of support from the Lord and the Lord’s people.”<sup>193</sup> The result of the vision was Paul staying and teaching for over a year.

Paul not only received a vision from God, but he was also able to share it with other people. Every letter that Paul wrote was full of vision of how the church should evangelize, take care of each other, pray, give, worship, and advance the gospel. At the end of the book of Acts, Paul was in chains but using his writing to mobilize the church to action. Acts ends with the following phrase: “For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!”<sup>194</sup> Stott explained this passage: “Without hindrance means that, although the military surveillance continued, there was no ban by the authorities on Paul’s speaking. Though his hand was still bound, his mouth was open for Jesus Christ. Though he was chained, the Word of God was not.”<sup>195</sup>

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191. Philippians 3:14

192. Acts 18:9-10

193. Willimon, *Acts*, 145.

194. Acts 28:30-31

195. Stott, *The Spirit, the Church, and the World*, 400.

### *Team Ministry*

Paul displayed the necessity of team ministry throughout his life. Ascough and Cotton emphasized this as a primary goal for Paul. “When it came to thinking about mission accomplishment, Paul was a consistent and relentless advocate of the working approach we moderns call teamwork - the deliberate collaboration between people trying to achieve complex ends.”<sup>196</sup> He knew that for the church to continue to grow, it could not be based on one man’s gifts or abilities. Paul invested into people knowing they had something to offer the local church. Ascough and Cotton added that, “For Paul, relationships are the building blocks of effective teamwork.”<sup>197</sup> To develop these relationships, Paul was intentional about allowing people to do ministry alongside him. Lokkesmoe wrote, “Paul knew there was no way he could effectively lead so many far-flung congregations without people like Luke, Tychicus, and Epaphras on his team. There was too much work to be done for Paul to do everything himself.”<sup>198</sup>

Team ministry made possible for Paul to have a broader influence than he could have done alone. Ascough and Cotton said, “Paul clearly believed in the value of teamwork, with its emphasis on co-operation, interdependency and shared responsibility for performance-related outcomes.”<sup>199</sup> Paul empowered local believers to lead the churches he planted, and then he used his letters to bring direction, correction, and guidance to those he had teamed up with. Lokkesmoe noted, “Paul simply did not have the luxury of leading without a team of

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196. Ascough and Cotton, *Passionate Visionary*, 89.

197. *Ibid.*, 90.

198. Lokkesmoe, *Paul and His Team*, 66–67.

199. Ascough and Cotton, *Passionate Visionary*, 89.

people working behind the scenes, especially once he was imprisoned.” Paul traveled with a team, worked with a team, went to prison with a team, wrote letters with a team, and celebrated with a team. Paul practiced team ministry.

Paul’s investment in teams also included many young leaders. Paul mentored young leaders such as Timothy, saying, “Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching.”<sup>200</sup>

Timothy went on to become a thriving church leader because of Paul’s investment in him. When referring to the latter stages of Paul’s life and ministry, Lokkesmoe commented, “Paul knew that the end was near for him and most of the first-generation Christian leaders, and he took seriously his responsibility to prepare the church for the challenges ahead.”<sup>201</sup>

Developing teams and leaders was a central theme for the church in the New Testament. The Bible states, “Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor.”<sup>202</sup> Jesus modeled team ministry in choosing his disciples. If anyone was capable of doing ministry alone, it was Jesus, but he displayed a model of team development that is still sets the standard for today.

In the gospels, Jesus is seen strategically surrounding himself with different sized groups of people. While he preached to thousands, Jesus’ team was relatively small. In Luke, Jesus sent out seventy-two disciples. While their names are not known, Jesus trusted them enough to send them out, “as lambs in the midst of wolves.”<sup>203</sup> While seventy-two disciples are mentioned, we

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200. 1 Timothy 4:12-13

201. Lokkesmoe, *Paul and His Team*, 187.

202. Ecclesiastes 4:9

203. Luke 10:3

only know the name of the twelve that Jesus hand selected. Scriptures show us that “Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach.”<sup>204</sup> Jesus developed those twelve to carry his message across the world, but even amongst the twelve, he had three that he was particularly close to. In fact, there are three instances in the gospels where Jesus was doing ministry with just those three men, Peter, James and John.

In his most vulnerable time, Jesus kept his team close. Jesus was showing them how to live, and not just telling them what to do. Jesus is a celebrated team builder. His example and investment in his team became his legacy. In John, Jesus said to his team, “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.”<sup>205</sup> The team was not perfect, but Jesus was willing to work with them to ensure their success. The Great Commission is not an assignment for a few great ministers but because of a large group of empowered believers.

### *Theological Conclusion*

God’s desire for expansion is rooted in the overall missio dei, the mission of God.<sup>206</sup> God’s desire from the very beginning was relationship with his creation. Evangelism and the growth of the church is focused on accomplishing this mission. According to Stetzer, “The purpose of the worship service is not just to arouse attendees' passions to hear preaching. The true objective is

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204. Mark 3:13

205. John 20:21

206. Ed Stetzer and Daniel Im, *Planting Missional Churches: Your Guide to Starting Churches That Multiply* (Nashville, TN, UNITED STATES: B&H Publishing Group, 2016), 260, accessed February 7, 2018, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/seu/detail.action?docID=4471712>.

to enable believers to encounter God in worship and the Word.”<sup>207</sup> All church growth and ministries are for the purpose of establishing true relationship between God and his people. In both Old and New Testaments God’s longing for renewed relationship was the “why” behind his actions. Evangelism in the New Testament, and throughout church history to the present time, was the “how” he accomplished it.

The church was birthed on the Day of Pentecost and the message of the Gospel spread throughout the Mediterranean. The strategy of the early church leadership was simple: spread the message to the urban areas first. Patzia comments that, “The expansion of the church was mainly an urban rather than a rural phenomenon. Although some Christian communities emerged in rural areas and smaller town and villages, missionaries targeted the major urban centers in each region.” The cities targeted by Paul were all of significant size: Rome (650,000), Ephesus (200,000), Antioch (150,000), Corinth (100,000), Damascus (45,000) and Athens (30,000).<sup>208</sup> While it is doubtful Paul started the church in all of these cities, his leadership was crucial to the development and leaders and churches in these thriving urban areas.

Despite the persecution against the early church, scriptures show that “The churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.”<sup>209</sup> Paul strengthened the churches through his focus on evangelism, unity, vision casting, and teamwork. The result of a strong church was the growth of the local body. Numbers matter because they are often indicative of strengthened faith within the Christian community.

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207. Ed Stetzer and Daniel Im, *Planting Missional Churches: Your Guide to Starting Churches That Multiply* (Nashville, TN, UNITED STATES: B&H Publishing Group, 2016), 261, accessed February 7, 2018, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/seu/detail.action?docID=4471712>.

208. Wayne Atherton Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul*, Second edition (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 10–16.

209. Acts 16:5



## *Literature Review*

### *Why New Church Plants?*

Church planting has been a highly researched subject over the last few decades, and there has been a renewed effort to plant new churches through networks, such as CMN, ARC, Acts 29, Stadia, and many mainline denominations. In my denomination, the Assemblies of God, a strategy to plant 10,000 churches is underway within their church-planting network called Church Multiplication Network (CMN). Over 3,900 churches have been planted in the United States through the Assemblies of God since 2008.<sup>210</sup> This renewed desire to plant churches is happening in other denominations, as seen in the report by Rebecca Randall, Science Editor for *Christianity Today*. “Since 1998, almost 50,000 new churches have been started in the United States.”<sup>211</sup> New churches are necessary to keep up with the rate of churches closing their doors. New churches are also necessary to keep up with the estimated 14 to 16 million immigrants who enter America each year.<sup>212</sup> New churches are also crucial to make up for the 80percent of churches in America that are currently plateaued or declining in attendance.<sup>213</sup>

Church planting is also necessary to keep up with current church closures in the United States. Based on recent statistics, 3700 churches closed their doors last year. According to Pinetops Foundation, “We anticipate that number will grow to at least 5,500 per year over the

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210. Church Multiplication Network “About CMN,” in <https://churchmultiplication.net/about>. Accessed November 14, 2019,

211. Rebecca Randall. "How Many Churches Does America Have? More Than Expected" in <http://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2017/september/how-many-churches-in-america-us-nones-nondenominational.html>. Accessed November 21, 2017.

212. Ibid.

213. Todd Wilson and Carl F George, *Multipliers: leading beyond addition*, 2017, 21.

next 30 years. In total, we anticipate 176,000 churches will close between today and 2050.”<sup>214</sup> To keep up with the current church closures, the American church needs to plant 6000 churches a year in order to just break even. The needed growth in church planting does not account for population increase expected in the United States. It is anticipated that by the year 2050, the United States population will surpass 400 million people, a growth of 75 million people.<sup>215</sup> It will take thousands of new churches to reach the projected population growth within the United States.

When new churches are launched, new people are reached with the gospel. There is a renewed focus on evangelism with a church plant that helps compel people to live out the Great Commission to “Go and make disciples.”<sup>216</sup> Keller said, “Dozens of denominational studies have confirmed that the average new church gains most of its new members (60-80percent) from the ranks of people who are not attending any worshipping body, while churches over 10-15 years of age gain 80-90percent of new members by transfer from other congregations.”<sup>217</sup> For decades, crusades and door-to-door evangelism seemed to be the best way to reach people, but the world has changed. Rick Warren, founding pastor of Saddleback Church, made the case for this: “The single most effective method for fulfilling the Great Commission that Jesus gave us is to plant

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214. Joshua Crossman, “The Great Opportunity,” Pinetops Foundation, 2018, 26, accessed September 4, 2019 <https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/4245467/The%20Great%20Opportunity.pdf>

215. Karesh Kochhar, “10 Projections for the Global Population in 2050,” February 3, 2014, in <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/02/03/10-projections-for-the-global-population-in-2050/>. accessed November 17, 2019,

216. Matthew 28:19

217. Keller, “Why\_Plant\_Churches-Keller.Pdf”.

new churches.”<sup>218</sup> Thom Rainer believes, “New churches have both a higher growth rate and a higher conversion growth rate.”<sup>219</sup>

Stetzer and Bird estimated that 68 percent of all church plants are still in operation after year four.<sup>220</sup> This makes church planting a risky endeavor, with a 32 percent failure rate during that time period. The risk is worth the reward based on the effectiveness of church plants for reaching new people for Christ. In *Viral Churches*, Stetzer wrote, “New churches today tend to remain focused outward and in tune with their communities, which helps explain their higher ratio of conversions and baptisms. They also have the advantage of being at the front end of their life cycle, not yet struggling with mission drift.”<sup>221</sup> Mission drift happens when a church moves away from its original purpose and mission.<sup>222</sup> New church plants are free of the baggage existing churches are often burdened with. Even the conventional facilities of a new church plant (school, theater, community center) is seen as a positive, despite the multiple difficulties that occur being a portable site, is seen as a positive for reaching people far from Christ because they do not carry the look and feel of a traditional church.

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218. Ed Stetzer and Warren Bird, *Viral Churches: Helping Church Planters Become Movement Makers*, 1st ed. (San Francisco CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010).

219. Thom S. Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth: History, Theology, and Principles* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1993), 205.

220. Edward Stetzer and Warren Bird, “The State of Church Planting in the United States: Research Overview and Qualitative Study of Primary Church Planting Entities,” 2009, 5.

221. Stetzer and Bird, *Viral Churches*, 25.

222. Peter Greer, *Mission Drift: The Unspoken Crisis Facing Leaders, Charities, and Churches* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2014).

*A Case for Urban Church Planting*

The world is changing, and part of that change, as mentioned earlier, is that people are gravitating towards cities. It is estimated that around 3 million people globally are migrating into cities every single week.<sup>223</sup> According to the World Migration Report, “Moving to cities can greatly enhance people’s well-being. It offers an escape from the impact of rural livelihood, and an access to diverse employment opportunities and better health and education, all of which have the potential to reduce the poverty of the people moving as well as those who stay behind”<sup>224</sup> Ehler commented on the urbanization of America: “80percent of the US population now lives in metropolitan areas with more than one million residents, and 90percent of the country’s gross national product comes from these cities.”<sup>225</sup>

Approximately 54 percent of the world’s population now lives in cities, up from 30 percent in 1950. Sources estimate this will grow to two-thirds of the world population in the next fifteen to thirty years.<sup>226</sup> If the church is going to thrive in this next century, it needs to learn to do effective ministry in urban settings. Rainer wrote, “Perhaps no period since the Reformation has brought such changes and challenges to the church.”<sup>227</sup> The church is facing a tremendous opportunity with cities. Pinetops Foundation addressed this: “Urban centers are growing at two to five times faster than the overall population (2-4 percent growth per year compared to 0.8

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223. International Organization for Migration “IOM-World-Migration-Report-2015-Overview.Pdf” in <https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/country/docs/syria/IOM-World-Migration-Report-2015-Overview.pdf>. Accessed November 14, 2019,

224. Ibid.

225. Ehler, “Cities in Motion: Ministry in Light of Demographic Shifts,” 1.

226. Bret Boyd, “Urbanization and the Mass Movement of People to Cities,” Grayline Group, January 17, 2017, accessed February 1, 2019, <https://graylinegroup.com/urbanization-catalyst-overview/>.

227. Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth*, 67.

percent for the national average). Young adults are driving that growth. Those 22 to 34 years of age have increased as a proportion of city dwellers, while declining everywhere else.”<sup>228</sup> What is the church’s response to the large influx of people into US cities? Tim Keller was clear that the solution is to plant new churches. He wrote, “The only way to increase the number and percentage of Christians in a city is to plant thousands of new churches.”<sup>229</sup>

### *The Church Planter*

Peter Wagner believes the greatest determining factor of the success and growth of a church plant is with the church planter: “In America, the primary catalytic factor for growth in a local church is the pastor. In every growing, dynamic church I have studied, I have found a key person whom God is using to make it happen.”<sup>230</sup> Throughout biblical and church history God has used strong leaders to accomplish his purpose. Rainer observed, “Certainly, the Old Testament examples of Moses, Joshua, David and Nehemiah support the postulate that leadership has been an important factor in the accomplishment of God's plan.”<sup>231</sup> New Testament leaders such as Peter and Paul also displayed extraordinary gifts of leadership. Rainer wrote about great leaders, such as those in the New Testament: “particularly a pastor, must follow God's plan for the church in order to lead the people in this time of greatest need.”<sup>232</sup>

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228. Joshua Crossman, “The Great Opportunity,” Pinetops Foundation, 2018, 43, accessed September 4, 2019 <https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/4245467/The%20Great%20Opportunity.pdf>

229. Stetzer and Bird, *Viral Churches*, 68.

230. Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth*, 1.

231. *Ibid.*, 192.

232. *Ibid.*, 186.

Darrin Patrick, founding pastor of The Journey Church, and one of the founders of Acts 29, wrote a very informative book describing an ideal church planter. In *Church Planter: The Man, The Message, The Mission* he wrote, “The skills requisite to planting a successful church are also invaluable. Being a pastor/church planter requires three basic skills: leading, teaching, and shepherding.”<sup>233</sup> The focus of strong leadership is a theme that runs through the Bible but also through multiple church planting and church growth books.

In Romans, Paul described leadership as a “gift,”<sup>234</sup> and he challenged those with the gift of leadership to lead “diligently.”<sup>235</sup> Strong and diligent leadership is crucial to the success of a church plant. Patrick reinforced this idea when he stated, “to effectively plant or grow a church, you must be a strong leader.”<sup>236</sup> Leadership is not a gift that everyone has. C. Peter Wagner wrote, “The gift of leadership is the special ability that God gives to certain members of the body of Christ to set goals in accordance with God's purposes for the future and to communicate these goals to others in such a way that they voluntarily and harmoniously work together to accomplish these goals for the glory of God.”<sup>237</sup> If everyone were called to lead, there would be no one to follow. The primary goal of the church planter should be to seek the spiritual gift of leadership so that they can, as Mark Daniels wrote, “be empowered by God to lead the Church and its ministries in pursuing its mission.”<sup>238</sup> Many times the church planter is without a church

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233. Darrin Patrick, *Church Planter: The Man, the Message, the Mission* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 67.

234. Romans 12:8

235. Romans 12:8

236. Patrick, *Church Planter*, 67.

237. C. Peter Wagner, *Finding Your Spiritual Gifts Questionnaire: The Easy to Use, Self-Guided Questionnaire*, Updated and expanded ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Chosen, 2017).

238. Mark Daniels, “MarkDaniels.Blogspot.Com: Opening Your Spiritual Gifts (Day 19),” Accessed November 14, 2019.

service or experience to display to people what the church will even look like. It is crucial that they have a gift of leadership to keep the vision in front of the team. It takes true leadership to keep everyone focused despite the preconceived ideas and desires with which each team member starts.

Leadership is especially vital in the season where a church planter is recruiting team members. John Maxwell wrote, "Leaders have two characteristics: first they are going somewhere, and second they are able to persuade other people to go with them."<sup>239</sup> The confidence of the leader helps bring about security and assurance to the team members that something great is about to happen. Leadership is an integral catalyst to launching a new church, as well as being the impetus in growing the church. Rainer suggested, "A visionary pastor is a major contributor to the growth of a church."<sup>240</sup>

Pastors who possess the gift of leadership are able to make crucial decisions that will lead to greater church health and growth, "because a visionary church growth pastor will have developed a vision from God, and he can respond to situations with confidence and decisiveness. In fact, decision-making will become increasingly easier as the vision or plan for the church unfolds. A visionary pastor is optimistic about the future because God has given him a clear picture of that future."<sup>241</sup> Like all skillsets, leadership can be discovered and developed through life experience, training, and the maturing process.<sup>242</sup>

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239. John C. Maxwell, *Leadership Gold: Lessons Learned from a Lifetime of Leading* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 77.

240. Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth*, 192.

241. *Ibid.*, 188–189.

242. Patrick, *Church Planter*, 75.

Leadership also involves making sure the vision stays focused. Good leaders are able to have crucial conversations that are necessary to keep the vision moving forward. Ascough and Cotton wrote, “Leaders who consistently avoid tough talk on issues that are critical to the community’s vision, values and cohesion are leaders in name only.”<sup>243</sup> The early stages of church planting requires the church planter to clearly define expectations, and at the same time squash any type of disunity.

The church planter is also a spiritual leader. Kirk Hadaway wrote, “The most important element of vision is prayer. A pastor who has a consistent prayer life seeking God’s wisdom will discover the exciting direction God has planned for the church.”<sup>244</sup> The spiritual health of today’s church planters is a subject of serious concern in many of the top church planting books. Patrick wrote: “A man who is a stranger to the things of God will be totally unable to teach them to others. Yet many pastors enter the ministry with serious doubts about their own salvation! Could this be one reason why thousands of churches will close their doors this year in North America and why the vast majority of North American churches are in plateau or decline?”<sup>245</sup> Church planters are leaders. They can lead their teams, their families, their church, and most importantly they can lead themselves towards growth.

### *Finances*

Finances are an important part of building a local church. Without adequate finances, the actualization of the church’s vision can be stalled; with proper finances, it can be accelerated.

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243. Ascough and Cotton, *Passionate Visionary*, 110.

244. C. Kirk Hadaway, *Church Growth Principles: Separating Fact from Fiction* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1991), 187.

245. Patrick, *Church Planter*, 24.



According to recent statistics, “The likelihood of church survivability increases by 178 percent when there is a proactive stewardship development plan within the church plant, designed to help it become financially self-sufficient.”<sup>246</sup> One of the primary tasks of the church planter is fundraising and the development of a culture of generosity within the local church. Church planters are the primary fundraisers for their church. Cliff Christopher explained this crucial role in leading a nonprofit: “In most nonprofit organizations the top job description for their executive director is fund-raiser.”<sup>247</sup> Churches are nonprofit organizations that have pastors as their executive directors.

There is a substantial amount of writing, both popular and academic on the subjects of fundraising, finances, and generosity within the local church. Much of this writing is in response to the fact that a financial dilemma exists in the American church today. Recent statistics for 2018 across multiple denominations report “individual giving fell by 1.1 percent from \$295 billion in 2017 to \$292 billion last year.”<sup>248</sup> In the midst of a thriving economy, people are giving less money to churches and other nonprofits.

It is important to understand that there are ways to combat the giving decline that is happening in America. Scott McKenzie wrote, “God’s people are not opposed to giving; they are opposed to supporting a weak or unclear purpose.”<sup>249</sup> A church planter cannot expect people to

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246. Stetzer and Bird, *Viral Churches*, 108.

247. J. Cliff Christopher, *Not Your Parents’ Offering Plate: A New Vision for Financial Stewardship*, 2nd ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2015).

248. Davius Crary, “Amid Broad Drop in Charitable Donations, Giving to God down \$3 Billion Last Year,” *National Catholic Reporter*, accessed January 30, 2020, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/people/amid-broad-drop-charitable-donations-giving-god-down-3-billion-last-year>.

249. Scott McKenzie, *Generosity Rising: Lead a Stewardship Revolution in Your Church*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2016), 46.

willingly donate to their cause. According to Christopher, “Donors are saying to our churches today that you have to earn our gifts. No longer can you just preach a sermon on tithing and think the members will give 10 percent to the church.”<sup>250</sup> Robert Jewe, a 23-year-old church-attending millennial, wrote out some questions that reflect what is in the mind of the next generation:

Where exactly is our money going? Is it helping others? Or is it being spent on elaborate Christmas pageants? Are you building the kingdom? Or are you building your kingdom? What are you doing in your community? Are you feeding and clothing the homeless? Are you hosting support groups for addicts? Are you finding childcare for single parents? These are things my generation respects. We want to help the people around us. You’ll win us over if you do the same.<sup>251</sup>

Before church planters can raise funds, they need to be able to explain the vision and create financial systems that build confidence in the potential donors. A new church must start by developing healthy financial systems. Nelson Searcy stated, “you will never have a healthy church if you don’t have a healthy stewardship system.”<sup>252</sup> People need to trust the leadership. “People realized long time ago that it was not the Mayflower that sailed across the ocean to America; it was the pilgrims who did the sailing.”<sup>253</sup>

The best way to establish trust is by creating checks and balances in each area of church finances. Michael E. Batts and Richard R. Hammar wrote that, “By establishing a system of strong checks and balances, the financial integrity of the church is protected, and the confidence

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250. Christopher, *Not Your Parents’ Offering Plate*, 6.

251. Robert Jewe, “Why I Won’t Give to Your Church,” CT Pastors in <http://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2013/spring/why-i-wont-give-to-your-church.html>. Accessed April 6, 2018,

252. Nelson Searcy and Jennifer Dykes Henson, *Maximize: How to Develop Extravagant Givers in Your Church*, Kindle (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2010), 175.

253. Christopher, *Not Your Parents’ Offering Plate*, 16.

contributors have is strengthened.”<sup>254</sup> The first step in this process is to develop a good spending philosophy.<sup>255</sup>

The spending philosophy of a church needs to help guide the development of a budget because “too often it (the budget) ignores the ministry’s values and the plan to accomplish its mission and vision.”<sup>256</sup> The budget reveals priorities, as “a church’s budgeting process should be much more strategic than simply estimating revenues and expenses.”<sup>257</sup> Budgets are often difficult for a church plant to create because there is no history to build it off of. In order to create a budget, one of the best solutions given was to create a rolling forecast budget for a 12-month period.<sup>258</sup>

According to Malphurs and Stroope, the first line item on each church budget should be missions’ giving. They wrote, “We believe that a church that desires biblical, numerical growth along with spiritual health will allocate about 10 percent of its budget to missions.”<sup>259</sup> The next large disbursement category for a budget is human compensation. This line item can account for 40-50 percent of a church’s operating budget.<sup>260</sup> This has been a deeply debated issue and many church members do not understand the need for so much of the church’s money to go to human resources. Stroope explained why this number should be at this level: “People are God’s human

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254. Aubrey Malphurs and Steve Stroope, *Money Matters in Church: A Practical Guide for Leaders* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 96.

255. Michael E. Batts and Richard R. Hammar, *Church Finance: The Complete Guide to Managing Ministry Resources* (Carol Stream, IL: Christianity Today, 2015), 3.

256. Malphurs and Stroope, *Money Matters in Church*, 53.

257. Batts and Hammar, *Church Finance*, 5.

258. *Ibid.*, 12.

259. Malphurs and Stroope, *Money Matters in Church*, 59.

260. Batts and Hammar, *Church Finance*, 4.

agents for ministry effectiveness. Your ministry will only be as good as the people who serve the Lord and the church.”<sup>261</sup>

With an effective values-based budget in place, the next step is to create accountability with people who are handling the church’s finances. A generally accepted thought is “leaders should avoid direct involvement in handling church finances.”<sup>262</sup> This protects the pastor’s integrity as well as establishes trust with the overall church’s financial system. Trust is crucial because “in most growing churches a direct relationship exists between a congregation’s trust in the leadership and their increased giving.”<sup>263</sup> In handling the funds, it is integral to practice dual control. “The practice of dual control relates to having at least two unrelated people working together when handling live funds.”<sup>264</sup>

A successful church planter is able to explain to their potential donors the impact their giving will have. This happens through giving regular updates to donors throughout the prelaunch and post launch seasons. Searcy encouraged this to be done quarterly: “That’s four giving statements per year— one in April, July, October, and January.”<sup>265</sup> These reports must include celebration of life change. People want results. Organizations, like Harvard University and Salvation Army, continually have surplus in their finances and their response to their donors is, “we took your money last year and we did great things with it. If you give us more money, we will do more great things.”<sup>266</sup>

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261. Malphurs and Stroope, *Money Matters in Church*, 59.

262. *Ibid.*, 92.

263. *Ibid.*, 93.

264. Batts and Hammar, *Church Finance*, 192.

265. Searcy and Henson, *Maximize*, 1681.

266. Christopher, *Not Your Parents’ Offering Plate*, 23.

Searcy reminded church planters that, “People do not give to sinking ships.”<sup>267</sup> Reminders of budget deficits and late mortgage payments only decrease giving within the local church. A letter explaining the turmoil or distress of finances within the church actually discourages giving rather than motivates it. Christopher added, “The church is the only nonprofit I know of that seems to believe that the more you cry that you are sinking, the more people will give you.”<sup>268</sup> He encourages church planters to stop sending out line-item budgets. People are easily distracted and confused by the amount of money being spent on items they cannot connect to the vision of the church. Instead he said churches should give out a public missional budget. A missional budget “takes the church’s mission of worship, nurture, service, and evangelism and then divides the entire budget into those categories.”<sup>269</sup>

Healthy fundraising requires the Lead Pastor to be positioned to create a generous culture within the church. “The person leading the flock makes a lot of difference in whether today’s donor contributes as completely as they can. When they see a pastor who has a great vision and shows excellent skills in leadership, they will invest in that pastor’s vision and trust in his or her skills to make the hopes of the donor come true.”<sup>270</sup> This is especially true for new church plants. Most of the money being raised is because of the pastor, not the ministry. This means that for a church, the best person to ask for financial buy-in is the pastor.<sup>271</sup>

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267. Ibid., 22.

268. Ibid.

269. Ibid., 104.

270. Ibid., 17.

271. Ibid., 47.

One of the main reasons that giving is declining is that churches are not winning anymore. Christopher said, “If you really want to see your stewardship programs flourish and the coffers overflow, then try winning some games.”<sup>272</sup> The analogy is given of a sports team that has a losing record but improves their stadium. The potential fans will come back once to see the improvement, but they will not become season pass holders unless the team starts to win. The church wins when lives are changed. “Nonprofits and churches only have one thing to sell—changed lives.”<sup>273</sup> It has been said that, “The best way to raise money for your church is simply do your job.”<sup>274</sup>

It takes boldness for a pastor to ask people to donate towards his or her church plant. Christopher said, “I do not look at asking for money as sales. I always look at it as evangelism. When I ask someone to give money for the work of the kingdom, I am doing nothing more than inviting them to be a part of what I so passionately believe to be the best place for their money and their life.”<sup>275</sup> The local church is God’s plan to expand his kingdom throughout the globe.

Pinetops Foundation explains the importance of fundraising as follows:

On average, the amount of outside funding a new plant needs to reach sustainability can range anywhere from \$50,000 to \$200,000-plus, depending on geography type of pastoral model. Therefore, to go from 4,000 plants a year to 8,000 or more successful church plants per year, the American church may need to mobilize as much as \$800 million to \$1.2 billion in additional funding for church planting per year.<sup>276</sup>

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272. *Ibid.*, 72.

273. *Ibid.*, 10.

274. *Ibid.*, 11.

275. *Ibid.*, 45-46

276. Joshua Crossman, “The Great Opportunity,” Pinetops Foundation, 2018, 48, accessed September 4, 2019 <https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/4245467/The%20Great%20Opportunity.pdf>

### *Team Building*

Team building is vital to the success of a church plant. Out of the church plants that survive the first four years, “an impressive 88 percent had church planting teams; in sharp contrast, only 12 percent of struggling church plants were planted by teams.”<sup>277</sup> Team building is a critical skill necessary for a church planter. David D’Angelo emphasized the importance of team building by stating, “Building the core team is the most time-consuming component. It can also be the most rewarding as you witness individuals using their gifts to serve in ways they have never done before.”<sup>278</sup> CMN describes five different teams that need to be recruited and built in the prelaunch season:

- Home Team – this is immediate family
- Prayer Team – this can be anyone and everyone
- Launch Team – this group prepares and executes the launch
- Staff Team – this group oversees ministry teams
- Ministry Team – this group of volunteers carries out weekly duties<sup>279</sup>

Building a church planting team requires the church planter to release control. “Pastors must overcome the insecurity that says: ‘Nobody can do the ministry but I!’ This attitude reflects a condescending view of laity or a fear that the pastor will be perceived as failing to do his

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277. Stetzer and Bird, *Viral Churches*, 145.

278. David D’Angelo and Ryan Stigile, *Multisite Church Pitfalls: 7 Dangers You Cannot Afford to Ignore* (Virginia Beach, VA: Createspace Publishing, 2016), 43.

279. Chris Railey, “CMN\_Coach\_Manual\_Seattle\_2019\_C4.Pdf,” Dropbox, 35 in [https://www.dropbox.com/s/rkzk7qw6s19wzqy/\\_CMN\\_Coach\\_Manual\\_Seattle\\_2019\\_C4.pdf?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/s/rkzk7qw6s19wzqy/_CMN_Coach_Manual_Seattle_2019_C4.pdf?dl=0). Accessed November 17, 2019.

job.”<sup>280</sup> Team building offers the church planter an opportunity to give ministry to other people and to multiply the impact of the church plant. Rainer wrote, “A church growth pastor must be willing to relinquish control and hands-on involvement in every ministry of the church. He must equip and empower others to do the work of ministry, even if he perceives that no one can get the job done as well as he can.”<sup>281</sup> The delegation of ministry must start from the church planter and become part of the culture of the local church. This is often difficult for the church planter because it releases control of areas that he or she might believe they could lead better. Rick Warren said, “You have to decide whether to structure for growth or control. You cannot have both.”<sup>282</sup> John Maxwell wrote about the importance of delegation by saying, “The people’s capacity to achieve is determined by their leader’s ability to empower.”<sup>283</sup> President Dwight Eisenhower said: “Leadership is the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it.”<sup>284</sup>

Within team building, successful church planters identify and develop potential church leaders. Stetzer and Bird reiterated the importance of developing a team by writing, “Leaders must be developed early and often in a plant.”<sup>285</sup> Chris Hodges, Lead Pastor of Church of the Highlands, said: “your church will grow as fast as the Lead Pastors ability to recruit and train

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280. Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth*, 188.

281. *Ibid.*, 190–191.

282. Nelson Searcy and Jennifer Dykes Henson, *Ignite: How to Spark Immediate Growth in Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009), 77.

283. *Ibid.*, 73.

284. *Ibid.*, 71.

285. Stetzer and Bird, *Viral Churches*, 108.



leaders.”<sup>286</sup> Paul displayed his value on leadership development in 2 Timothy: “The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.”<sup>287</sup> This verse shows four levels of leadership development.<sup>288</sup> Church planters need to think generationally instead of just temporarily, as Paul did. The church has the ability to reach the next generation when the focus is on developing teams that include young future leaders.

### *Launching Large*

The common belief among church planting material and experts today is that the size of the launch determines the health of a church plant. The larger the launch, the easier it is for the church to become self-sustaining. Stetzer stated that, “large starts lead to momentum, credibility, and status as self-supporting will soon follow.”<sup>289</sup> “Seventy-five percent of the fastest growing church plants had over 101 attendees at their first service. By contrast, 80.4percent of struggling church plants had 100 or less.”<sup>290</sup> Searcy explained the *large launch* strategy by writing, “A big day is an all-out push toward a single Sunday for the purpose of breaking the next growth barrier and setting an attendance record in order to reach as many people as possible for Jesus.”<sup>291</sup> When launching a church, the big day traditionally comes a month after school starts in the Fall or in

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286. Chris Hodges, “Cultivating Generosity with the Local Church.” Finance Seminar, Church of the Highlands. Birmingham, AL, April 16, 2018.

287. 2 Timothy 2:2

288. Stetzer and Bird, *Viral Churches*, 86.

289. Stetzer and Bird, “The State of Church Planting in the United States: Research and Overview and Qualitative Study of Primary Church Planting Entities,” 8.

290. Stetzer and Bird, “The State of Church Planting . . .” 12.

291. Searcy and Henson, *Ignite*, 25.

Winter.<sup>292</sup> Both ARC and CMN encourage a large launch model with a majority of the effort going towards the first public meeting.

A large launch is typically possible because of a strategic marketing plan before the big day. George Barna was a pioneer in accumulating data on how to reach unchurched people through marketing and wrote about it in his book *Marketing the Church*. Barna explained that we must first "think of marketing as the activities that address the needs of a target audience, thereby allowing the business to satisfy its goals."<sup>293</sup> CMN outlines a five-step plan for marketing a church plant to the community. These are:

1. Know your story
2. Develop your brand
3. Create a compelling web presence
4. Build a marketing strategy
5. Leverage community events<sup>294</sup>

It is important for the marketing material to match the look, feel and demographic of the community a church is trying to reach. Not all marketing materials work in every community. Searcy suggested that, "Before you launch a promotional campaign, think about the type of 'fish' in your community and what type of 'bait' is best suited to catch them."<sup>295</sup> For Rainer, "Another piece of the vision puzzle is learning the community and ministry environment. Demographic

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292. Ibid., 36.

293. George Barna, *Marketing the Church* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1988), 30.

294. Railey, "CMN\_Coach\_Manual\_Seattle\_2019\_C4.Pdf," 27–28.

295. Searcy and Henson, *Ignite*, 125.

information helps us to understand the statistical composition of our community, but our research should not end there.”<sup>296</sup> It is important to talk to the community and establish the needs, beliefs, and trends of the community where the church is being planted.

The large launch day creates a goal for the entire team to shoot for, since “Big days create inherent urgency that you can capitalize on.”<sup>297</sup> It is healthy for the church planter, as well as the launch team, to feel the urgency to get as many people as possible to the grand opening. Rodney Mills discussed the importance of urgency in his article “Healthy Churches Grow,” where he stated, “For lasting change to occur, church leaders and members must sense the urgency of the situation and determine that doing nothing is worse than the anticipated pain of changing long-standing practices or traditions.”<sup>298</sup> The urgency should lead the launch team to invite as many people as possible. Searcy said, “Sixty to 80 percent of first-time guests come to church because a friend invited them.”<sup>299</sup> A church marketing strategy must include the resources necessary to equip launch team members with printed resources to invite their friends and family to the big grand opening.

### *Evangelism*

*Christianity Today* evaluated the different methods of evangelism employed throughout the past fifty years.<sup>300</sup> According to Stetzer, “The report started with the peak era for evangelistic crusades

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296. Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth*, 187.

297. Searcy and Henson, *Ignite*, 91.

298. Rodney Mills, “Healthy Churches Grow,” *The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*. Vol. 10, No. 2 (Fall 2016): 74.

299. Searcy and Henson, *Ignite*, 86.

300. Tim Stafford, “Go and Plant Churches of All Peoples: Crusades and Personal Witnessing Are No Longer the Cutting Edge of Evangelism,” *Christianity Today* Vol. 51 (September 2007): 9.

(such as Billy Graham, tent revivals, and so on) and worked forward to recent years.”<sup>301</sup> The article concluded, “Today, church planting is the default mode for evangelism.”<sup>302</sup> Evangelism is at the heart of every church plant. If the going to reach more people for Christ, we have to create churches that provide opportunities every single Sunday for lost people to get saved. Andy Stanley called for the establishment of “churches for unchurched people.”<sup>303</sup> Searcy added, “When it comes to evangelism, the pastor's primary role is to keep the evangelistic temperature red-hot inside the church.”<sup>304</sup> Based on church planting and church growth literature, one way to create a culture of evangelism is to work on improving the worship services. In evaluating churches that are growing, Rainer stated, “worship has been linked with church growth primarily because worship services are increasingly becoming the entry point for the unchurched into churches.”<sup>305</sup>

Mills wrote, “As church leaders, it is our responsibility not to grow the harvest, but to create an environment whereby God can bring about His harvest and grow His kingdom.”<sup>306</sup> An environment that attracts unbelievers does not happen by accident and, for Andy Stanley, “Every ministry environment communicates something. There are no neutral environments. Environments are the message before the message.”<sup>307</sup> From the parking lot, to the welcome area,

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301. Stetzer and Bird, *Viral Churches*, 23.

302. *Ibid.*, 24.

303. Andy Stanley, *Deep & Wide: Creating Churches Unchurched People Love to Attend* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 315.

304. Searcy and Henson, *Ignite*, 53.

305. Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth*, 225.

306. Mills, “Healthy Churches Grow,” 70.

307. Stanley, *Deep & Wide*, 157.

to the kids' areas, everything is communicating to the guest that they are welcome and they are expected at this church plant. The goal should be for every church setting, situation and sermon to be an "irresistible environments."<sup>308</sup> According to Stanley, "our goal was to make our environments so irresistible that even people who didn't buy our theology would want to come back and participate."<sup>309</sup>

Russell Chandler reinforced the importance of environment when he wrote, "One of the first marks of growing churches that is instantly perceived is a commitment to excellence, an attitude that strives for quality and rejects mediocrity."<sup>310</sup> Church planters do not always have the best facilities, but successful planters work hard at creating excellent environments in their temporary facilities. Rainer added, "The average American has become accustomed to quality: slick productions in television and movies; shiny, clean malls; and businesses seeking to improve their products and services. While devout Christians may tolerate worship services that are less-than-good, we cannot expect the unchurched to be so tolerant."<sup>311</sup>

When looking at churches that do this best, Rainer wrote: "Every facet of the service in many growing churches is planned with guests in mind. Those who come are called 'guests' ('you have been invited') rather than 'visitors' ('you dropped in on us')."<sup>312</sup> A level of excellence helps the guest to realize they are valued and desired in the church they are visiting. Part of a culture focused on "guests" is the ability for a guest to remain anonymous. In a thriving church

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308. Ibid., 160.

309. Ibid.

310. Russell Chandler, *Racing toward 2001: The Forces Shaping America's Religious Future* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1992), 299.

311. Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth*, 228.

312. Ibid., 230.

plant, a guest would never be singled out and embarrassed in one of the services. “Growing churches let the guests themselves determine if they want to be identified.”<sup>313</sup>

The message content for a church that focuses on evangelism is very important. According to Darrin Patrick, “A missional pastor should always preach as if there are unbelievers in the crowd. He should never assume that his audience is comprised only of those already convinced of the truth and power of the gospel.”<sup>314</sup> Rainer explained, “sermons in growing churches are positive and encouraging. The world has enough bad news. Even if the message is a hard-hitting sermon on the consequences of sin, it can be communicated in light of the good news of the Sin Forgiver.”<sup>315</sup> Church planters would be remiss if they did not give an opportunity for a response at the end of each message, and “The single best way to encourage unbelievers to say yes to Jesus is to invite them to. Never miss a chance to call for a commitment. You have the opportunity to invite people into a relationship with God at all levels of your ministry.”<sup>316</sup>

To create an environment that fosters evangelism, celebration and fun are crucial components. Wagner remarked that most church services seem “more like a funeral than a festival.”<sup>317</sup> That is unfortunate. A church focused on reaching lost people should be a celebration. Searcy wrote, “When that neighbor shows up, celebrate! Psychologist tell us that what gets rewarded gets repeated. When someone brings a guest, celebrate with him.”<sup>318</sup> When

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313. Ibid.

314. Patrick, *Church Planter*, 195.

315. Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth*, 233.

316. Searcy and Henson, *Ignite*, 146.

317. C. Peter Wagner, *Your Church Can Grow* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998), 113.

318. Searcy and Henson, *Ignite*, 103.

the culture is full of fun, the environment becomes comforting and less threatening to the unbeliever. Andy Stanley believes in the importance of a fun pre-service environment and has put this into practice: “If our immediate win is to capture the interest of unchurched people, then at the broadest end of the funnel, we must remove every possible obstacle from the path of the disinterested, suspicious, here-against-my-will, would-rather-be-somewhere-else, unchurched guest.”<sup>319</sup>

To make evangelism a priority, the vision needs to be clearly cast from the stage. Searcy wrote, “I’ve noticed that what gets presented from the stage is more likely to get accomplished in the pews.”<sup>320</sup> The pastor needs to cast the vision of special large Sundays that can be used to reach more people. Kirk Hadaway asked: “Can special events such as high attendance days, friend days, Christmas and Easter spectaculars, seminars, conferences, and dramas result in growth? The answer is ‘yes,’ if used properly.”<sup>321</sup> The pastor capitalizes on big Sundays when he uses the sermon to motivate the people towards reaching the lost. Thus, “The people in your church would love to be passionate about evangelism, whether they realize it yet or not. People need a cause. They like to be stirred, and long to be part of something that is bigger than they are.”<sup>322</sup>

According to Stetzer, “among churches of all sizes, growing churches are rare. In fact, they only make up about 20 percent of our churches today. The other 80 percent have reached a

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319. Stanley, *Deep & Wide*, 210.

320. Searcy and Henson, *Ignite*, 62.

321. Hadaway, *Church Growth Principles*, 27.

322. Searcy and Henson, *Ignite*, 31.

plateau or are declining.”<sup>323</sup> The goal of church planting is not about transfers from other churches but about true evangelism. Lewis Drummond defined evangelism as, “a concerted effort to confront the unbeliever with the truth about and claims of Jesus Christ and to challenge him with the view of leading him into repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and, thus, into the fellowship of the church.”<sup>324</sup> The pastor can raise the level of evangelism in their church by presenting the vision through the stage, the staff, and the structure.<sup>325</sup>

### *Assimilation*

Evangelism helps reach new believers, but assimilation helps develop them and plant them within the local church. Assimilation is crucial to a church plant and church growth because “the likelihood of church survivability increases by over 250 percent when the church offers leadership development training to new church members.”<sup>326</sup> There has to be a process for developing and connecting new attenders and new believers.

Searcy explained the importance of assimilation: “When an unbeliever makes the decision to give his life to Christ in your church, your next step is to follow up with him right away.”<sup>327</sup> Comparing a new believer to the returning younger son in Jesus’ parable of the prodigal son, Rainer wrote, “our Lord rejoices when one of His children returns ‘home’ (Luke 15:11-32). When we seek to assimilate new members, we are attempting to keep the ‘children’

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323. Stetzer and Bird, *Viral Churches*, 59.

324. Lewis A. Drummond, *Leading Your Church in Evangelism* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1975), 21.

325. Searcy and Henson, *Ignite*, 61.

326. Stetzer and Bird, *Viral Churches*, 108.

327. Searcy and Henson, *Ignite*, 154.



from leaving.”<sup>328</sup> Assimilation helps new believers’ decision for Christ stick and connects them with a church family to nurture that decision.

It is not enough to just evangelize and hope the outcome is good. Patrick wrote, “We are not dealing with replaceable objects that can become obsolete like a cell phone, but with God’s prized creations.”<sup>329</sup> The book of Hebrews is clear that pastors will give an account to God for how they cared for his people.<sup>330</sup> This is why it is unacceptable for people to just attend, but each person must be assimilated into the church family, although “there is considerable evidence which suggests that at least one-third, and perhaps as many as one-half, of all Protestant church members do not feel a sense of belonging to the congregation of which they are members.”<sup>331</sup>

All ARC churches are encouraged to adopt the Growth Track assimilation system from Church of the Highlands in Birmingham, Alabama. “Highlands Growth Track is designed to help you become a fully-devoted follower of Jesus Christ. From the initial decision to find out more about the vision of Church of the Highlands, to a fulfilling leadership role on our team, we will provide you with a path to experience growth and fulfillment.”<sup>332</sup>

The Highlands growth track is comprised of four separate classes that can be taken in any order, with the goal of having everyone complete all four classes. The four classes are:

- Church 101 (First Sunday of every month)

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328. Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth*, 286.

329. Patrick, *Church Planter*, 79.

330. Hebrews 13:17

331. Lyle E. Schaller, *Assimilating New Members*, Creative leadership series (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1978), 16.

332. Church of the Highlands, “Highlands Growth Track,” in <https://www.arcchurches.com/launch/file-library?pagename=launchpercent2Ffile-library&folder=Growth+Track&sortdir=A>. Accessed November 18, 2019,

Become better acquainted with the story, vision and values of Church of the Highlands. Come to connect with others and have the opportunity to become a church member.

- Essentials 201 (Second Sunday of every month)  
Explore the essential tools and beliefs that produce a more meaningful relationship with Christ.
- Discovery 301 (Third Sunday of every month)  
Discover and understand how your personal and spiritual makeup reveals a path to your purpose. We believe God created every person with a specific plan for his or her life.
- Dream Team 401 (Fourth Sunday of every month)  
Find out more about the community, growth, and fulfillment that comes from being on the Dream Team.<sup>333</sup>

Each step leads people to additional steps and teams outside of the growth track. For instance, baptism has been incorporated into Church 101 of Highland's Growth Track, since "Baptism is a reason to celebrate! Not only does it signal a new fully developing follower of Jesus, it is also the culmination of your evangelism system."<sup>334</sup> Baptism connects them with a public declaration of their faith that is crucial for their assimilation process.

In referencing assimilation, Rainer wrote, "most churches are like poor relay teams. Instead of caring about the handoffs, they are preoccupied with the programs."<sup>335</sup> Growth Track only works when there are effective handoff systems to assimilate people into the church family. Thus, according to Rainer, "The vibrant churches we studied have a simple process that produces movement, a process that facilitates the handoffs. The programs in these churches are tools used to promote movement. The leaders focus on what happens in between the programs as much as

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333. Ibid.

334. Searcy and Henson, *Ignite*, 161.

335. Thom S. Rainer and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church: Returning to God's Process for Making Disciples* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 2006), 80.

they do the programs”<sup>336</sup> For Highlands, the ultimate goal of all assimilation is “to help you connect with a group of people where your life can touch the lives of others.”<sup>337</sup>

### *Discipleship*

The Great Commission gives special focus to the subject of discipleship. Jesus was clear, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations.”<sup>338</sup> Discipleship requires individual care and concerted effort. Patrick wrote, “The average pastor can shepherd about seventy-five people, which (not coincidentally) is roughly the average size of a church in North America. Therefore, unless you want a church of that size or less, you must learn how to set up systems that promote pastoral care in your local church.”<sup>339</sup> The discipleship and care of believers are serious matters. The book of Acts states, “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.”<sup>340</sup> Patrick described the shepherds role when he wrote, “A shepherd is, simply stated, a spiritual doctor. Shepherds care for the health of people's souls, just as doctors care for the health of people's bodies.”<sup>341</sup> The structure of the church cannot be just about reaching wide through evangelism, but a church has to grow deep through discipleship. Carl George described the church that is effective as one that looks like the first century church in Jerusalem. George

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336. Ibid., 81.

337. Church of the Highlands, “Highlands Growth Track,” June 14, 2019, accessed November 18, 2019, <https://www.arcchurches.com/launch/file-library?pagename=launch%2Ffile-library&folder=Growth+Track&sortdir=A>.

338. Matthew 28:19

339. Patrick, *Church Planter*, 85.

340. Acts 20:28

341. Patrick, *Church Planter*, 84.

described the church as, “large enough to win thousands but small enough to have a personal touch.”<sup>342</sup>

Churches must create a system that helps them have a personal touch and impact on each potential disciple. When referencing discipleship and pastoral care, Andy Stanley said: “Our entire ministry model is designed to move people into groups. We believe that circles are better than rows.”<sup>343</sup> Rainer added that, “churches with successful small groups tend to have strong leadership, organization, and accountability.”<sup>344</sup> According to Rainer, “To facilitate movement to small groups, small groups are promoted in the worship services.”<sup>345</sup> It is through small groups that churches can care and develop the individual into their God given potential.

Writing about the importance of groups Patrick commented that, “Good shepherds equip church members to shepherd one another in the context of small groups. The early church was made of smaller, missional house churches that we must mimic in the twenty-first century. The church must get smaller as it gets larger.”<sup>346</sup> According to ARC, “groups transfer the weight of pastoral care off the pastor and staff and to the church.”<sup>347</sup>

A transition in structure is necessary for the pastor to effectively disciple the church that grows beyond seventy-five people. Wagner described the role of a pastor of a growing church as a rancher instead of just a shepherd. He wrote: "It fits the bill perfectly. Notice that in a church

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342. Carl F. George, *Prepare Your Church for the Future* (Tarrytown, NY: F.H. Revell, 1991), 23.

343. Stanley, *Deep & Wide*, 134.

344. Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth*, 295.

345. Rainer and Geiger, *Simple Church*, 103.

346. Patrick, *Church Planter*, 86.

347. Association of Related Churches, “Completed ARC Manual” (PDF File, Birmingham, Alabama, June 16, 2019), accessed November 18, 2019, <https://arcchurches.com/>.

led by a rancher the sheep are still shepherded, but the rancher does not do it. The rancher sees that it is done by others."<sup>348</sup> When the shepherd becomes a rancher, the pastor is finding leaders to help disciple the church through the context of small groups. The rancher is still shepherding, but his focus becomes on shepherding the leaders as they shepherd the rest of the flock.

Small groups can also help with discipleship. Rainer wrote, "If Christians believe that most of the nation adheres to biblical beliefs, they are working under a false assumption. The sad truth is that Americans are generally ignorant of the Bible."<sup>349</sup> George Barna described the sad state of biblical involvement in America when he wrote, "One poll showed that, while 93 percent of Americans have a Bible in their home, only 12 percent of all adults read it daily."<sup>350</sup> Groups not only increase Bible knowledge but they also help cultivate generosity. Randy Alcorn stated that "it is impossible to become a fully devoted follower of Jesus without also becoming a fully devoted steward of your resources."<sup>351</sup>

### *Outreach*

Outreach is a common component of growing churches, so while "80 percent of fast-growing churches put 10 percent of their budgets toward outreach and evangelism, only 42.3 percent of churches that grew at slower rates committed this amount. Also, 63 percent of fast-growth churches raised additional funding; this compares dramatically to 23 percent of those that didn't

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348. George, *Prepare Your Church for the Future*, 23.

349. Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth*, 217.

350. George Barna, *The Frog in the Kettle: What Christians Need to Know about Life in the Year 2000* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1990), 118.

351. Searcy and Henson, *Maximize*, 223.

grow as fast.”<sup>352</sup> These statistics indicate the more investment a church makes in outreach into their communities, the more potential they have to grow and make an impact.

Serving the community is not just about having a new Sunday service for them to attend, but as the Apostle John wrote, “Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.”<sup>353</sup> Thus, “Being a blessing to the city means we take seriously the problems of the city. We most certainly need to be faithful to creeds that define historical orthodoxy, but we also need gospel-motivated deeds if we are to faithfully proclaim the gospel.”<sup>354</sup>

A church plant must understand that God’s mission is not just about people coming to church, but “churches that obey the Great Commission are ‘doing’ churches. They seek to find prospects rather than waiting for prospects to come to them.”<sup>355</sup> Hadaway wrote: “It is clear that breakout churches (and growing churches generally) tend to have a greater presence in their community. They are less inward looking and see the role of the church as helping people, whether they are members of their congregation or not.”<sup>356</sup>

Tony Morgan stated, “Maybe discipleship is really more about helping people serve God by serving others.”<sup>357</sup> Maturity happens when the church is on a mission to improve the community that it resides in. Dino Rizzo, Executive Director of ARC, wrote:

We may never know until we get to heaven how our service and simple acts of kindness have affected the course of a life, a community, or even a nation. If we do nothing, the result will be nothing! However, when we engage in a pursuit to serve others, and a

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352. Stetzer and Bird, *Viral Churches*, 3.

353. 2 John 3:18

354. Patrick, *Church Planter*, 234.

355. Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth*, 246.

356. Hadaway, *Church Growth Principles*, 169.

357. Tony Morgan, *The Unstuck Church: Equipping Churches to Experience Sustained Health* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2017), 84.

*servolution* is ignited to care for the hurting around us, we will witness the most amazing results. People will find hope and healing that can be found only in Jesus.<sup>358</sup>

The Pinetops Foundation reported that religious organizations have benefitted the U.S. economy \$1.2 trillion dollars annually.<sup>359</sup> Despite all of those resources, “62percent of the unaffiliated do not believe that houses of worship contribute to solving important social challenges.”<sup>360</sup> It is unfortunate that so many people do not see the impact that the local church is making to improve their community. Joshua Crossman added that, “The church should be famous for its radical care for the poor, and in doing so point people to Jesus.”<sup>361</sup>

### *Multiple Services and Multiple Sites*

Growing churches provide options for people to attend in the midst of their busy schedule. Joshua Crossman stressed the importance of options for church growth by saying, “multiple services are the best option.”<sup>362</sup> Adding options is important early on for multiple reasons. There is usually a shortage of space, people love options, and because of the intense focus for members to bring their friends and coworkers to church.

The overwhelming statistic is that churches begin to plateau in attendance by their fifteenth year.<sup>363</sup> To combat plateauing, church plants should be looking for innovative ways of

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358. Dino Rizzo, *Servolution: Starting a Church Revolution through Serving*, Leadership network innovation series (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 16.

359. Joshua Crossman, “The Great Opportunity,” Pinetops Foundation, 2018, 85, accessed September 4, 2019 <https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/4245467/The%20Great%20Opportunity.pdf>

360. *Ibid.*, 86.

361. *Ibid.*, 85.

362. Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth*, 275.

363. Stetzer and Bird, *Viral Churches*, 26.

reaching new people by adding different services or launching different locations. Ralph Moore challenged pastors by saying: “It’s time to stop counting converts and begin counting congregations.”<sup>364</sup> Each new service is a new opportunity for people to serve, attend, give and invite people into a relationship with Christ.

One of the notable trends in rapidly growing urban churches is the desire to create multiple locations throughout their metropolitan areas. Patrick wrote: “Gospel-centered, missional churches in the twenty-first century will imitate churches in the book of Acts by planting new churches wherever the Holy Spirit leads them.”<sup>365</sup> Geoff Surrat, author of *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*, reported in 2006 that the estimated number of multi-site churches across America was 1,500 and by 2012 the number is well beyond 8,000.<sup>366</sup> Currently, over five million people attend a multisite church across America every week.<sup>367</sup> Authors David D’Angelo and Ryan Stigile, wrote “A well-developed multi-site church is situated to lead more people in more places to a relationship with Jesus.”<sup>368</sup> If a church desires to reach more people, they should find ways to multiply their congregation within their community.

Church planters who desire to grow in urban communities need to explore the world of multi-site. This is a mindset shift from traditional church plants. The strategy, when planting a church, is multiplication instead of addition, and “Leadership sets the tone and pace for any

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364. Ibid., 42.

365. Patrick, *Church Planter*, 189.

366. Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon, and Warren Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution: Being One Church--in Many Locations*, The Leadership Network Innovation Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 18.

367. Jim Tomberlin, “Trends in the Multisite Movement,” September 9, 2019, accessed January 30, 2020, <https://outreachmagazine.com/features/megachurch/46547-trends-in-the-multisite-movement.html>.

368. D’Angelo and Stigile, *Multisite Church Pitfalls: 7 Dangers You Cannot Afford to Ignore*. Kindle edition. 2016 51.



organization.”<sup>369</sup> As a church planter, it is important to come up with a strategy to not only grow large, but also grow wide into different communities in these large metropolitan areas. Jim Tomberlin, author of *Church Locality: New Rules for Church Buildings in a Multisite, Church Planting, and Giga-Church*, encouraged churches to scout the right location in the right community. He said, “people no longer naturally gravitate towards the church campus, so the church must go to the people.”<sup>370</sup> He added: “Megachurches have shifted their philosophy from building bigger and bigger to spreading further and further.”<sup>371</sup>

One of the benefits of a multi-site church is that new communities can be reached with the gospel. “The core of the multi-site concept is that a church must reverse the flow. Instead of drawing people to the church, take the church into their world.”<sup>372</sup> Willow Creek Community Church in Chicago started its second venue in response to the fact that “one-third of Willow Creek attendees were driving over half an hour to attend a Sunday morning experience; yet, because of the distance these people were not able to get plugged into other ministries of the church.”<sup>373</sup> Jim Tomberlin explained the 30-minute problem as “Once people drive more than 30 minutes one way to church, their investment drops off dramatically.”<sup>374</sup>

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369. Ibid, 18.

370. Jim Tomberlin and Tim Cool, *Church Locality: New Rules for Church Buildings in a Multisite, Church Planting, and Giga-Church World* (no place: Rainer Publishing, 2014), 82.

371. Ibid., 23.

372. Cathy Lynn Grossman, “New Face of Evangelism: 1 Church, Multiple Sites,” in <https://seu.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=J0E226804040809&site=ehost-live&scope=site>. Accessed November 2, 2017.

373. Bob Smietana, “High-Tech Circuit Riders,” *Christianity Today* 49, no. 9 (September 2005): 4.

374. Ibid.

The convenience of a church being moved into local neighborhoods is becoming the trend because of the multi-site movement. In the same way, people want a local McDonalds, Publix, Wal-Mart and other franchises, “inherent in this thinking is that like a franchise, a church provides goods and services. People expect churches to offer franchises close to where they live and work.”<sup>375</sup> If leadership can discover these prime locations, the church can grow to best reach these communities.

### *Conclusion*

There has been tremendous focus in both the scriptures and current literature on the importance of church planting within the goal of obeying the Great Commission. House and Allison wrote, “The single most effective method for fulfilling the Great Commission that Jesus gave us is to plant new churches who in turn reproduce themselves.”<sup>376</sup> While the populations of the urban areas are increasing, the solution is to plant healthy local churches that can best serve the needs of their respective communities. Patrick asked the questions, “What if our cities were littered with new churches in every neighborhood? What if pastors actually put the gospel and the church above their comfort, ego and preference?”<sup>377</sup> According to the literature that has been evaluated in this chapter, the answer would be that God’s kingdom would advance.

The cost is substantial if more churches are not planted. The statistics reveal that “churches are the primary way the unaffiliated are introduced to Christ. As early as the Book of Acts, we see bodies of new believers reaching their neighborhoods in word and deed and sending

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375. Brad House and Gregg R Allison, *MultiChurch: Exploring the Future of Multisite*, 2017, 37.

376. Stetzer and Bird, *Viral Churches*, 16.

377. Patrick, *Church Planter*, 236.

out missionaries to plant new churches.”<sup>378</sup> In chapter three, I will provide qualitative data on churches that have launched in the last decade in some of the fastest growing metropolitan areas of America. These churches are seeing rapid life change and there is a great deal to learn from each of them.

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378. Joshua Crossman, “The Great Opportunity,” Pinetops Foundation, 2018, 32, accessed September 4, 2019 <https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/4245467/The%20Great%20Opportunity.pdf>

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE PROJECT NARRATIVE & FIELD WORK

Five churches from five metropolitan areas were studied in this project. All five of these churches have an average Sunday attendance in excess of 1,000 people, and three of the churches are operating in multiple locations. The history of each church and its pastor will be provided. These churches are one of many church plants that have been launched into these communities over the past decade, but my connection with the churches that will be evaluated is through my involvement in ARC and CMN.

The churches were chosen because of their rapid growth and because of the rapid growth of the metropolitan areas they were planted in. Each metropolitan area is rapidly growing and is among the top ten fastest growing cities, as noted by the 2018 census bureau. Each of these metropolitan areas will be evaluated based on the previous decade of growth and identify many of the key reasons for the growth in population. Each metropolitan area has been chosen not just because of their historic growth, but also because of their projected growth.

Each of these metropolitan areas is not only dealing with a rise in population, but also, as shown later, each is dealing with a decline in church attendance. A brief overview of each church history and attendance will be presented. The statistics given in this chapter can be sobering, especially in relation to the large population growth.

#### *Limitations*

There are numerous limitations associated with this research and with the interviews of the five church planters. The research will be qualitative in measure, and the goal is to uncover common

themes that have attributed to church growth among the various church plants and church planters. Each of these church plants were chosen because they have seen rapid and exponential numerical growth. It is important to note that rapid growth does not necessarily translate to church health, as growth in attendance is not exclusively indicative of spiritual growth.

Numerical growth was used to identify each of these churches because their metropolitan areas were also rapidly growing. As seen in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, the book of Acts refers to the numerical growth of the church in several places. The assumption is that each of these churches is not driven by the desire for numerical growth, but numerical growth is often the by-product of the Spirit's work and the health of the church.

The pastors were all interviewed by telephone. Each interview lasted between forty-five to ninety minutes. Each pastor received questions at least twenty-four hours prior to the interview, and each was told they were selected because of their rapid church growth over such a short period of time. The questions asked were simply to help guide the conversation. Much of the content and themes that emerged came from the pastors expounding beyond the questions that were asked.

The following sections provide an overview of the respective church plants I have studied, as well as background information regarding the metropolitan areas in which they reside. The census data for each metropolitan area is explained in each section. These metropolitan areas are projected to continue to grow for years and decades to come. The church attendance rate for the five metropolitan communities selected were evaluated and listed in the sections below. After each community is evaluated, the chosen church plant and church planter will be discussed. Each church planter is given a short biography and the story of how their church was planted. Many of the details about the church plant were pulled through thorough

research and data generated through interviews. The details and attributing factors of church growth for each church planter will be found in Chapter 4.

#### *Action Church- Orlando, Florida*

I conducted an interview on September 9, 2019 with Justin Dailey from Action Church. Action Church was planted by Justin and Stefanie Dailey on January 26th, 2014 in the greater Orlando area. In the following sections I will outline the current growth and changes happening in the Metropolitan area of Orlando, and then I will provide details about the ministry of Action Church I discovered in the phone interview with Pastor Justin.

#### *Orlando Metropolitan Area*

In less than ten years, the Greater Orlando area has grown by over 400,000 residents. According to new U.S. Census Bureau reports released in April 2019, Orlando has grown from 2,134,402 in 2010 to 2,562,962 in 2018.<sup>379</sup> The growth has accelerated throughout the years, with over 60,000 residents moving into Orlando between 2017 and 2018.<sup>380</sup>

The growth in Orlando has been caused by multiple factors. One of those factors is the large migration of Puerto Ricans to the Orlando area. According to Pew Research, “Puerto Ricans have primarily settled in Florida’s largest metro areas, with Orlando leading the way. In 2013, the Orlando-Kissimmee-Sanford metro region had the highest number of Puerto Ricans in the state, at 314,000. That figure was up by 41,000 (15%) over the previous year, the largest

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379. “Counties in South and West Lead Nation in Population Growth,” *The United States Census Bureau* in <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2019/estimates-county-metro.htm>. Accessed November 18, 2019.

380. “Central Florida Cities among Fastest Growing in US” in <https://apnews.com/25fe6d1f5afd4024a8f3c1239bab63d0>. Accessed November 18, 2019.

increase by number of any Florida metro area.”<sup>381</sup> The surge of Puerto Ricans moving to Orlando continued after Hurricane Maria devastated the island of Puerto Rico.<sup>382</sup> The growth in Orlando shows no sign of stopping. A report from the Orlando Economic Partnership predicts that “the 2030 reports projects Central Florida will add roughly 1,500 people per week, buoying the population to over 5.2 million residents.”<sup>383</sup>

The surge in residents moving into Orlando creates a vast array of issues, most notably is the lack of affordable housing. Xander Peters wrote: “The Orlando metro area currently has only thirteen affordable and available rental homes for every 100 extremely low-income renter households.”<sup>384</sup> Housing is not the only concern. Human trafficking is widespread throughout the Orlando area. According to a 2016 report from the National Human Trafficking Hotline, Orlando was in the top three cities in America for calls related to human trafficking.<sup>385</sup>

Furthermore, church attendance in Orlando is on the decline. According to Barna, 51 percent of the greater Orlando region population does not attend church. In 2017, Orlando ranked ninth out of the top ten most unchurched cities in America.<sup>386</sup> Two years prior it had been ranked

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381. Jens Manuel Krogstad, "In a Shift away from New York, more Puerto Ricans Head to Florida" in <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/10/30/in-a-shift-away-from-new-york-more-puerto-ricans-head-to-florida/>. Accessed February 28, 2020,

382. “Central Florida Cities among Fastest Growing in US” in <https://apnews.com/25fe6d1f5afd4024a8f3c1239bab63d0>. Accessed November 18, 2019.

383. Xander Peters, “More than 5.2 Million People Will Call Central Florida Home in 2030, Report Estimates,” *Orlando Weekly* in <https://www.orlandoweekly.com/Blogs/archives/2019/03/30/more-than-52-million-people-will-call-central-florida-home-in-2030-report-estimates>. Accessed November 18, 2019.

384. *Ibid.*

385. Kate Santich, “Orlando 3rd in Nation for Human-Trafficking Calls,” *Orlandosentinel.Com*, accessed February 28, 2020, <https://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/os-orlando-third-nationally-human-trafficking-20170927-story.html>.

386. What Are the Most Churched Cities in America? | Facts and Trends-Praying for the millennials says, “What Are the Most Churched (and Unchurched) Cities in America?,” *Facts & Trends*, last modified August 23, 2017, accessed November 18, 2019, <https://factsandtrends.net/2017/08/23/churched-unchurched-cities-america/>.

twenty-second, with 43 percent of the population not attending church.<sup>387</sup> That is a drastic decline in church attendance in just two years. According to Barna, “Unchurched adults have not attended a church service, except for a holiday or special occasion, at any time within the past six months.”<sup>388</sup> “Dechurched” is a term also used to describe people within a city that do not attend a local church. According to Barna, “dechurched” “make up 34 percent of the American population. Like the rest of the unchurched, the “dechurched” haven’t attended a church service in the past six months, but previously they were at least minimally active in a local congregation.”<sup>389</sup> The national average is well below the Orlando average. “Among the general U.S. population, twenty nine percent are considered ‘dechurched’ and nine percent are never churched, for a combined total of thirty-eight percent unchurched.”<sup>390</sup> Orlando exceeds the national dechurched number with forty-three percent of the population classified as dechurched.<sup>391</sup>

### *Justin Dailey and Action Church*

Pastor Justin received his ministry training at Highlands College, in Birmingham, Alabama. Highlands College is a ministry of Church of the Highlands, one of the founding churches of ARC. Justin has a Bachelors degree in Theology from Faith Christian University, and currently

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387. “Churchless Cities: Where Does Your City Rank?,” *Barna Group*, accessed November 18, 2019, <https://www.barna.com/research/churchless-cities-where-does-your-city-rank/>.

388. “Churchless Cities: Where Does Your City Rank?,” *Barna Group*, accessed February 25, 2020, <https://www.barna.com/research/churchless-cities-where-does-your-city-rank/>.

389. Facts and says, “What Are the Most Churched (and Unchurched) Cities in America?”

390. “Churchless Cities: Where Does Your City Rank?,” *Barna Group*, accessed February 25, 2020, <https://www.barna.com/research/churchless-cities-where-does-your-city-rank/>.

391. “Churchless Cities: Where Does Your City Rank?,” *Barna Group*, accessed February 25, 2020, <https://www.barna.com/research/churchless-cities-where-does-your-city-rank/>.



holds pastoral credentials through Action Church. Pastor Justin got his start in ministry at Bayside Community Church in Bradenton, Florida under the leadership of Randy Bezet. According to the Pastor Justin’s bio “In early 2012, while attending Hillsong Conference, Pastor Justin felt a clear call to plant Action Church. After a visit to the Winter Springs area with his wife Stefanie, they both felt a strong, supernatural love for the city and knew they had found their home. He partnered with the Association of Related Churches (ARC), and on January 26th, 2014, with over 700 people in attendance, Action Church was born.<sup>392</sup>

The interview with Pastor Justin took place on September 9, 2019. During the interview, he mentioned, “we moved to Winter Springs in August of 2013 without knowing anyone in the city.”<sup>393</sup> According to the United States Census Bureau, Winter Springs is a city of 37,321 residents within the greater Orlando Metropolitan area.<sup>394</sup> Justin moved with his family, along with thirty other people he recruited from previous churches he had pastored to assist with the incredible opportunity of planting a new church in a needy, dechurched city.

For six months, Pastor Dailey worked at building his launch team, which grew from thirty to eighty-two before the grand opening of Action Church.<sup>395</sup> Their prelaunch season was a mix of launch team meetings, startup parties, serving in the local school, and according to Justin, they “leaned into any relationship that would help them serve their city.”<sup>396</sup> From the beginning, Justin believed he would lead a thriving church. He reinforced this idea by saying, “I was not

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392. “Our Pastor,” *The Action Church*, accessed November 19, 2019, <https://www.theactionchurch.com/pastor-justin-dailey>.

393. Justin Dailey, “Action Church Interview,” phone interview, September 9, 2019.

394. “U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Seminole County, Florida; Florida,” accessed February 28, 2020, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/winterspringscityflorida,seminolecountyflorida,FL/PST045219>.

395. Dailey, *op. cit.*

396. Dailey, “Action Church Interview.” Phone Call, September 9, 2019.

created to lead something small. I came here to change a city. I kept casting vision for a church of over 1,000 to a group of people who were under forty in total attendance.”<sup>397</sup>

On Action Church’s first official Sunday, 796 people attended and twenty-two people made decisions for Christ.<sup>398</sup> Justin was transparent about the sharp drop in attendance that followed his first public service. Although there were 796 people at the launch, it quickly dropped 251 people within a few weeks. Pastor Justin and the Action Church team took an aggressive approach strategy, which I will outline in Chapter 4, in order to build up their attendance numbers, and by Easter of 2014 they had 500 people in attendance.<sup>399</sup>

Action Church has grown consistently and rapidly since their first Easter in 2014. We [Action Church] launched two services in August of 2014 and started to average 575 in attendance. We did a big marketing push for our one-year anniversary and had 904 people in attendance on our anniversary service. We did another big marketing deal for Easter and broke 2,000 in attendance, but after Easter of 2015 we went down to 1200 as an average attendance. On the second anniversary, January 2016, we hit an attendance record of 1,800 people and stayed there throughout most of the year. In 2017 we launched our third location and the following year we were recognized as the second fastest growing church in America. We were running low three thousands by the end of 2017. By the end of 2018 we had launched our fourth location and we were consistently running 4,000 in attendance. We are now running 4,800 in attendance.<sup>400</sup>

Action Church has been recognized as one of the fastest growing churches in America for the past four years in a row. In 2016, Action Church was identified as the nineteenth fastest growing church. Attendance grew by 75 percent (533 attenders) in a single year.<sup>401</sup> In 2017,

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397. Ibid.

398. Ibid.

399. Ibid.

400. Ibid.

401. Anonymous, “2016\_Outreach100-Summary.Pdf,” [http://www.outreachmagazine.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/2016\\_Outreach100-Summary.pdf](http://www.outreachmagazine.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/2016_Outreach100-Summary.pdf). Accessed November 19, 2019.

Action Church was again identified as the nineteenth fastest growing church with an attendance jump of 519 people.<sup>402</sup> In 2018, Action Church jumped to second place on *Outreach Magazine's* list of fastest growing churches. Action Church grew by 1,529 attenders at a growth rate of 84 percent.<sup>403</sup> In 2019, Action Church showed incredible growth yet again with 30 percent growth, adding 987 people to their weekly Sunday services. Action Church was labeled the eighth fastest growing church in America in 2019.<sup>404</sup>

The growth at Action Church has been incredible, which makes it worth researching. Like all churches, Action Church has faced major obstacles throughout its early years. Justin talked about these obstacles saying, “I had so much to do and so little structure. Coming from a mega-church, where I had staff, systems, and plenty of structure, to planting a church, I had so much to do. But not knowing anyone in the city it felt like I didn’t know what to do, or where to start. It developed within me a passion for prayer when I didn’t know what else to do, and forced me to focus on building one day at a time.”<sup>405</sup> Since those early days Pastor Justin has created strategies and systems to sustain rapid growth. I will also evaluate these strategies in Chapter 4. The goal for launching Action Church was never to have large numbers, but to have real life-change. As of November 2019, Action Church has seen 7,957 people make decisions for Christ since their first public service.<sup>406</sup>

#### *New Hope Church- Seattle, Washington*

I conducted an interview on September 4, 2019 with Jeffery Portman from New Hope Church. New Hope Church was planted by Jeffery and Joanne Portman in 2013 in the greater Seattle area. In the following sections I will outline the current growth and changes happening in the

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402. “Outreach 100: 2017 Fastest-Growing Churches in America” in <https://outreach100.com/fastest-growing-churches-in-america/2017>. Accessed November 19, 2019.

403. Outreach Magazine, “Outreach Magazine Celebrates America’s Fastest-Growing Churches,” *OutreachMagazine.Com*. <https://outreachmagazine.com/features/megachurch/36058-outreach-magazine-celebrates-americas-fastest-growing-churches.html>. Accessed November 19, 2019.

404. “Outreach 100: Action Church” in <https://outreach100.com/churches/action-church>. Accessed November 19, 2019.

406. Dailey, “Action Church Interview.” Phone Call, September 9, 2019.

Metropolitan area of Seattle, and then I will provide details about the ministry of New Hope Church I discovered in the phone interview with Pastor Jeffery.

### *Seattle Metropolitan Area*

The Seattle metropolitan area is ranked sixth nationwide in population growth. Between 2017 and 2018 the Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue area grew from 3,884,469 to 3,939,363, an increase of 54,894 residents.<sup>407</sup> The population of King County alone increased by nearly 29,000 residents over that one-year time span. According to Patch media, “King County placed first for numerical growth in Washington, and sixth place for numeric growth nationwide between 2017 and 2018.”<sup>408</sup> The rapid growth during this time is similar to the years prior. The metro area has had consistent growth from 2010, with an overall increase of 499,558 residents.

According to the census data, there has been a net increase of 220,000 jobs in Seattle during the last decade, fueling a remarkable increase in the population.<sup>409</sup> The growth in the population is unique to Seattle because, according to the Seattle Times, “Seattle is the only metro area outside of the Sunbelt that had more people move in from other parts of the country than move away.”<sup>410</sup> The influx of international migration also helped in the growth of Seattle. Last year over 21,000 residents moved into the Seattle area from outside of the United States.

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407. “Counties in South and West Lead Nation in Population Growth,” *The United States Census Bureau* in <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2019/estimates-county-metro.htm>. Accessed November 18, 2019.

408. Travis Loose, “Seattle-Tacoma Metro Growth Ranks 6th Nationwide: Census,” *Seattle, WA Patch*, last modified April 21, 2019, accessed November 19, 2019, <https://patch.com/washington/seattle/seattle-tacoma-metro-growth-ranks-6th-nationwide-census>.

409. Gene Balk / FYI Guy, “Seattle Just One of 5 Big Metros Last Year That Had More People Move Here than Leave, Census Data Show,” *The Seattle Times*, last modified March 26, 2018, <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/data/seattle-just-one-of-5-big-metros-last-year-that-had-more-people-move-here-than-leave-census-data-show/>. Accessed November 19, 2019.

410. *Ibid.*

“Almost half of King County’s growth since 2010 is made up of people born outside of the United States.”<sup>411</sup> The top three countries where people are migrating from are India, China, and Mexico.

Religion in the state of Washington has been steadily declining. *Seattle Times* columnist, Gene Balk, wrote, “Ever since pollsters began asking Americans about their faith, Washington has ranked among the less-religious states in the country. But Washington has never been as secular as it is right now. A record number of state residents did not identify with any religion in 2017, according to polling giant Gallup. Forty-seven percent of adults in the state say they are not religious, and seldom or never attend services.”<sup>412</sup> The statistics for those younger than thirty years old are even more drastic. Only 28 percent in this age group consider themselves to be very religious, compared with 47 percent of those aged sixty-five and older.<sup>413</sup> Balk wrote, “It’s possible that the influx of young newcomers to Seattle area is the driving force behind the change in Washington’s numbers.”<sup>414</sup>

In 2015, Seattle ranked as the second most unchurched city in America, trailing only San Francisco, with only 52 percent of the population claiming to be Christian.<sup>415</sup> According to Pew research, 37 percent of people from Seattle, identify as having no connection with religion. They

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411. Gene Balk / FYI Guy, “New Milestone in King County: Immigrant Population Tops 500,000,” *The Seattle Times*, last modified January 14, 2019, accessed March 5, 2020, <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/data/new-milestone-in-king-county-immigrant-population-tops-500000/>.

412. Gene Balk / FYI Guy, “Washingtonians Are Less Religious than Ever, Gallup Poll Finds,” *The Seattle Times*, last modified April 20, 2018, <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/data/washingtonians-are-less-religious-than-ever-gallup-poll-finds/>. Accessed November 19, 2019.

413. *Ibid.*

414. *Ibid.*

415. Michael Lipka, “Major U.S. Metropolitan Areas Differ in Their Religious Profiles,” *Pew Research Center* in <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/07/29/major-u-s-metropolitan-areas-differ-in-their-religious-profiles/>. Accessed November 19, 2019.

are classified as “nones.”<sup>416</sup> Seattle has the largest population of religious “nones” in America. Pew Research reported, 10 percent of Seattle residents self-identify as atheist, while 6 percent are agnostics. In a poll that targeted frequency of prayer, scripture study, or religious education in adults in the Seattle metro area, only 18 percent answered that they participate in any of those areas every week. Sixty-six percent responded that they seldom or never pray or read the scriptures.<sup>417</sup>

### *Jeffery Portman and New Hope Church*

The Portman family moved to Puyallup in July of 2013 with the vision of starting a church that would present hope and develop people. Pastor Jeffery and Joanne were high school sweethearts and have been married for over 30 years. They are both life-long learners, as Jeffery has a Doctorate of Ministry degree from the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, Missouri, and Joanne is working on a PhD. in Education. Jeffery is ordained with the Assemblies of God, and has been credentialed through the North West Ministry Network since 1993.

During the interview, Jeffery explained that he moved into the Puyallup area “without knowing anyone.”<sup>418</sup> Puyallup is a city with a population of 41,886 and is part of the greater Seattle Metropolitan area.<sup>419</sup> Jeffery and his wife Joanne were in youth ministry for sixteen years,

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416. Ibid.

417. Michael Lipka, “Adults in the Seattle Metro Area - Religion in America: U.S. Religious Data, Demographics and Statistics,” *Pew Research Center’s Religion & Public Life Project*, 2019, <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/>. Accessed November 19.

418. Jeffery Portman, “New Hope Church Interview,” phone Call, September 4, 2019.

419. “Puyallup, Washington,” *Wikipedia*, November 13, in 2019 [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Puyallup,\\_Washington&oldid=926041746](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Puyallup,_Washington&oldid=926041746). Accessed November 19, 2019.

and served as the District Youth Directors for the Northwest Ministry Network of the Assemblies of God before receiving a call from God to plant a church that would multiply throughout Seattle.<sup>420</sup> Jeffery said, “From the very beginning our dream was to plant five churches in five years.”<sup>421</sup> What inspired Jeffery to move his family to this community was “the lost-ness of the community. This community needs the gospel. Only 10 percent of the people in the area we are in go to church.”<sup>422</sup> Not only was the need high, but Jeffery and his family also fit the demographic of the community, such as medium age and education. In spite of the good fit, the decision to move was a challenging one that would require faith. Jeffery said, “you can be comfortable or you can be obedient.”<sup>423</sup> He and Joanne chose to be obedient and go where it has been difficult.

The season before launching New Hope Church was extremely difficult for Jeffery. He said, “I was the full-time church planting director at the NW Ministry Network, recruiting and developing our New Hope team, while finishing my doctorate, relocating our family, and traveling to raise funds for the launch. My commute for one year was over an hour each way. It felt like I had two-and-a-half jobs with only the energy to do one of them.”<sup>424</sup>

After nine months of planning, team building and fund raising, New Hope Church launched in a movie theater in April 2014. Jeffery remarked that it was “a miracle to have 365 people attend the first service in this dechurched community.”<sup>425</sup> The total launch budget was

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420. Portman, “New Hope Church Interview”, phone Call, September 4, 2019.

421. Ibid.

422. Ibid.

423. Ibid.

424. Ibid.

425. Ibid.

\$200,000. After the launch the church settled at 215 people. Because of the vision for multiplication, Jeffery launched a second campus at a coffee shop ten months into the church's existence.<sup>426</sup> He said, "we drained the account in order to launch our second location, but it was important to set a precedent that we are a multiplying church."<sup>427</sup>

New Hope has experienced both seasons of rapid growth as well as seasons of plateaus during the last five years. According to Jeffery, "we grew substantially in our first year and then it completely stalled in year two. During year two we worked hard at developing additional teams and adding locations, which resulted in great growth in year number three. We currently have three buildings that we own and have launched five locations within five years. The church has doubled in the last year and we have hit over 1000 in weekly attendance."<sup>428</sup> Each location is under the direct supervision of a site pastor who reports directly to Pastor Jeffery. The preaching at New Hope Church is unique in that the church has multiple locations, and they do not use video teaching. New Hope Church has a teaching team that collaborates on Sunday messages. There is a common theme across all locations, including the Spanish location, but each message is preached from the perspective of the campus pastor.

#### *Faith Family Church- Houston, Texas*

I conducted an interview on October 4, 2019 with Josh Joines from Faith Family Church. Faith Family Church was planted by Josh and Kara Joines in Baytown, Texas. Baytown is a city within the greater Houston area. In the following sections I will outline the current growth and changes

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426. Ibid.

427. Ibid.

428. Ibid.



happening in the Metropolitan area of Houston, and then I will provide details about the ministry of Faith family church I discovered in the phone interview with Pastor Justin.

### *Houston Metropolitan Area*

The Houston metropolitan area has been surging in population since 2010. According to the Census Bureau, the Houston Metropolitan ranked third in growth nationwide from 2017 to 2018. In 2017, Houston had 6,905,695 residents, and in 2018 that number had grown by 91,689 to 6,997,384.<sup>429</sup> Since 2010, “The Houston Metro area has added more than one million people to its population, growing at a rate of 18.2 percent.”<sup>430</sup>

The projections for Houston’s future population are aggressive. The metro area has the potential to add millions of residents who will need to find a healthy church. According to projections from METRO Next, “Greater Houston’s population will surpass ten million by the year 2040, up from roughly seven million today.”<sup>431</sup> The growth in Houston is not all migration and job growth. Houston is adding 60,000 residents a year just because of high birth rates, which far exceed the death rate.<sup>432</sup> The church has a great opportunity to reach the next generation in the Houston metropolitan area.

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429. “Counties in South and West Lead Nation in Population Growth,” *The United States Census Bureau* in <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2019/estimates-county-metro.htm>. Accessed November 18, 2019.

430. “Population Growth | Houston.Org” in <https://www.houston.org/houston-data/population-growth>. Accessed November 19, 2019

431. Ortiz Alvaro “Al,” “If Houston’s Population Projections Are Correct, Where Are We Going to Put Everyone?,” *Houston Public Media*, last modified October 18, 2018 in <https://www.houstonpublicmedia.org/articles/shows/houston-matters/2018/10/18/308489/if-houstons-population-projections-are-correct-where-are-we-going-to-put-everyone/>. Accessed November 19, 2019.

432. Ibid.

Houston also has a mixed blend of religious adherents. It is considered, “The megachurch capital of the country”<sup>433</sup> and despite all the great churches in the city, church attendance is struggling. According to the Kinder Houston Area Survey, “Regular religious service attendance in Houston has been on a steady decline since 2009, when 64 percent of Houston-area residents said they had attended services in the last month.”<sup>434</sup> Seven years later, the number of Houston-area residents that said they had attended a religious service in the last month was only 45 percent.<sup>435</sup> The rate of Houstonians who identify as “nones” has tripled since 1982, and now stands at 18 percent of the population.<sup>436</sup> The rise in the nonreligious is partly because Houston is considered, “the youngest in the nation. Thirty-six percent of metro area residents are under the age of twenty-five and the largest percent of adults (15.1 percent) are age twenty-five to thirty-four.”<sup>437</sup>

### *Josh Joines and Faith Family Church*

Pastor Josh started his ministry training at Texas Bible Institute, a small Bible College, and then received a Bachelor's in Theology from International Seminary. He is ordained through Faith Family Church. Pastor Josh grew up in Baytown but never imagined he would plant a church in

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433. “In Houston, the Land of Megachurches, Religious Service Attendance Declines,” *The Kinder Institute for Urban Research* in <https://kinder.rice.edu/2016/04/25/in-houston-the-land-of-megachurches-fewer-people-attending-religious-services>. Accessed November 19, 2019.

434. “In Houston, the Land of Megachurches, Religious Service Attendance Declines,” *The Kinder Institute for Urban Research*, accessed February 26, 2020, <https://kinder.rice.edu/2016/04/25/in-houston-the-land-of-megachurches-fewer-people-attending-religious-services>.

435. Ibid.

436. Ibid.

437. “Houston Still Most Diverse City in the Nation, Report Finds” in <https://www.houston.org/news/houston-still-most-diverse-city-nation-report-finds>. Accessed November 19, 2019.

that community. He described the journey of church planting by saying, “In January of 2013, Kara and I heard God speak to our hearts about planting a life-giving church that would teach people how to honor God and build lives that reflect His goodness to the world. In October 2013, we attended an intensive training and screening process with the Association of Related Churches in Birmingham, AL, also known as the ARC .”<sup>438</sup>

During our interview, Josh expressed his frustration with the churches he has attended in the Baytown. His concern is that they did not “reach my friends from high school.”<sup>439</sup> He could not find a healthy, attractational and/or missional church that would impact people like “my brother, who is a mess and isn’t being reached.”<sup>440</sup> It was out of that compelling passion that Josh moved his family to the Baytown area, working for eleven months before launching the church. Twenty-seven people showed up to the very first interest meeting and that team grew to over 100 adults before the church launched.<sup>441</sup> The prelaunch season was extremely challenging for Pastor Josh and the launch team. He said, “I had so many struggles before launch. One major struggle was finding a venue. Being told ‘no; four times wasn’t easy to hear. The fifth venue I approached was the charm.”<sup>442</sup> Josh launched the church in Ross Sterling High School, in the center of the city, where it has continued to meet for the past five years.

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438. “Faith Family Church - Our Pastors,” accessed November 19, 2019, <https://myfaithfamily.org/our-pastors>.

439. Josh Joines, “Faith Family Church Interview,” phone call, October 4, 2019.

440. Ibid.

441. Ibid.

442. Ibid.

At the grand opening of Faith Family Church, 603 people showed up. Josh attributes the great turnout to a combination of “word-of-mouth advertising, and effective marketing.”<sup>443</sup> The church’s lowest attendance happened three weeks later, with 450 people attending. Josh said that people were so “impressed by the excellence in the church that very few left after the launch.”<sup>444</sup> Faith Family Church has experienced rapid growth. The church had 1,600 in attendance at their first Easter service, at which time they commenced with two services. The church continued to grow, and expanded to three services the following Easter. Five years later, the church is running 2,300 attendees every Sunday, and now is in the midst of a massive building project, at a projected cost of 18.5 million dollars. The church has raised 7.5 million dollars, which has far exceeded Pastor Josh’s expectation for a five-year old church plant.<sup>445</sup>

*Citizens Church- Riverside/San Bernardino, California*

I conducted an interview on September 10, 2019 with Chris Norman from Citizens Church.

Citizens Church was planted by Chris and Tatum Norman on January 19th, 2014 in Redlands, California. Redlands is a city of 71,586 on the east side of San Bernardino metropolitan area.<sup>446</sup>

In the following sections I will outline the current growth and changes happening in the Metropolitan area of Riverside/ San Bernardino, and then I will provide details about the ministry of Citizens Church I discovered in the phone interview with Pastor Chris.

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443. Ibid.

444. Ibid.

445. Ibid.

446. “Redlands, California,” *Wikipedia*, November 12, 2019 in [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Redlands,\\_California&oldid=925859436](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Redlands,_California&oldid=925859436). Accessed November 19, 2019.

### *Riverside and San Bernardino Metropolitan Area*

The Riverside and San Bernardino metropolitan area is home to 4,622,361 residents. According to the Census Bureau, this metropolitan area has grown by 51,934 people from 2017 to 2018, and the area is ranked as the eighth fastest growing metropolitan area in America.<sup>447</sup> The Riverside-San Bernardino area has been on a rapid growth trend for the past twenty years. The population grew from 3,244,000 in 2000 to 4,225,000 in 2010, a growth rate of 30 percent.<sup>448</sup> A majority of the growth is from those moving out of the Los Angeles metropolitan area in an attempt to look for “new housing options, jobs, and entertainment.” According to *The Sun*, “Riverside has made it easier to add residential living in the downtown area, a move that attracts younger people looking for areas where they can live and work.”<sup>449</sup> The projections for San Bernardino metropolitan area is astounding. By 2046, this metropolitan area will be ranked as one of the top ten regions in the United States and second in all of California with an estimated 7.2 million residents.<sup>450</sup>

Religious adherents in the Riverside-San Bernardino area are lower than the rest of California. Only 40.6 percent of the area identifies as religious, while the state average is

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447. US Census Bureau, “Counties in South and West Lead Nation in Population Growth,” *The United States Census Bureau*, accessed November 19, 2019, <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2019/estimates-county-metro.html>.

448. “Population Dispersion Continues in Riverside-San Bernardino, San Diego and Sacramento | Newgeography.Com” in <https://www.newgeography.com/content/002103-population-dispersion-continues-riverside-san-bernardino-san-diego-and-sacramento>. Accessed November 19, 2019.

449. “The Inland Empire Population Will Grow by This Much over the next 30 Years,” *San Bernardino Sun*, May 21, 2017 in <http://www.sbsun.com/social-affairs/20170521/the-inland-empire-population-will-grow-by-this-much-over-the-next-30-years>. Accessed November 19, 2019.

450. *Ibid.*

45.8percent.<sup>451</sup> A majority of the residents that identify as religious are Roman Catholic. According the *Official Catholic Directory*, more than 22,000 new Catholics moved into the Riverside-San Bernardino area during 2018. The report noted, “Factors that continue to drive general population growth in San Bernardino and Riverside counties – affordable housing, new construction, economic growth – would partly explain the growth of the Catholic community.”<sup>452</sup>

The metropolitan area has faced some traumatic events over the last few years that brought on national attention. The Inland Empire was the target of a domestic terror attack in 2015. The attack happened December 2, 2015 at an office holiday party, when Syed Rizwan Farook and Tashfeen Malik opened fire on a group of 100 partygoers. Fourteen people were killed, and twenty-two were injured.<sup>453</sup> The result of the attack was that “nationwide, hate crimes against Muslims were up,”<sup>454</sup> and the religious climate in the metropolitan area was tense. This tension not only created problems for the Muslim community, but also instilled fear about gathering in local Christian churches, based on safety concerns.

Twenty-five percent of the metropolitan area residents are religiously unaffiliated (“nones”).<sup>455</sup> The Pew Research shows only thirty-four percent of the Riverside-San Bernardino

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451. “San Bernardino, California Religion,” *Https://Www.Bestplaces.Net* in [https://www.bestplaces.net/religion/city/california/san\\_bernardino](https://www.bestplaces.net/religion/city/california/san_bernardino). Accessed November 19, 2019.

452. Emily Morris, “The Hispanic Community Is Bringing Our Numbers Up,” *California Catholic Daily*, December 19, 2019, accessed February 28, 2020, <https://cal-catholic.com/the-hispanic-community-is-bringing-our-numbers-up/>.

453. Sarah Parvini, Kate Mather, James Queally and Richard A. Serrano, “Everything We Know about the San Bernardino Terror Attack Investigation so Far,” *Los Angeles Times*, Dec. 10, 2015 in <https://www.latimes.com/local/california/la-me-san-bernardino-shooting-terror-investigation-htlmstory.html>. Accessed November 19, 2019.

454. No name, “One Year after San Bernardino Attack, City Aims to Prevent Muslim Hate Crimes,” *The Guardian*, December 1, 2016, sec. US news in <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/dec/01/san-bernardino-shooting-one-year-later-muslim-hate-crimes>. Accessed November 19, 2019.

455. No name, “Adults in the Riverside Metro Area - Religion in America: U.S. Religious Data, Demographics and Statistics,” *Pew Research Center’s Religion & Public Life Project* in <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/>. Accessed November 19, 2019.

residents say they attend church on a regular basis.<sup>456</sup> The decrease in church attendance may be attributed to the large influx of millennials moving into the metropolitan area. Millennials, in a nationwide average, rarely attend church. Only twenty-nine percent of millennials say they attend church on a weekly basis.<sup>457</sup> After evaluating the movement of millennials through the US census information, Pete Saunders of Forbes magazine, estimated the growth rate of millennials in San Bernardino at over 7 percent, one of the highest rates in the nation.<sup>458</sup>

### *Chris Norman and Citizens Church*

Before founding Citizen’s Church, Pastor Chris moved to Orange County and served on staff a Calvary Chapel church in Costa Mesa in 1999. It was during his time at Calvary Chapel that God began to “to shape a dream in their heart of planting a church with a simple goal – helping people come to know Jesus and live out their unique purpose in life. They envisioned a place so filled with life that you couldn’t wait to get there. A place that would help people from every generation and every walk of life live in the fullness God has for them.”<sup>459</sup>

Pastor Chris and his family moved back to their hometown of Redlands, California in 2013, and began the process of launching Citizens Church. Pastor Chris recruited a team of fifty

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456. Ibid.

457. No name “Younger Millennials - Religion in America: U.S. Religious Data, Demographics and Statistics,” *Pew Research Center’s Religion & Public Life Project*, n.d., accessed February 29, 2020, <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/>.

458. Pete Saunders, “Where Educated Millennials Are Moving,” *Forbes*, accessed February 29, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/petesaunders1/2017/01/12/where-educated-millennials-are-moving/>.

459. Citizens Worship Church Citizens, “Learn More About Citizens Church – Citizens Church – Pastor Chris Norman,” n.d., accessed November 19, 2019, <https://citizenschurch.org/learn-more/>.

volunteers to help him pull off a large launch in the Fox Theater. The church officially launched on January 19, 2014 with over 500 people in attendance.<sup>460</sup>

Citizens Church has seen remarkable growth in the past six years. Norman said his drive to plant in Redlands was “purely evangelistic.”<sup>461</sup> He said, “In the 1920’s, Redlands was the most churched area in America. The church buildings are still there, but they are empty now. It shouldn’t be this way. The new generation was being raised up not going to church anywhere.”<sup>462</sup> Norman started recruiting a team to launch the church only three months before their public grand opening, and he joined ARC six weeks before his first service. Prior to launch, Chris and Tatum dedicated themselves to the recruitment and training of team members every single day, and by the time the church launched they had sixty-five adults on their team. As well, Chris raised 80,000 dollars to start the church.<sup>463</sup>

The grand opening of Citizens Church was attended by 535 people. Norman attributes the large attendance to the marketing done in the days before the launch. He said, “I feel like the city was talking about us. The mailer enforced what people saw on social media. People on our team were very fired up, and they were talking to their friends.”<sup>464</sup> In the weeks that followed, attendance dropped to 350 people, but it did not take long for it to increase.<sup>465</sup> According to Norman, “850 people attended our first Easter service, and after that massive Sunday we

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460. Ibid.

461. Chris Norman, “Citizens Church,” phone call, September 10, 2019.

462. Ibid.

463. Ibid.

464. Ibid.

465. Ibid.



sustained our attendance at over 500 people every weekend.”<sup>466</sup> By the end of their first year the church was averaging 800 people in attendance.

However, the growth at Citizens Church has not come without trials. Because of issues within their city, the church has moved thirty-three times in five years.<sup>467</sup> As revealed in the interview, each move affected growth and caused issues with momentum. The church started its second location in September 2017 with a vision of reaching more unchurched people in a growing part of the Riverside-San Bernardino metropolitan area. Citizens Church now has two locations and averages “1000 people attending the weekend services and hundreds in small groups all over the Inland Empire.”<sup>468</sup>

#### *The House Fort Worth- Dallas/Fort Worth, Texas*

I conducted an interview on February 27, 2020 with Micah Berteau from The House Fort Worth. The House Fort Worth was planted by Micah and Lindsey Berteau in 2018. The House is located in the greater Dallas/Fort Worth metropolitan area. In the following sections I will outline the current growth and changes happening in the Metropolitan area of Dallas/Fort Worth, and then I will provide details about the ministry of The House Fort Worth I discovered in the phone interview with Pastor Micah.

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466. Ibid.

467. Ibid.

468. Church, “Learn More About Citizens Church – Citizens Church – Pastor Chris Norman.”

### *Dallas/ Fort Worth Metropolitan Area*

The Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington metropolitan area was the fastest growing area in the nation, according to census reports from 2018, with a growth of 131,767 residents.<sup>469</sup> The total population of the Dallas Metropolitan area surpassed 7.5 million residents in 2018 making this metropolitan area the fourth largest in America.<sup>470</sup> The cause of this rapid growth is multifaceted. Texas State Demographer Lloyd Potter reported, “If you look at Dallas-Fort Worth, its economy is continuing to expand and that is creating economic opportunities.”<sup>471</sup> Many rural citizens have moved into Dallas since 2010 looking for greater economic and educational opportunities.<sup>472</sup> According to research by the Kinder institute, “The increases in population are attributed to migration, both domestic and international, and a natural increase in births outweighing deaths.”<sup>473</sup> The large growth in the Dallas Metropolitan area has created an opportunity for the church to reach a large amount of people within a relatively small area.

The Dallas Metropolitan area is ranked one of the most religious areas in America. According to Pew Research, 85 percent of Dallas metro residents find religion to be very important or somewhat important to their lives.<sup>474</sup> There is a disconnection between the high

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469. US Census Bureau, “Counties in South and West Lead Nation in Population Growth,” *The United States Census Bureau*, accessed November 19, 2019, <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2019/estimates-county-metro.html>.

470. Ibid.

471. Casey Leins, “Dallas-Fort Worth Gained More Residents Than Any Other City in 2018,” *US News & World Report*, accessed February 29, 2020, <https://www.usnews.com/news/cities/articles/2019-04-22/census-data-shows-dallas-fort-worth-experienced-biggest-population-growth-in-2018>.

472. Ibid.

473. Heather Leighton, “Four Texas Counties Had the Highest Numeric Growth in America, According to New Census Numbers,” *The Kinder Institute for Urban Research*, accessed February 29, 2020, <https://kinder.rice.edu/urbanedge/2019/04/18/fastest-growing-texas-counties-cities-census-bureau>.

religious worldview and church attendance in the Dallas metro area, since only 41 percent of Dallas residents attend church on a weekly basis.<sup>475</sup> Dallas has a wide variety of religions backgrounds because of the diversity in the city. Thirty-six percent of Dallas residents are from Mexico, and they hold to a strong Catholic faith. According to World Population Review, “The suburbs of Dallas are home to a large number of Asian people, including Koreans, Taiwanese, Chinese, Vietnamese, Thai, Indians, Pakistanis, and Sri Lankans.”<sup>476</sup> This creates a huge opportunity for the church to impact people from around the globe within the Dallas Metropolitan area.

The Dallas Metropolitan area is also known for its celebration of the LGBT community, which seems to be a contradiction to the religious bent. According to recent stats from the World Population Review, Dallas is the twelfth largest home of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender population in the United States.<sup>477</sup> The large percentage of LGBT creates an opportunity for church planters to minister to the needs of this community. When discussing the interaction of the LGBT community and the church, an opinion piece by the Dallas Morning News wrote, “In North Texas, gays go to church. And here in North Texas, churches approach homosexuality as a principle and gay Christians as people in a variety of ways. Some churches

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474. No name, “Adults in the Dallas Metro Area - Religion in America: U.S. Religious Data, Demographics and Statistics,” *Pew Research Center’s Religion & Public Life Project*, n.d., accessed February 29, 2020, <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/>.

475. Ibid.

476. No name, “Dallas, Texas Population 2020 (Demographics, Maps, Graphs),” accessed March 2, 2020, <http://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/dallas-population/>.

477. Ibid.

openly affirm them. Some churches include them without recognizing their same-sex partnerships or marriages. Some churches expect gay members to hide their sexual identity.”<sup>478</sup>

*Micah Berteau and The House Fort Worth*

Pastor Micah was serving as a youth minister at his father’s church in Modesto, California prior to them moving to Dallas. Micah has a Masters Degree in Theology, and is currently completing a Masters Degree in Divinity. The original idea was given to him in 2016 with the vision to expand the reach of The House in Modesto by adding a location in the Dallas area. Berteau said, “we realized that California is a long way from Fort Worth. The better solution was not to do a campus, but to do a full independent church plant.”<sup>479</sup> The Berteaus moved in September 2017, while Lindsey was 8 months pregnant with their second child.

Planting The House Fort Worth was filled with multiple obstacles and setbacks. Berteau was transparent about many of the obstacles, such as the first interest meeting in July 2017, when only ten people showed up. Berteau noted, “we were very disappointed with the turnout.”<sup>480</sup> Another major obstacle was finding a venue: “Our greatest obstacle was overcoming all of the ‘nos’ we received when looking for a location.”<sup>481</sup> The House Fort Worth did not have a venue solidified until six weeks before the church launched. After months of advertising and inviting the community, The House Fort Worth launched on February 11, 2018. Berteau described the

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478. William B. Lawrence, “The Biggest Schism in American Church Life Is Homosexuality, and North Texas Is at the Epicenter,” *Dallas News*, last modified February 26, 2019, accessed March 2, 2020, <https://www.dallasnews.com/opinion/commentary/2019/02/26/the-biggest-schism-in-american-church-life-is-homosexuality-and-north-texas-is-at-the-epicenter/>.

479. Micah Berteau, “The House Fort Worth Interview,” phone call, February 27, 2020.

480. *Ibid.*

481. *Ibid.*

day as “an ice day with twenty degree temperatures and the streets iced over.”<sup>482</sup> The Dallas news described this Sunday by writing, “Roads across North Texas, including southern Dallas County, Arlington, Fort Worth and North Richland Hills, were reportedly icy after the storm.”<sup>483</sup> Pastor Micah continued to hear reports of people trying to drive to the launch day but were prevented from coming because of dangerous roads. In spite of the inclement weather, The House Fort Worth launched with 450 people in attendance.

The House Fort Worth hit its lowest turnout five weeks after launch, with 275 in attendance. Pastor Micah moved their venue a week before their first Easter and they immediately grew to over 500 in attendance. The day before Easter, The House Fort Worth put on a community egg drop that featured a helicopter dropping eggs on a field. Over 7,000 people showed up and the event helped create awareness about the church. Six hundred and fifty people attended their first Easter.<sup>484</sup> In 2019, The House Fort Worth was ranked the fifth fastest growing church in America, with an average attendance of 1049.<sup>485</sup> Since the launch, 5,300 people have made commitments to Christ in services at The House Fort Worth. The church continues to exist to “save the lost, revive the found, build a house, and change the world.”<sup>486</sup>

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482. Ibid.

483. Kyle Roberts, “Light Sleet, Freezing Rain Passes through DFW, Causing Slick Roads,” *WFAA*, accessed March 2, 2020, <https://www.wfaa.com/article/weather/light-sleet-freezing-rain-passes-through-dfw-causing-slick-roads/287-517311975>.

484. Berteau, “The House Fort Worth Interview.” phone call, February 27, 2020.

485. Anonymous, “Outreach 100: 2019 Fastest-Growing Churches in America,” accessed March 2, 2020, <https://outreach100.com/fastest-growing-churches-in-america/2019>.

486. Berteau, “The House Fort Worth Interview.” Phone Call, February 27, 2020.

### *Goals and Objectives*

The communities and churches I interviewed have one major element in common: they are all experiencing numerical growth. Each of the metropolitan areas in which the churches reside has the potential of adding millions of new residents over the next decade. It will take churches, like Action, New Hope, Faith Family, Citizens, and The House Fort Worth, to be planted with a strategic plan to grow and reach people who are far from God. In the next chapter I will evaluate the interviews that I conducted with the pastors I mentioned. In each interview I asked the following questions as a catalyst to the discussion:

1. Describe the growth of your church plant?
2. To what do you attribute this rapid growth?
3. How does your church plant differ from other churches in your metropolitan area?  
What do you feel you are doing differently?
4. Has your church growth remained at a constant, or have you noticed an ebb and flow to what has happened? What factors have influenced this?
5. Describe your personal leadership best practices that have influenced the church growth?
6. What is at the foundation of your community practices that have influenced the church growth?
7. What would you change if doing this again? What advice do you have for future church planters in growing metropolitan areas?

The objective behind these questions was to discover themes that are crucial for church growth that would be effective across the nation within various metropolitan areas. Once each interview was completed, I transcribed the conversation. I considered what they said as well as

the passion in their tone as they described best practices and key factors they believed contributed to their numerical growth. Dailey, Portman, Joines, Norman, and Berteau all provided great insights into what they believe has caused the rapid growth in their church plants. The goal is to use each of these themes to establish some guidelines for future church planters, assisting them to effectively plant and grow a church in a large metropolitan area. The themes of each of the interviews are found in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE PROJECT EVALUATED

In this chapter I will evaluate and discover themes pertaining to the five church plants chosen because of their unusual numerical growth in the years since their public launch. As stated, in order to evaluate the keys to their successes, each of the church planters were contacted via email, and sent a list of questions that helped navigate the conversations. The shortest of the interviews was 45 minutes and the longest was over 90 minutes. Each of the church planters shared their story, their post-launch growth, and some principles they believed helped them experience rapid growth in the thriving metropolitan areas they were serving. The questions asked were simply to help guide the conversation, but they were not given to lead the dialogue to any pre-determined goal.

After each interview was completed, the content was transcribed, and then divided into themes that had emerged throughout the interviews. Themes emerged when all five church planters discussed the importance of a particular subject. To find the themes we created key words to look for in the transcripts.

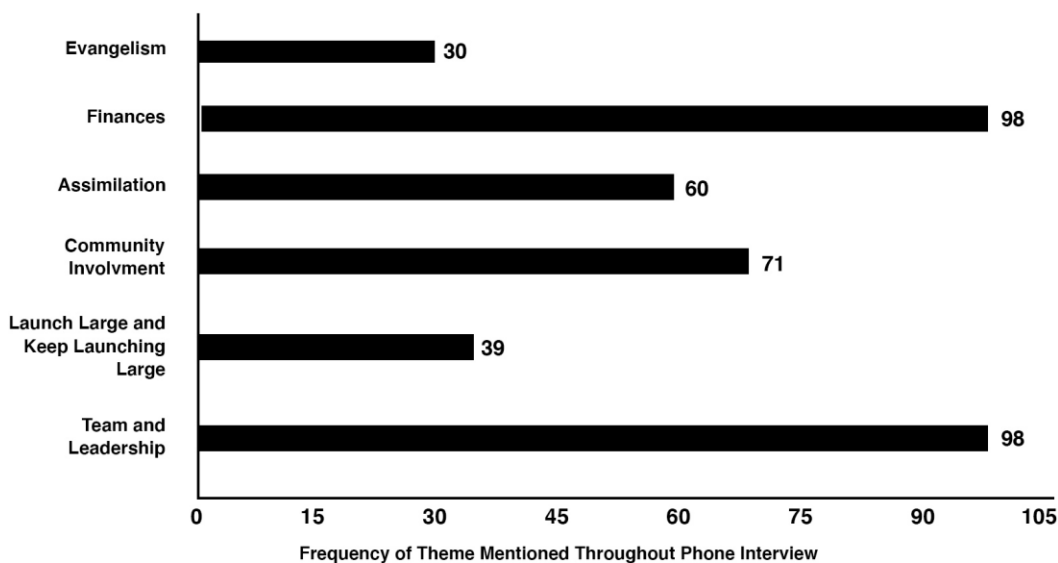
The first theme discovered was the motivation of the church planter. I found a central motivation in each of the church planters to reach lost people as a central driver for the mission. The second theme I discovered was the drive to recruit and develop leaders. Each church planter talked in detail about how important the right people on their team was and how they developed those leaders. Each planter showed this as a key factor to their growth. The third theme was the focus on launching large, and continually launching large. The effort they all invested into launch their first Sunday was used to continue to build the momentum on special Sundays



throughout the year. This created an “invite culture” for the churches and has given them the ability to sustain growth. The fourth theme I found focused on the easy assimilation of new attendees. Each planter explained how important it was to not just get people in the front door of the church, but to keep them from leaving by getting them assimilated into the church through an easy onboarding process. The importance of small groups and community played a huge part in the assimilation process in each of the churches. The fifth theme revealed in the interviews was a solid focus on financial stewardship, including fundraising and generosity. It takes money to plant and grow a church, and each of these planters showed a commitment to making sure money was available and accounted for throughout the process. The final theme was the focus on community involvement. Each pastor planted their church with a heavy focus on serving their local community before the church was even started. That serve culture has continued today and is a major driver for the growth of each congregation.

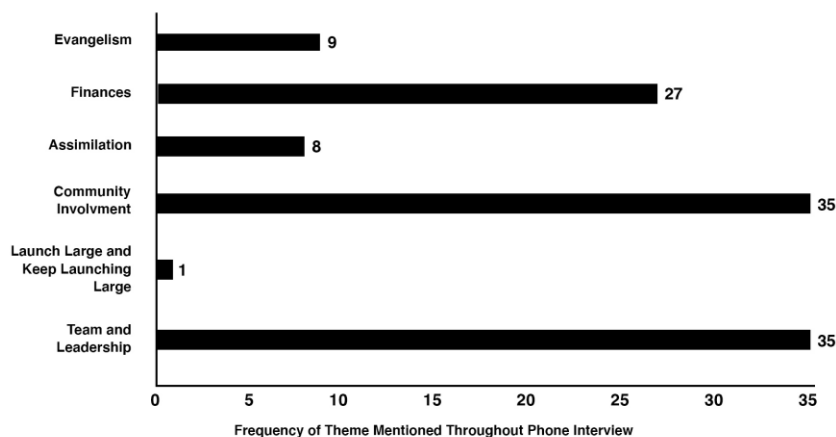
The frequency of the themes mentioned can be noted in the figure below.

## Church Statistics



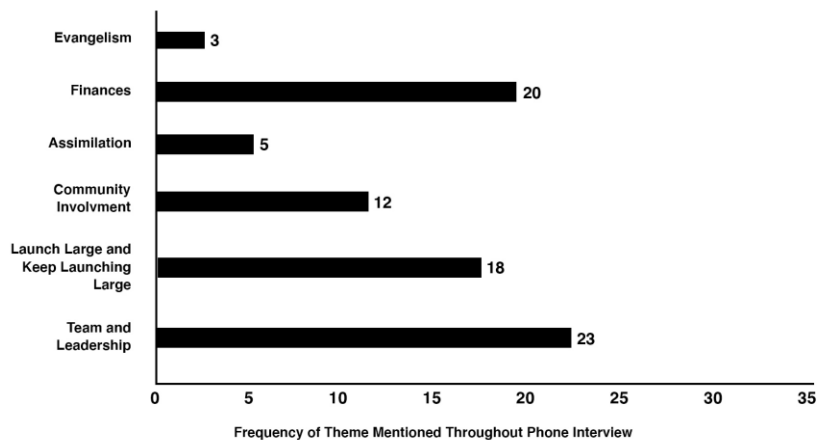
While each church planter highlighted each of the six themes, many of the planters were bent towards talking about one or two of the themes in my interview. Pastor Jeffery (New Hope Church) had a huge focus on building a team and being involved in the local community. You can see the mentions of the themes from my interview with Pastor Jeffery below.

### New Hope Church



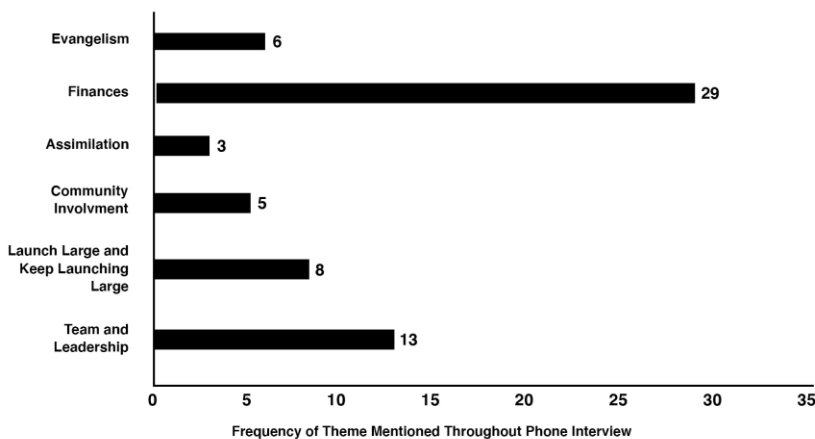
Pastor Dailey (Action Church) started his interview off with the importance of launching large with an excellent Sunday experience. He followed up that focus with the importance of developing teams and creating financial systems that cultivate generosity. You can see the mentions of the themes in the graph below.

### Action Church



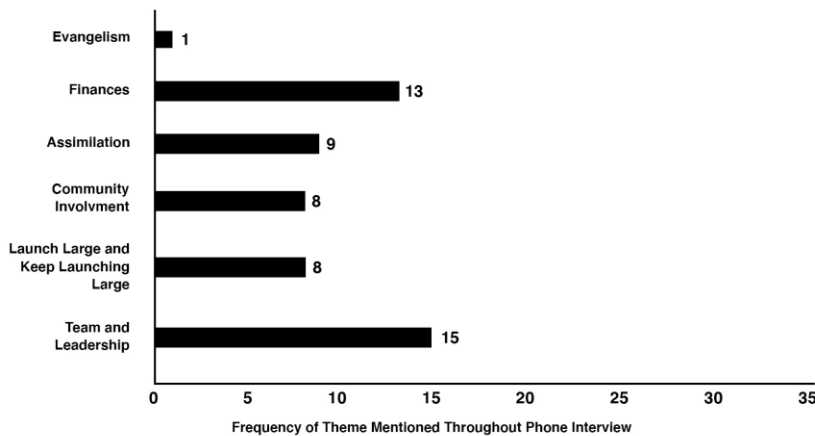
Pastor Micah (The House Fort Worth) emphasized the importance of culture in his Sunday experience and in his development of his church plant teams and leaders. The theme of finances was mentioned the most, but it was mentioned out of a weakness in his personality. The themes from my interview with Pastor Micah are shown in the graph below.

### The House Fort Worth



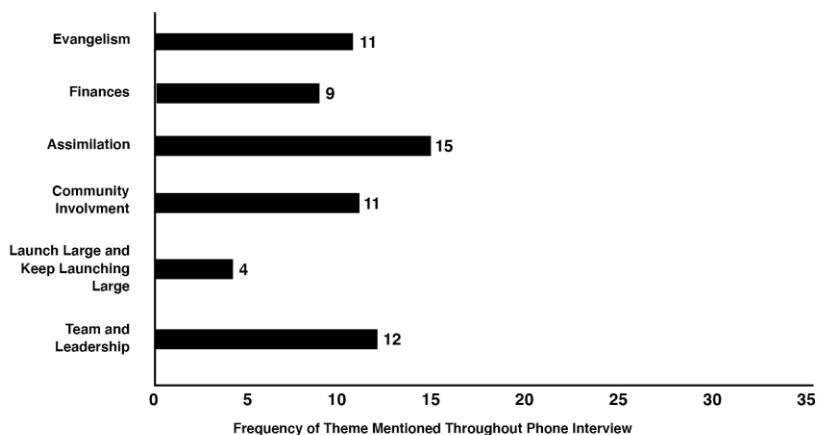
Pastor Josh (Faith Family Church) talked in detail about the importance of assimilation, having next-steps for attenders. He is also in the midst of a building project, so he described the importance of stewardship and generosity in our interview. The following graph describes the mentions of each of the themes by Pastor Josh.

### Faith Family Church



Pastor Chris (Citizens Church) has a huge heart for community engagement and assimilation. He talked in detail about the outreaches that have been used to make an impact in his metropolitan area. The mentions of each of the themes from Pastor Chris are shown in the graph below.

### Citizen's Church



In the remainder of this chapter, I will show how each of these themes are implemented by the respective church planters. I will also connect the Biblical literature and current literature review with each theme. The goal is to reinforce how each of these themes is a necessary focus for future church planters in metropolitan areas across the United States.

#### *Theme #1- Evangelism*

A consistent theme throughout each interview was a passion from each lead pastor to reach lost people. When asking Pastor Chris (Citizens Church) what drove him to the San Bernardino Metropolitan area, he responded with, “I am very much evangelistic. I want to see thousands of people come to Jesus. I am driven by evangelism. Everything that I do is with evangelism in

mind. I kept asking myself, ‘Why aren’t people showing up to church and how do we create an environment that they would want to show up to’?”<sup>487</sup>

Pastor Micah (The House Fort Worth) said: “I grew up in church and watched my dad have a passion for lost people.”<sup>488</sup> The passion was passed from his father and gave Micah a desire to start a church focused on reaching the lost in the Fort Worth area. Pastor Micah said, “Jesus came to seek and save the lost. If Jesus came to do this, I know he came to do a lot of things, but this is the main thing, so it has to be my priority.”<sup>489</sup>

Pastor Josh (Faith Family Church) described evangelism as his drive to move to the Houston Metro area. Pastor Josh said, “I operate way more as an evangelist and I knew that I had to surround myself with good pastoral people.”<sup>490</sup> Pastor Josh even implemented a value statement saying, “We do not exist for us, we exist for the world.”<sup>491</sup> When asked what he thought was the secret to Faith Family’s success, Pastor Josh pointed it back to his heart for evangelism, saying, “We are constantly talking about reaching our city at any cost. This is a characteristic of a growing church.”<sup>492</sup> Faith Family continues to reach people and has seen 21,086 decisions since their grand opening in 2014. Pastor Josh expressed to me that the number mentioned includes salvations and rededications in both their services and community outreaches.

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487 Norman, “Citizens Church.” Phone Call, September 10, 2019.

488. Berteau, “The House Fort Worth Interview.” Phone Call, February 27, 2020.

489. Ibid.

490. Joines, “Faith Family Church Interview.” Phone Call, October 4, 2019.

491. Ibid.

492. Ibid.

Pastor Jeffery (New Hope Church) planted his church in the very unchurched Seattle metro area. He said, “The drive for us is the lostness of our community. I have a burden for people to go to heaven and know Jesus. We call that presenting hope and developing people. Jesus isn’t our last hope, He is our only hope.”<sup>493</sup>

Reaching people for Christ is at the heart of what Pastor Justin is trying to do at Action Church. Their mission statement is broken down into two major words: reach and connect.<sup>494</sup> On their website, Pastor Justin outlined the heart for evangelism at Action Church. He wrote,

In Matthew 28:18, Jesus commands His disciples to go. We learn here that we are not called to be a success, but rather commanded to be obedient - to go. We are committed to see people discover what they have been searching for. The local church is the hope of the world! The answer to the problems we face won’t be solved with anything the world has to offer. The answer is found in Jesus and in Him alone. Our hope is that we can bring authentic life-change to our community.<sup>495</sup>

### *The Importance of Evangelism*

The scriptures are clear: Jesus came with a single mission of reaching the lost. Jesus is quoted in the book of Luke as saying: “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”<sup>496</sup> As mentioned in chapter 2, evangelism is the tool God uses to accomplish the mission of God on earth to restore relationship between God and humanity. Evangelism is not for the purpose of building a church but for the purpose of reuniting God with his creation. Throughout church history, evangelism has been the key-motivating factor of expanding the gospel message and the kingdom of God throughout the world. Paul reinforces evangelism as his motivation for ministry

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493. Portman, “New Hope Church Interview.” Phone Call, September 4, 2019.

494. “The Action Church - A Church You Can Call Home,” *The Action Church*, <https://www.theactionchurch.com>. Accessed November 20, 2019

495. Ibid.

496. Luke 19:10

in the book of 2 Corinthians. He said: “For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.”<sup>497</sup> Churches that grow have an evangelistic motivation. They see the unchurched in their community as their target audience. Jeffery Portman does not describe his community as “post-churched.” Instead he calls them “pre-churched.”<sup>498</sup> This is a creative way of looking at each person as a potential Christian and member of their church. For Portman, “the lost are an opportunity and not an obstacle.”<sup>499</sup>

### *The Example for Evangelism*

The five church planters that I interviewed understand that they set the pace and example for what evangelism looks like in their local church. Each planter gave specific names of people in their community who fueled their passion to plant the church because these individuals were far from Christ. The pastors interviewed displayed a frustration for seeing malls and parks packed on Sunday, but the churches being mostly empty. Chris Norman explained his heart for evangelism by referencing the story of Jesus and the prostitute who came and fell at His feet.<sup>500</sup>

Norman said:

When Jesus showed up in a room, the town prostitute fell at his feet. That is the example of what the church should be. The girl knew that she could come to Jesus. Why? Because she knew that Jesus was going to love her. There was something about the way Jesus carried himself where this girl, known as the town prostitute, could come and get exactly what she needed, what Jesus had. He neither condemned nor condoned her. She was

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497. 2 Corinthians 5:14-15

498. Portman, “New Hope Church Interview.” Phone Call, September 4, 2019.

499. Ibid.

500. Luke 7:36-50

accepted and perfectly loved. She was also perfectly corrected, challenged and disciplined. This is what our church should be like.<sup>501</sup>

The motivation to reach lost people is a passion that Pastor Micah (The House Fort Worth) believed was passed on from him to his leadership team. He said, “I had a strong push to see the lost saved, and people saw that passion and saw me going after lost people, and that would go down to the leadership.”<sup>502</sup> The motivation to reach lost people created an invite culture in which people would invite strangers to church throughout the city. This has been a major component of the growth of The House Fort Worth.

During the interview, Pastor Justin said: “our community is too big for our church to remain small. Before we ever started, we were committed to our community before expecting something from our community. I made it a point to serve the people that we were there to reach.”<sup>503</sup> The heart for evangelism is an example for the rest of leadership team at Action Church. The result is Action Church has seen 7,957 decisions for Christ since their first public service.

### *The Strategy for Evangelism*

Once a motive to reach the lost is established, the church planter needs to evaluate the approach to reaching people within the community. In his previous ministry role, Pastor Chris (Citizens Church) was very involved behind the pulpit but did not have permission to try new things to reach new people. This frustration was the catalyst for him to not just take over an existing

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501. Norman, “Citizens Church.” Phone Call, September 10, 2019.

502. Berteau, “The House Fort Worth Interview.” Phone Call, February 27, 2020.

503. Dailey, “Action Church Interview.” Phone Call, September 9, 2019.



church but to pioneer a church that would be outward focus and reach lost people. He said, “When you walk around Redlands you notice the people have no vision. And the scriptures are clear ‘without vision people perish’. They do not see what could be, so they are living for whatever makes them happy at the moment.”<sup>504</sup> It was out of this desire that Chris created the rallying cry for their team “we are called to help people see God’s vision for their life.”<sup>505</sup> He and the team at Citizens Church have continued to be motivated by evangelism and they have seen 2,250 decisions for Christ since launch.

At Action Church, the strategy for evangelism involves a Sunday experience focused on reaching people far from Christ. The very first “reaction statement” for Action Church says, “We make it hard for people to go to hell by making it fun to go to church.”<sup>506</sup> It is the drive for evangelism that has helped Action Church keep the focus on reaching unchurched people in their Sunday gatherings. The church has duplicated this model to creating multiple locations with multiple services across Orlando. Each of these services are identical in worship, feel, and culture. The goal is that you get the same Action Church experience no matter what location you walk into or invite a guest to.

Pastor Chris evaluates his Sunday services by asking himself this question: “why aren’t people showing up and how do we get them to show up?”<sup>507</sup> The Sunday experience is constantly evaluated with these churches. Pastor Josh (Faith Family Church) said, “Make Sundays excellent. Have great communication towards guest. They should feel loved from the parking lot

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504. Norman, “Citizens Church.” Phone Call, September 10, 2019.

505. Ibid.

506. “Reaction Statements,” *The Action Church*, accessed March 6, 2020, <https://www.theactionchurch.com/our-reaction>.

507. Norman, “Citizens Church.” Phone Call, September 10, 2019.

to checking their kids in.”<sup>508</sup> When discussing what sets their Sunday experience apart, Pastor Josh said, “We make excellence our standard, not our preference.”<sup>509</sup> Every week they are looking for ways to make their experience better.

For the churches interviewed, the best way to reach the lost was to continually evaluate their Sunday experience through the eyes of the unchurched. This evaluation includes their Sunday sermons. The more time in the church erodes the leadership’s ability to see issues or obstacles towards reaching the lost in the community. Pastor Josh challenged himself to put more time into his sermons to make his communication a draw for unchurched church. Josh said, “I believe that pastors who prepare longer will see more conversions in the service.” Josh went on to say, “I work hard to appeal to the person who has never been to church by using humor.”<sup>510</sup>

The heart to reach lost people not only drove the Portmans (New Hope Church) to the Seattle area, but also drove their “arrows out” strategy. Pastor Jeffery said, “Before we started the church we were determined to be an arrows out type church. We were going to be constantly focusing on how we can impact and engage our community so that they can come to know Christ.”<sup>511</sup> The phrase “arrows out” meant that they would put their focus on expanding their Sunday services throughout the Seattle metropolitan area. According to their website, “We envision teams of people being sent out in our communities and across the globe to present hope in Jesus.”<sup>512</sup> New Hope has continued this heart for evangelism and has seen 322 decisions for

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508. Joines, “Faith Family Church Interview.” Phone Call, October 4, 2019.

509. Ibid.

510. Ibid.

511. Portman, “New Hope Church Interview.” Phone Call, September 4, 2019.

512. “Kingdom Builders,” *Newhope Church*, accessed March 6, 2020, <https://www.newhopech.com/kingdom-builders>.

Christ since its launch. The motivation for reaching the lost has given New Hope a passion for multiplying their experiences in locations throughout Seattle. The church is committed to “funding the multiplication of the local church by both coming alongside other church plants, and expanding New Hope campuses and planting Spirit-filled churches in our communities. We do not do this for comfort, fancy buildings, or praise, but to create space for grace for those who have yet to hear the good news of the Gospel.”<sup>513</sup>

### *Theme #2- Teamwork*

The second overarching theme that emerged in every interview was the importance of developing a team and cultivating leaders. Pastor Jeffery (New Hope Church) spent most of his interview talking about how important the team is and how crucial it is for the lead pastor to work at developing future leaders. In referencing the role he and his wife play, he said: “It is not about our faces on a banner, it is about a team. Team works in our community. Other churches are about the individual but at New Hope Church it has always been about a team. We are very intentional about talking about apprenticing and how we are better together.”<sup>514</sup>

Pastor Chris (Citizens Church) has had a focus on team development from the very beginning. Pastor Chris started Citizens Church with a desire to not only recruit team members but to give people ownership of the church. Norman said to potential team members: “Some of the best ministries of this church are inside of you, and I am here to help you discover it and pour fuel on it.”<sup>515</sup>

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513. Ibid.

514. Portman, “New Hope Church Interview.” Phone Call, September 4, 2019.

515. Norman, “Citizens Church.” Phone Call, September 10, 2019.

In referencing the importance of their teams, Pastor Josh (Faith Family Church) said, “I empowered people by giving them all the tools necessary to succeed. I didn’t just dump and run. I delegated with realistic expectations. We not only empowered people but we trained them.”<sup>516</sup> Team building was the top agenda item for him when he moved to the greater Houston area. He encourages church planters to “be slow to appoint people in leadership, but empower them without giving them a formal title.”<sup>517</sup> Once a team member showed competency in an area and healthy delegation was done, the end result in his mind was ownership. He said: “when a team member is properly trained, they are able to get their piece of the pie and become owners. They don’t feel exasperated when the training and delegation is done right.”<sup>518</sup>

### *Leadership Development*

Church plants do not grow because of the work of a few teams, but the sacrifice and wisdom of well-developed leaders. In the opinion of the planters that were interviewed, the greatest contributing factor for growth was the right leaders on their team. Pastor Justin finished his interview by saying, “Churches stop growing because the Holy Spirit is not going to give you more than you handle. You need more leaders. Key leaders to take off the weight of the lead pastor.”<sup>519</sup> If a church is wanting to grow, the focus of the current leadership is to develop a program or a system to become a pipeline for the development of leaders that will lead teams within the church. At Action Church their solution has been to develop Action Leadership Academy. According to their website, “Action Leadership Academy is a practical internship at

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516. Joines, “Faith Family Church Interview.” Phone Call, October 4, 2019.

517. Ibid.

518. Ibid.

519. Dailey, “Action Church Interview.” Phone Call, September 9, 2019.

one of the fastest growing churches in the country. Each semester you will spend time learning from the Pastoral Staff, training in your area of passion, and being equipped to lead like never before.”<sup>520</sup>

The model of apprenticing is an idea that Pastor Jeffery (New Hope Church) sees in the life of Jesus’ ministry. According to him, “Jesus gathered unschooled and ordinary people. We do the same. You do not have to be an all-star to be on our team.”<sup>521</sup> When recruiting team members, Pastor Jeffery ask the following two questions: Do you love Jesus? Do you have gifts? If the answer is yes to both of the questions, Portman would respond with, “We will create space for you on our team.”<sup>522</sup> While there is a spot on the team for everyone, not everyone can become a leader at New Hope. Portman gave a sports analogy, “It should be easy to be on your team, but hard to be in your starting lineup.”<sup>523</sup> Meaning that people should be able to join easily, but that doesn’t mean they are entitled to be a key church leader. For New Hope, leadership comes with a level of expectation that is very clear and holds people to a higher standard. When a person becomes a leader at New Hope, they are expected to recruit people constantly. To hold leaders accountable, Portman regularly ask his leaders the following questions:

- Who is not on our team that should be?
- Who is going to ask them?
- When are you going to ask them?
- What did they say?

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520. “Action Leadership Academy,” *Action Leadership Academy*, accessed March 11, 2020, <http://www.actionleadershipacademy.com>.

521. Portman, “New Hope Church Interview.” Phone Call, September 4, 2019.

522. Ibid.

523. Ibid.

- When can they start?<sup>524</sup>

From the start, Pastor Josh (Faith Family Church) structured the church as if it was a megachurch. He said, “We designed the church structure as a megachurch from day one, and I was then able to scale it with what team members we needed to recruit, and what leaders we needed to develop.” It was this stable structure for development of leaders that Pastor Josh contributed to having “almost zero turnover”<sup>525</sup> in the five years they have been operating.

One of the skills Pastor Chris said is necessary to grow a thriving church is the ability to “help people see their calling in the context of the vision that God has given you for your church.”<sup>526</sup> He mentioned that, in order recruit team members and develop leaders he needed to “connect the dots”<sup>527</sup> from the passion in their life and what God wanted to do in Citizens Church. Pastor Chris regularly develops leaders through their team nights. These quarterly gatherings create an opportunity for him to “casts vision about the cultural points of Citizens Church. We also fast together and pray together for God to move.”<sup>528</sup>

When recruiting and developing leaders, Pastor Justin said, “People want to know that you know where you are going, even if you don’t know where you are going. Leaders will attract people if they have confidence. People want to follow someone who thinks they know where they are going.”<sup>529</sup> Justin takes the approach to walk in confidence with big vision of telling

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524. Ibid.

525. Joines, “Faith Family Church Interview.” Phone Call, October 4, 2019.

526. Norman, “Citizens Church.” Phone Call, September 10, 2019.

527. Ibid.

528. Ibid.

529. Dailey, “Action Church Interview.” Phone Call, September 9, 2019.

people where the church is going. Justin talked about recruitment by saying, “I tell people where we are going and then I cast the vision of how it would look to go there together. I have to transition it from my thing to their thing.”<sup>530</sup>

Pastor Micah (The House Fort Worth) discussed in detail the importance of culture when recruiting and raising up leadership. According to him, “Culture is not what you do, it’s who you are. It’s how you preach, live, talk. In the early days, I couldn’t do as much leadership teaching, lessons, classes, because I was busy, but if I got the leaders around my life, they would walk away with the culture.”<sup>531</sup> It was the culture of leadership that would attract the leaders necessary to build a healthy and growing church. His key principle in developing leaders is the importance of knowing who you are. He gave an illustration of fast food chicken restaurants in the Dallas Metro area, saying: “Every corner there is another fast food chicken restaurant. They all do well. They all serve chicken. They all just package it differently. They need to know who they are. You need to know what kind of chicken you serve and what people you are trying to reach.”<sup>532</sup>

### *Hiring Team Members*

Part of Action Church’s success is the focus that Justin has had in hiring the right leaders. Dailey said, “Key hires have kept the growth consistent.”<sup>533</sup> It is not enough to just have great volunteers, but hiring key leaders “takes the weight off of the lead pastor. To grow a fast, large church, its not just volunteers, but its hires.”<sup>534</sup> Justin reiterated the importance of confidence

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530. Ibid.

531. Berteau, “The House Fort Worth Interview.” Phone Call, February 27, 2020.

532. Ibid.

533. Dailey, “Action Church Interview.” Phone Call, September 9, 2019.

534. Ibid.

when hiring staff. He said: “We have to have confidence and security to bring great people around us.”<sup>535</sup> Justin showed the importance of leaders and key hires to the growth of their church with the passage of Elisha and the widow in 2 Kings 4. Justin said,

I can point back to every season of our church of exponential growth is when we hired somebody great. I see in 2 Kings 4, the story of Elisha, the widow and the jars, that the oil stops flowing when they were out of jars. Churches don’t stop growing because they don’t pray enough or love enough, or they don’t want to reach their city enough. I think they stop growing because the Holy Spirit isn’t going to give you more jars, more leaders, than you can steward.<sup>536</sup>

Pastor Justin’s final challenge for future church planters was all about hiring. Dailey said, “I would have been slower to give out titles and quicker to remove them. We had confusion about who we wanted on our team and what we expected, so I would have written staff values earlier.”<sup>537</sup>

The leaders interviewed are successful in part because of their ability to identify and develop potential church leaders. From the very beginning of the church, Jesus chose to work through a team of disciples. The church grew through the teamwork of the early church leaders. Paul emphasized teamwork when he wrote, “As it is, there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I don’t need you!’ And the head cannot say to the feet, ‘I don’t need you!’”<sup>538</sup> As mentioned in chapter two, Chris Hodges, Lead Pastor of Church of the Highlands, said: “your church will grow as fast as the Lead Pastors ability to recruit and train leaders.”<sup>539</sup>

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535. Ibid.

536. Ibid.

537. Ibid.

538. 1 Corinthians 12:20-21

539. Chris Hodges, “Cultivating Generosity with the Local Church.” Finance Seminar, Church of the Highlands. Birmingham, AL, April 16, 2018).



### *Theme #3- Launch Large*

Each of the researched church plants started with a large launch strategy. Each church planter put a strategic date on the calendar and backed the date with a marketing campaign to ensure that as many people as possible knew about the very first public service. As with the start of a church, the birth weight of a newborn baby is important. According to Dr David Hill, “In general, it can be a good indicator of the baby’s health.”<sup>540</sup> The starting size can indicate health that, in many cases, can be indicative of the future growth of the church plant.

Action Church opened with the largest launch at 796 people in attendance.<sup>541</sup> Faith Family was close behind with 603 people in its first service.<sup>542</sup> Citizens Church launched with 535 people on its grand opening.<sup>543</sup> The House Fort Worth launched with 450 attenders in the midst of a snow storm in Dallas.<sup>544</sup> Finally, New Hope Church launched in the greater Seattle area with 365 people in attendance.<sup>545</sup> According to ARC’s 2017 annual review, the average size of an ARC church plant grand opening is 264 people.<sup>546</sup> Each of these studied churches far

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540. No name, “What A Baby’s Birth Weight Really Tells You,” *HuffPost*, last modified May 4, 2018, accessed November 21, 2019, [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/what-a-babys-birth-weight-really-tells-you\\_b\\_5aeb5b51e4b0c72d590a4cb6](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/what-a-babys-birth-weight-really-tells-you_b_5aeb5b51e4b0c72d590a4cb6).

541. Dailey, “Action Church Interview.” Phone Call, September 9, 2019.

542. Joines, “Faith Family Church Interview.” Phone Call, October 4, 2019.

543. Norman, “Citizens Church.” Phone Call, September 10, 2019.

544. Berteau, “The House Fort Worth Interview.” Phone Call, February 27, 2020.

545. Portman, “New Hope Church Interview.” Phone Call, September 4, 2019.

546. No name, No Name, “ARC: Association of Related Churches / 2017 Year in Review,” accessed November 20, 2019, <https://www.arcchurches.com/annualreport/2017/>.

exceeded the average for a church plant launch. The size of each church launch and their numerical growth is shown in the table below.

<b>CHURCH</b>	<b>LAUNCH TEAM</b>	<b>LAUNCH ATTENDANCE</b>	<b>LOWEST SUNDAY</b>	<b>ONE YEAR ANNIVERSARY</b>
<b>ACTION CHURCH</b>	82 Adults	796	251	904
<b>CITIZENS CHURCH</b>	65 Adults	535	350	800
<b>FAITH FAMILY CHURCH</b>	100 Adults	603	450	600
<b>NEW HOPE CHURCH</b>	75 Adults	365	215	400
<b>RADIANT CHURCH</b>	40 Adults	348	275	550
<b>THE HOUSE FORT WORTH</b>	80 Adults	450	275	1000

### *Large Grand Opening Strategy*

Since Action Church had the largest launch, it was a major talking point of my interview with Pastor Justin. He said: “The months leading up to launch were filled with community involvement and a big marketing campaign.”<sup>547</sup> Justin raised \$750,000 to launch Action Church and over 50K of it was spent on marketing before they ever had a first service. Justin said, “The 50,000 dollars spent on marketing went to social media, a billboard, and a 170k mail piece that

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547. Dailey, “Action Church Interview.” Phone Call, September 9, 2019.

went to homes in communities surrounding the high school.”<sup>548</sup> Action has invested heavily in their sound, video, and production department so that they can create impressive experiences from the very beginning.<sup>549</sup>

Pastor Josh attributed their large launch turnout to a “combination of word of mouth and effective marketing.”<sup>550</sup> While Faith Family did all the regular mailers and social media campaigns, He said, “the best form of advertising is word of mouth.”<sup>551</sup> Pastor Jeffery raised \$280,000 before their public launch. A good portion of the money was used to serve the community and raise awareness about New Hope Church. Before the church started, Pastor Jeffery rallied the church to be an active part in the community. Portman said, “We became a staple in our community. We started adopting schools. We also did all of the normal things to get the word out: Facebook marketing, Instagram, great signage in the community, and we did one mailer.”<sup>552</sup>

Pastor Micah (The House Fort Worth) had a large launch strategy for their first Sunday. Pastor Micah got his degree in marketing and understood how important it is to get the word out on a mass scale. He said, “I knew that if I could get our product in front of people, the moment they walk in the doors they would be changed.”<sup>553</sup> Pastor Micah relied heavily on social media advertisement to help get the word out about The House Fort Worth grand opening.

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548. Ibid.

549. Ibid.

550. Joines, “Faith Family Church Interview.” Phone Call, October 4, 2019.

551. Ibid.

552. Portman, “New Hope Church Interview.” Phone Call, September 4, 2019.

553. Berteau, “The House Fort Worth Interview.” Phone Call, February 27, 2020.

Pastor Chris knew before launching his church that he wanted to have a large first service. Norman said, “I don’t want to invite that girl I’m trying to reach into an awkward home Bible study. I wanted to start something that is impressive and inviting from the very beginning.”<sup>554</sup> When I asked Chris what did he attribute to so many people showing up to the launch, he responded, “We were very clear about our vision and what we are here to do in our city. We are here to serve people. And our city knew that and that is why they showed up.”<sup>555</sup> Norman got the word out through a large mailer and lots of Instagram advertisements. He said, “I feel like the city was talking about us before we launched and our team members were so excited that they were ready to bring friends.”<sup>556</sup>

### *Continual Relaunching*

Pastor Justin has continued a large launch strategy a couple times a year with having what he calls “Big Days.”<sup>557</sup> According to him, “A big day, such as Easter, gives our church a chance to show off and creates a reason why people need to invite a friend. Too many churches are doing things but no one knows about it. These strategic invite pushes work.”<sup>558</sup> Action Church had over 7500 people at their Easter services in 2018 simply because of this big Sunday push. They put on a service that presented the gospel filled with songs and a theme of the popular movie, *The Greatest Showman*. The big production Sundays are part of Justin’s plan because he said, “we

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554. Norman, “Citizens Church.” Phone Call, September 10, 2019.

555. Ibid.

556. Ibid.

557. Dailey, “Action Church Interview.” Phone Call, September 9, 2019.

558. Ibid.

never wanted people to think we were a church plant, but we wanted to look like Church of the Highlands on day one.”<sup>559</sup>

Pastor Josh has also capitalized on large invite weekends over the past five years to keep his church “outward focused”<sup>560</sup> and make sure they understand the mission to invite people to church. Pastor Micah continued his marketing campaigns after his initial launch to increase awareness around specific big Sundays. These Sundays included a new move into a facility or a special service for a holiday. Micah emphasized the importance of being original in marketing. He said, “begin the marketing from a place where you know yourself, who you are, and what you are trying to let the city know. Don’t simply be another replica of another church.”<sup>561</sup> It is not only marketing that makes the Sunday a big event, but Pastor Micah emphasized the importance of prayer and fasting before the big Sundays. He made it a point to share how it is Christ who grows the church and brings the increase.

Citizens Church didn’t just launch large but they put other big Sundays on the calendar to keep the evangelistic focus of the church. Norman said, “We kept relaunching each season. Human nature trends inward but the relaunching helps do a good job at thinking outward. We are not on the mission of community. We are a community on mission.”<sup>562</sup> Pastor Portman continues to use his strategy in launching his multiple locations throughout the greater Seattle area. Through big invite weeks and campus openings, Portman said, “the church has doubled in size over the past year.”<sup>563</sup>

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559. Ibid.

560. Joines, “Faith Family Church Interview.” Phone Call, October 4, 2019.

561. Berteau, “The House Fort Worth Interview.” Phone Call, February 27, 2020.

562. Norman, “Citizens Church.” Phone Call, September 10, 2019.

563. Portman, “New Hope Church Interview.” Phone Call, September 4, 2019.

*Theme #4- Assimilation*

Church planters with an evangelistic motivation usually focus on getting people in the front door, but they ignore keeping people from leaving out from the back door. It is not enough to just reach out to people; churches that grow learn how to keep people. This happens through effective assimilation. The assimilation process needs to be clear to the congregation and consistent for guests. Pastor Josh said that one of the keys to their success is “consistent monthly assimilation.”<sup>564</sup> They have never missed a month of getting guest through their assimilation process and connect to the church. When evaluating what would make New Hope Church grow faster, Pastor Jeffery said, “our church would grow faster if there was, over the next 6 months, a greater engagement with our growth track.”<sup>565</sup> Growth Track is his assimilation process.

All five churches emphasized the importance of not just seeing people come to Christ but helping people connect and stay at the local church. Pastor Micah (The House Fort Worth) remarked about the importance of assimilation by asking the question, “You can plant a church, but can you keep a church?”<sup>566</sup> Retention through assimilation is crucial for a growing church. Pastor Justin (Action Church) wrote: “It is not enough to just reach people but the church needs a solid system for connecting people. The greater people know about the vision the greater they are willing to sacrifice for it.”<sup>567</sup> Faith Family attributes its high retention rate after launch to an

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564. Joines, “Faith Family Church Interview.” Phone Call, October 4, 2019.

565. Portman, “New Hope Church Interview.” Phone Call, September 4, 2019.

566. Berteau, “The House Fort Worth Interview.” Phone Call, February 27, 2020.

567. Dailey, “Action Church Interview.” Phone Call, September 9, 2019.

“effective follow up strategy.”<sup>568</sup> When referring to having a consistent and easy assimilation process, Pastor Josh referenced an analogy from the book *Good to Great* by saying, “If you can get the fly wheel turning, it takes the guess work out of it.”<sup>569</sup> In other words, you start the process and stay consistent with it.

### *Creating an Assimilation Plan*

According to Pastor Josh, “a great assimilation process gets people involved and helps them become owners of the local church.”<sup>570</sup> On the Faith Family website, attenders are encouraged to attend their assimilation classes called, Next Steps. The website describes the classes as follows

Have you ever wondered, “How do I find my place in this church family?” Look no further - Next Steps is a four-week process that guides you to discover your redemptive purpose and live the life God created for you. Next Steps provides you with the tools that equip you to 1) Connect to the church, 2) Discover the strengths of your purposeful design, 3) Develop your personal leadership, and 4) Use your God-given gifts to make a difference in the lives of others.

Pastor Jeffery adopted a growth track to get people effectively assimilated. According to New Hope’s website, “Growth Track is one of the tools New Hope offers to develop people. We believe in people becoming the church, not just going to church. In this four-week class, you will be equipped with key habits & disciplines to help you develop & strengthen your relationship with Jesus. You will also discover that you are you for a reason – God has created you intentionally with a divine purpose and a call to serve those around you.”<sup>571</sup>

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568. Joines, “Faith Family Church Interview.” Phone Call, October 4, 2019.

569. Ibid.

570. Ibid.

571. No name, “Growth Tracks,” *Newhope Church*, accessed November 20, 2019, <https://www.newhopech.com/growthtracks>.

Citizen Church calls its assimilation process, Life Track. “At Citizens, LIFE TRACK is where it all begins. Life Track is a 2 part process specifically designed to help you learn more about Citizens, find some people to do life with and discover the perfect place for you.”<sup>572</sup> For Pastor Chris, assimilation is taking people from just attending to “connecting people to their sweet spot.”<sup>573</sup>

Action Church assimilation process is called Action Steps. It is through Action Steps that people are connected to the vision of the church. “Action Steps is a 3-week class held on the first three Sundays of every month. Through this curriculum you will learn about who Action Church is, the purpose God has for your life, and how to develop your leadership and get involved at Action.”<sup>574</sup> The three classes that everyone is asked to go to are the following:

**STEP 1 - Who is Action Church?**

Explore the ministry of Action Church and find out how to connect with our church. This class takes place on the first Sunday of every month.

**STEP 2 - Why am I here?**

Dive into the details of your personality, discover your gifts, and see how your design reveals your purpose in life. This class takes place the second Sunday of the month.

**STEP 3 - How do I lead?**

Learn how to strengthen your character to fulfill your leadership potential, so you can begin making a difference with your life. This class takes place on the third Sunday of every month.<sup>575</sup>

The House Fort Worth is only a two-year-old church. The easy assimilation process has been crucial to deal with the rapid growth of the congregation and the recruitment of volunteers

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572. No name, , “Life Track – Citizens Church – Pastor Chris Norman,” n.d., accessed November 20, 2019, <https://citizenschurch.org/life-track/>.

573. Norman, “Citizens Church.” Phone Call, September 10, 2019.

574. No name, “Steps,” *The Action Church*, accessed November 20, 2019, <https://www.theactionchurch.com/actionsteps>.

575. Ibid.



for their multiple services. Many of the Sunday serve teams are showing up at six o'clock AM and leaving at eight o'clock PM.<sup>576</sup> The House Fort Worth has adopted a two-step growth track process. According to its website, "Our Growth Track at The House happens twice a month and is designed to help you discover your God-given purpose. Growth Track is made up of 2 Steps, VISION & SERVE, that equip you to follow Jesus, find connection at our church, discover your purpose, and serve other."<sup>577</sup>

### *Connecting People in Groups*

The assimilation process doesn't stop at a Next Steps class. That is the first of many steps that growing churches have to get people connected and growing in their spiritual life. It is when they get stagnant that people get complacent and leave the church. One of the best ways to constantly challenge people is through small groups. Small groups help a big church have the personal touch of a small church. In the book of Acts, when the church started to grow, the scriptures tell us, "Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts."<sup>578</sup> It was not enough to just meet in the temple, but it was necessary to meet in homes and around dinner tables.

Small groups provide venues for growth and spiritual depth that cannot be formed in a single Sunday service. In the age of technology, growing churches, are now using digital meetings as a way to connect people throughout the week. There are many people who are shut in and cannot travel or feel awkward about going into someone's home, so this gives them the

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576. Berteau, "The House Fort Worth Interview." Phone Call, February 27, 2020.

577. No name, "Get Involved," *The House Fort Worth*, August 17, 2018, accessed March 2, 2020, <http://thehousefw.com/get-involved/>.

578. Acts 2:42

opportunity to meet virtually with other members of the church. Citizen’s church promotes their groups by saying, “Whether it’s through sermon discussions, serving your neighbors and city, or sharing a common interest in a hobby or sport, we encourage everyone to join a group and begin growing in their relationship with God and making some new friends. Many groups meet weekly for six to thirteen-week seasons.”<sup>579</sup>

### *Theme #5- Financial Principles*

Each of the church planters who were interviewed talked about the importance of finances in both the prelaunch season and the overall growth of church. Pastor Justin said, “You can have all the right people, vision, systems, but without money you cannot grow. Finances might be in the top two or three key factors for church growth.”<sup>580</sup> Pastor Jeffery said, “Money follows vision. I have raised 1.5 million in the last year or so and I wish I would have cast vision as clearly as I do now so that we could have raised more money at the beginning.”<sup>581</sup> Pastor Josh said, “We have never been afraid to talk about money from the very beginning. Because of that strategy, our giving has been strong from day one.”<sup>582</sup>

### *Prelaunch Finances*

Each of the church planters was asked to give advice to future church planters, and to explain what they would have done differently if they were starting over. Pastor Jeffery’s advice was, “I

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579. Citizens Worship Beaumont Citizens Church in Redlands &, “CGroups Main Page – Citizens Church – Pastor Chris Norman,” n.d. <https://citizenschurch.org/cgroups/>. Accessed March 6, 2020.

580. Dailey, “Action Church Interview.” Phone Call, September 9, 2019.

581. Portman, “New Hope Church Interview.” Phone Call, September 4, 2019.

582. Joines, “Faith Family Church Interview.” Phone Call, October 4, 2019.

would have raised more money. Our outside support ended after 2 years, so people received a 10 percent pay cut because we overstepped financially. It was not wise.”<sup>583</sup> He went on to explain how he wished, “I would have asked more people to sacrifice to be part of what God is doing.”<sup>584</sup>

The churches interviewed each raised over \$80,000 to launch their church. Action Church raised \$750,000 through personal friends, ministry connections, and fellow churches.<sup>585</sup> These funds helped launch the church and care for the cost of the church for the first six months. Citizens Church raised the least amount with \$80,000 but he also received a \$30,000 matching grant from ARC to help him launch large<sup>586</sup> Pastor Jeffery raised \$280,000 but only spent \$220,000 on the launch of New Hope Church. Each of the churches interviewed participated in receiving a matching grant from the Association of Related Churches (ARC) or the Church Multiplication Network (CMN). The grants ranged from \$30,000 to \$50,000. According to CMN, “The Church Multiplication Network and AGTrust Matching Fund is a proven financial tool that serves as an accelerator to church multipliers. CMN also provides post-launch funding, up to \$20,000 to help with property expenses for churches in their first five years of operation.”<sup>587</sup>

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583. Portman, “New Hope Church Interview.” Phone Call, September 4, 2019.

584. Ibid.

585. Dailey, “Action Church Interview.” Phone Call, September 9, 2019.

586. Norman, “Citizens Church.” Phone Call, September 10, 2019.

587. No name, “CMN and AGTrust Matching Fund,” Church Multiplication Network, accessed March 17, 2020, <https://churchmultiplication.net/matchingfund>.

*Cultivating Generosity*

Prelaunch fundraising helps the church launch large, but a culture of generosity has to be intentionally created after the church is started. In order to cultivate generosity, Pastor Micah implemented a two-minute offering talk each Sunday since his church launched. He said, “I take two minutes each Sunday to teach about tithing. I follow it up by telling the congregation a quick story about how their giving is making a difference.”<sup>588</sup> Creating a giving culture was more important for Pastor Micah than just having a moment for giving in their service. The way he created a giving culture was by celebrating their generosity and talking about the joy of being generous.<sup>589</sup> Pastor Micah was honest about the fact that talking about money was not something he was gifted in, but he said that he loves to preach about faith and that creates a lot of generosity within the church.<sup>590</sup>

Pastor Josh has not only had strong giving from the beginning, but he is also in the midst of raising 18.5 million dollars for their first permanent church building. To date, Pastor Josh has raised 7.5 million dollars for this building that is set to open in 2020.<sup>591</sup> He said, “We didn’t do a campaign, we just encouraged the people to give by casting a lot of vision. We also involved them in every step of the process. We believed that clearly defined goals would create stability and people would respond with giving.”<sup>592</sup> Faith Family takes a unique approach to the Sundays that happen to be 5th Sunday months. Josh said, “If a month has 5 Sundays, we will take that 5th

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588. Berteau, “The House Fort Worth Interview.” Phone Call, February 27, 2020.

589. Ibid.

590. Ibid.

591. Joines, “Faith Family Church Interview.” Phone Call, October 4, 2019.

592. Ibid.

Sunday to update the church on finances and to remind people of what we did. The key is to make sure you celebrate.”<sup>593</sup>

Action Church has purchased two buildings since it starting in 2014. Pastor Justin talks about his financial principles by saying: “Talk often about money and the vision that it is going towards. Keep the vision in front of people by proving what you are doing with their money. Also present to them regularly what we could do if we had more resources.”<sup>594</sup> Justin has intentionally connected with high capacity donors at his church and when he meets with them he, “finds out what they are passionate about and connects their heart with the vision of the church.”<sup>595</sup> This team is called their “Legacy Team” and other churches call this team of high capacity givers their “Kingdom Builders” team. The goal of these teams is to cultivate community among high capacity givers. These teams accelerate the vision of the church through their generosity.

Pastor Josh also said “Every year we do a series on finances. In the series in-between, I try to work the topic into one message. And I focus the church on tithing. I never ask the people to give if they aren’t tithing. I tell them, ‘If you aren’t tithing, don’t give to the project, start tithing.’”<sup>596</sup> Finance series are intimidating for new church plants, but they create an opportunity for people to hear about God’s plan for their finances as well as how the church handles financial stewardship. An annual finance series is a regular event at the five researched church plants.

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593. Ibid.

594. Dailey, “Action Church Interview.” Phone Call, September 9, 2019.

595. Ibid.

596. Joines, “Faith Family Church Interview.” Phone Call, October 4, 2019.

*Theme #6- Continual Community Involvement*

It is through regular community outreach that the church receives a reputation for helping the community instead of just wanting the community to come to them. Jesus said: “In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”<sup>597</sup> Serving the community is what brings about significance and legacy to the local church. Serving the community also creates the best advertisement for the local church. The best publicity a church can receive is about how they are serving the needs in their local community.

Pastor Chris (Citizens Church) explained mission and outreach as the entire purpose of his church. He used an example of Starbucks versus a battlefield. Pastor Chris said, “Too many churches have the goal of community. They want their people hanging out. But the relationships made at Starbucks are not nearly as deep as the relationships made on the battlefield. The depth of our community is dependent upon the importance of our cause. The goal is not community, the goal is a community on mission.”<sup>598</sup>

Pastor Micah talked in detail about how important it was for his church to be involved in the community. He said, “Most church plants fold in a year in my community. This place (Dallas/ Fort Worth) spits out church plants on a daily basis. I knew I was graced to be here and I was ok with whatever pace God wanted to build the church. Our response was going to be to serve the community.”<sup>599</sup> Pastor Josh started the church with a culture to serve the community.

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597. Matthew 5:16

598. Norman, “Citizens Church.” Phone Call, September 10, 2019.

599. Berteau, “The House Fort Worth Interview.” Phone Call, February 27, 2020.

He said, “We started consistent serve Saturdays and capitalized on an annual serve day in the middle of the summer to make a big impact in our city.”<sup>600</sup>

Action Church is consistent in its desire to serve its community. Dailey said, “The community knows about Action Church way before they come into our doors. We are out serving.”<sup>601</sup> The idea of community involvement is part of the DNA of Action Church. One of their mission statements online shows the importance of outreach by saying, “We will do anything short of sin to reach people.”<sup>602</sup> Jeffery Portman also created a serving culture at New Hope Church. Portman said, “When God calls you there is a grace and mantle for that community.”<sup>603</sup> It is the passion for his community; Pastor Jeffery has rallied New Hope to consistently look at ways to best serve the hurting people in their area.

### *Outreach Ideas*

Pastor Chris (Citizens Church) intentionally created ways to keep the church focused on reaching the community. The very first summer the church put on a Summer Vacation Bible School. The goal was to reach 300 kids and it would cost \$15,000. According to Pastor Chris, “it was a major risk and we did not have the money but the vision was clear that we needed to do this event to keep an evangelistic focus in our church.”<sup>604</sup> Citizens Church has continued this outreach over the past few years and last Summer, 2019, “we had 1,700 kids and over 450 volunteers. The total

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600. Joines, “Faith Family Church Interview.” Phone Call, October 4, 2019.

601. Dailey, “Action Church Interview.” Phone Call, September 9, 2019.

602 “Reaction Statements,” *The Action Church*, accessed March 6, 2020, <https://www.theactionchurch.com/our-reaction>.

603. Portman, “New Hope Church Interview.” Phone Call, September 4, 2019.

604. Norman, “Citizens Church.” Phone Call, September 10, 2019.

cost has risen to \$60,000 a year, but it is a huge opportunity for us to make a big impact in our community.”<sup>605</sup>

In order to maintain community involvement, The House Fort Worth has created serve days called “I love my city.” According to its website, “We are passionate about serving our community and bringing hope to the broken. The House Fort Worth partners every month with different local organizations. Our vision is to continue partnering with great organizations and exposing our church community to the privilege and responsibility of serving our city.”<sup>606</sup>

Pastor Josh described natural disasters as an opportunity to reach out to their community. The serve culture of Faith Family Church was shown to the city in the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey. He said, “During the disaster relief of Hurricane Harvey the church stepped up. The mayor came to me and said, ‘I don’t know how we could have recovered without Faith Family.’”<sup>607</sup> Pastor Josh went on to show how serving the community is the best advertisement. He said, “helping people is better than buying social media ads. It will grow your church.”<sup>608</sup> Faith Family Church created a community partnership with Toys for Tots where they collect thousands of toys every year for needy kids. According to the local paper, Faith Family is able to make an impact in over 4,000 kid’s lives each Christmas through this strategic partnership.<sup>609</sup>

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605. Ibid.

606. No name, “I LOVE MY CITY,” *The House Fort Worth*, September 9, 2018, accessed March 2, 2020, <http://thehousefw.com/ilovemycity/>.

607. Joines, “Faith Family Church Interview.” Phone Call, October 4, 2019.

608. Ibid.

609. Christopher James, “Community Elves Collect & Hand out Thousands of Toys,” *BaytownSun.Com*, [http://baytownsun.com/news/article\\_d2fd0280-ff4a-11e8-9b53-6f3b463b34ed.html](http://baytownsun.com/news/article_d2fd0280-ff4a-11e8-9b53-6f3b463b34ed.html). Accessed November 21, 2019.



Action Church continually serves the communities that their locations are in through serve events, holiday outreaches, and an annual serve day. A regular system that has been put in place is called “Serve Saturdays”. Every location has one serve event in their community each month. The outreaches vary based on the needs of the community. In South Orlando, their newest location, the outreaches usually involve “inviting people to church at Publix, Starbucks, and giving away free gas.”<sup>610</sup> Their Sanford location is located in a high need community. The focus of their monthly community involvement usually involves serving in an underprivileged community or event helping out at the local opening day of the youth baseball leagues.<sup>611</sup> No matter what the event is, the goal is to mobilize the church to make an impact outside of the walls of the church.

Action Church has done a great job at creating a sustainable system of serving by having online signups for events every month. When Hurricane Irma hit the Orlando area, Action Church already had the systems in place to serve their communities in an effective way. Action Church also served the LGBT community after the Pulse nightclub shooting in June of 2006. Each disaster has given Action Church the opportunity to be the church to the hurting in their local community.

When the community is at the darkest, it is a perfect opportunity for the church to shine the light of Christ. Faith Family was able to serve in the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey. Action Church was able to serve in the aftermath of Hurricane Irma and the pulse night club shooting.

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610. No name, “Events South Orlando,” *The Action Church*, accessed March 6, 2020, <https://www.theactionchurch.com/eventssouthorlando>.

611. No name, “Serve Saturday,” *The Action Church*, accessed March 6, 2020, <https://www.theactionchurch.com/events-sanford/2019/6/1/serve-saturday>.

Citizens Church served continually after the shooting in San Bernardino. Disaster relief is a time for the church to capitalize on being the hands and feet of Jesus to a world that is hurting.

Pastor Jeffery regularly challenges his church to get outside of the walls of the church to impact the greater Seattle area. Part of their outreach is to plant locations in unreached parts of the city. Pastor Jeffery said it this way: “We are a pioneering church and we need settlers. Settlers are not the same as settling. We are a multiplying church and if people don’t like that there are a lot of great churches in the area they are going to enjoy more. But we are going to multiply. We are going to keep asking ‘where is the greatest need and who is God raising up to fill that need.’”<sup>612</sup>

#### *Final Advice for Future Planters*

Pastor Micah spent a large portion of our interview giving advice for future church planters. He encouraged church planters to “go where you are graced and know your why!”<sup>613</sup> He talked about many wounded church planters that he had been in contact with who gave up because of how tough it was. Pastor Micah said, “Know who you are. They will want you to change, they will compare you to other preachers and try to get you to be them, but you need to know what you are called to build, what you are called to do, and be ok if it goes slow.”<sup>614</sup> He also emphasized the importance of taking care of your family. The strain that church planting put on his family was immense, and he stressed that your marriage needs to be strong before you plant. He closed with

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612. Portman, “New Hope Church Interview.” Phone Call, September 4, 2019.

613. Berteau, “The House Fort Worth Interview.” Phone Call, February 27, 2020.

614. Ibid.

the statement, “pray a lot and don’t compromise.”<sup>615</sup> The importance of prayer and dependence on God was central to the success and growth at The House Fort Worth.

Pastor Chris talked about the importance of stability in his advice for church planters. He said, “I wouldn’t have moved as much and would have provided more consistency in our facility and leadership.”<sup>616</sup> Pastor Josh had great advice for future church planters. He encouraged them to “Have fun. Be more relational early on, and define what excellence means to you.”<sup>617</sup> He described his approachability in the lobby before and after the services as a huge help in the growth of the church. Pastor Josh reinforced this idea by saying, “I always made it seem like I am super available. I was in the lobby as much as possible connecting with people.”<sup>618</sup>

### *Summary of Evaluation*

As seen in this chapter, there are six themes that emerged from my interviews with rapidly growing church plants in five rapidly growing metropolitan areas. The themes that emerged were as follows: evangelism as the motivation, a focus on team and leadership development, launching large, assimilation, financial principles, and community involvement. Each of these themes could be seen as a best practice for church planters in metropolitan areas. The themes are not new and can be seen throughout the expansion of the early church, as discussed in chapter two. In the next chapter I will take some time to make this apply to future church planters and talk about how I am using the information gathered to implement best practices for Radiant

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615. Ibid.

616. Norman, “Citizens Church.” Phone Call, September 10, 2019.

617. Joines, “Faith Family Church Interview.” Phone Call, October 4, 2019.

618. Ibid.

Church. I will also discuss the project limitations and give some final thoughts about this doctoral project.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE PROJECT CONCLUSIONS

In the previous chapter, five successful church planters have expressed what it took to plant in their respective metropolitan areas. Churches like Action Church (Orlando), New Hope Church (Seattle), Citizens Church (Riverside-San Bernardino), Faith Family Church (Houston), and The House Fort Worth (Dallas-Fort Worth), provide glimmers of hope for what is possible when church planting is done well. Out of the qualitative data they provided, six relevant themes emerged: evangelism as the motivation, a focus on team and leadership development, launching large, assimilation, financial principles, and community involvement. These themes will be described as best practices for future church planters in this final chapter. I also intent to discuss the project limitations and the steps that future church planters should implement in planting a church in a metropolitan area. The best practices presented in these themes has also given me multiple takeaways to apply to Radiant Church to continue our growth throughout Tampa Bay.

#### *Project Limitations*

According to Rebecca Randall, “50,000 new churches have been planted in America since 1998.”<sup>619</sup> Many of these churches have launched by a several denominations with varying strategies. ARC has just surpassed 900 churches launched since its inception in 2001.<sup>620</sup> CMN

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619. Rebecca Randall, “How Many Churches Does America Have? More Than Expected,” *News & Reporting*, accessed November 21, 2017, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2017/september/how-many-churches-in-america-us-nones-nondenominational.html>.

620. No name, No Name, “Church Planting - Learn About ARC | ARC Churches,” n.d., accessed November 21, 2019, <https://www.arcchurches.com/>. Accessed November 21, 2019.

has planted 3,900 churches nationwide since 2008.<sup>621</sup> These two organizations account for just a small percentage of the total number of churches planted since 1998. I chose to research five of the 50,000 churches that have been planted because of their exceptional numerical growth and perceived church health. They were also chosen because of their strategic location within a rapidly growing metropolitan area. I believe that the lessons learned through this research could work in other areas of the United States, but also that other styles could produce a healthy, thriving, and growing church in urban centers, as well.

Another limitation to consider is what I call the “God factor.” When addressing Peter, Jesus told him, “I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.”<sup>622</sup> Jesus is the one who grows his church. It is evident that he uses people and systems, but ultimately there is a “God factor,” and church planters need to understand that many things are out of their control. Each church planter interviewed was clear that they are a product of God’s grace and His sovereign plan for their cities. It would be ignorant for me to not take into account the fact that, like the Psalmist says, “Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him.”<sup>623</sup>

Another limitation is the fact that I did not address the personality types of the church planters. The question should be asked if these church planters all had the same personality or if there was a certain personality type that better equipped a church planter for rapid growth. Dr. Jeremy Johnson did his doctoral dissertation on the subject of the connection of the Enneagram number and the attendance of church. He wrote, “The findings from the research indicate a significant relationship between Enneagram Type 3s (Achievers) and 8s (Challengers) as a

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621. No name, “About CMN,” *Church Multiplication Network*, <https://churchmultiplication.net/about>. Accessed November 21, 2019.

622. Matthew 16:18

623. Psalm 115:3

common profile of the megachurch pastor (in 79% of the cases).”<sup>624</sup> Instead of focusing on personality types, which I believe would exclude people who did not fall in the same category as the pastors researched, I focused on the central practices that they believed attributed to their success. None of the pastors interviewed referenced their personality type or their “drive” as a reason for the rapid growth. Personality could be a factor in rapid growth, but I do believe that church planters should not let their personality type determine their calling to plant a church in a rapidly growing metropolitan community.

While many styles and approaches might differ from church plant to church plant, I do believe that the key themes mentioned in chapter four can cross denominational and stylistic lines. These themes can be presented as best practices for church plants. Church planting in any context is difficult and is risky. The key to minimizing that risk is to take best practices from other communities and apply them to the context you are moving into. When Katie and I moved to Tampa, there had not been a growing church plant in the South Tampa area for over a decade. The context was urban and we had to be creative about marketing and spaces to meet within the city. We did not use the obstacles as an excuse to not look at best practices that had worked in suburbs, inner cities, and rural areas across America. The goal was to find the current best practices and apply them to our context. In the remainder of this chapter, I will evaluate how the findings in this dissertation can become applied for future church planters.

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624. Jeremy David Johnson, “The Connection between Lead Pastors’ Enneagram Personality Type and Congregational Size” (Ed.D., Southeastern University, 2019), accessed April 13, 2020, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/2212230104/abstract/3B3B42CE9D3540D4PQ/1>.

*Application #1 – Check the Motive*

A church planter in a metropolitan area needs to be motivated by evangelism. The theme of evangelism challenged me in our expansion efforts throughout Tampa Bay. The growth of the church needs to be motivated by gaining new member from the unchurched and lost in our community. Church planters of growing churches spread that desire to reach lost people to their family, to their leaders, their teams, their congregations, and even to the other churches in their communities.

If church planters lack the motivation of evangelism, they should pause and ask the Lord to give them this passion before moving forward. Jesus displayed a passion for the lost throughout his ministry. Scriptures accounted for Jesus' passion for the lost, "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."<sup>625</sup> Church planters who are motivated by presenting their new style, motivated by the desire to preach, or motivated by the desire to be their own boss, usually will not be able to grow a church because growth happens through evangelism.

Once a motive to reach the lost is the focus, the church planter needs to evaluate his/her approach to reaching people in his/her community. The advice given for church planters is to start by evaluating their Sunday services. In the evaluation of our services at Radiant Church, it is important for me to apply the themes highlighted in this doctoral project. Evaluating the services through the eyes of the unchurched is helpful.

As mentioned in chapter two, "As church leaders, it is our responsibility not to grow the harvest, but to create an environment whereby God can bring about His harvest and grow His

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625. Matthew 9:36



kingdom.”<sup>626</sup> When evangelism is the motive, the church planter should be willing to do whatever is necessary to create an environment that is not about his or her preference but more about reaching unchurched people in their metropolitan area.

*Application #2 – Leadership Development is a Priority*

The theme of teamwork was consistent across all of the interviewed churches. The challenge was not just the development of teams but the development of leaders to effectively handle the teams within the church. As examined in chapter two, the Apostle Paul spent substantial amount of his time and energy on investing in young leaders. Paul was effective because of leaders like Luke, Tychicus, Epaphras, Silas, and Timothy.<sup>627</sup> Church plants that have rapid growth have focused on the importance of recruiting and developing leaders.

From the early days of the church plant, pastors should create a system for development of their team leaders. Because of the importance of the theme within the interviews, I have evaluated the current leadership development at Radiant Church. Pastor Justin (Action Church) spends more intentional time training leaders to best lead the teams within his church through his Action Leadership Academy. I believe that the future leaders of Radiant Church need to hear more regularly from myself. A pastor can delegate a lot of things, but leadership development should not be delegated. It needs to be not just the priority at the beginning, but the continual priority of the church planter if he or she desires the church to continue to grow and be healthy.

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626. Mills, “Healthy Churches Grow,” 70.

627. Lokkesmoe, *Paul and His Team*, 66–67.

*Application #3 - Launch Large and Keep Launching Large*

Future church planters should heed the advice given by ARC and CMN to launch large. With so many people to reach, the best solution to reach large amounts of people is to create an experience with momentum that will have hundreds of people attend on day one. As discussed in chapter two, “Seventy-five percent of the fastest growing church plants had over 101 attendees at their first service. By contrast, 80.4percent of struggling church plants had 100 or less.”<sup>628</sup>

Church plants should raise as much money as possible, recruit as many people as possible, get the word out as much as possible, with the intention of having the largest launch as possible.

I continue to evaluate our strategy at Radiant Church based off of this theme when it comes to the launch of our multi-site locations. The theme of the large launch challenged me to raise more money so that we can launch large venues in the attempt to reach more people. When the motive is evangelism, churches stay outward focused and try to get as many people to attend their launch as possible. The more people at the launch equals more people to hear the message of the gospel.

Future church planters should have a goal of launching with at least thirty-five team members and expect to settle at half of the launch attendance roughly five to seven weeks after the launch. It is not enough to have just a one-time public launch. Every three to four months, church planters should strategically put another big day on the calendar in order to keep the church thinking evangelistically. As discussed in chapter two, pastors can motivate the church to think evangelistically by putting special invite Sundays on the calendar. Searcy wrote, “people

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628. Stetzer and Bird, “The State of Church Planting,” 12.

need a cause. They like to be stirred, and long to be part of something that is bigger than they are.”<sup>629</sup> Big invite Sundays give people something to focus on.

An outline of our large launch given by ARC and CMN strategy is as follows:

- Identify a Sunday 6-8 weeks away that traditionally is heavily attended. My encouragement for church planters is to not fight the trends. If people traditionally travel or if there is a major citywide event on the same day, it will not be worth it to make that Sunday your evangelistic target. Also do not pick a holiday weekend. ARC and CMN recommend the Sunday after Labor Day or the Sunday after Martin Luther King weekend in January.
- Create an incentive for church members to bring their friends. This is traditionally a sermon series that deals with current needs people are facing. Many churches provide free food before or after the service. The major incentive that has worked for many of the pastors interviewed is just the focus on lost people coming to faith. People will invite their friends on that Sunday if they know that there is an intentional focus by the leadership to create an environment for lost people to come to Christ.
- Resource your church members with invite cards, yard signs, and flyers. The goal is to start handing these out a month in advance. Everyone should be thinking about the same date to invite unchurched people. The goal is to not push the entire series, but to push that one date.
- Pastors should preach a series leading up to the Launch Sunday or special Sunday about the importance of evangelism. Vision is best brought to the church through the Sunday messages. In these messages pastors are asking church members to write down the names

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<sup>629</sup>. Searcy and Henson, *Ignite*, 31.

of friends and family members they will be praying for an opportunity to invite to the special Sunday in just a few weeks.

- Pastors need to create an online strategy through advertising on search engines, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and other social media platforms. The online marketing supplements the ground game that the church members are already doing.
- Churches should send out a mailer to the community. The goal of the mailer is to entice the reader to go to the church's website. The websites job is to push people toward the One Big Sunday service.
- Start a prayer initiative the weeks before the launch Sunday or special Sunday. It is prayer that moves the heart of God and it is prayer that motivates the people to invite. Prayer is the backbone of a growing church.
- Develop the launch Sunday or special Sunday with the guests in mind. Do not bring in outside bands or speakers. This is a time for them to experience the best that your church has to offer. The serve teams should be expecting guest and do their best in serving and loving people.
- Create an opportunity for a response at the end of the message. Whether this is a traditional altar call or hands raised, the point is to call the lost to action and present them with an opportunity to surrender their life to Christ.
- Follow-up must happen immediately. If they give their life to Christ, the pastors should call them the following week. Churches should resource new believers by giving them books in the mail or helping them get connected on a digital Bible reading plan that will help cultivate the new decision. Churches should also provide an opportunity for new

believers to get baptized. Baptisms not only celebrate life change but they help cultivate generosity.

The strategy of a large launch is costly. The five interviewed church plants launched from an \$80,000 budget up to a \$750,000 budget. A typical special Sunday budget can be around \$20,000 for a church of 500 people. This budget enables the church to resource the congregation with videos, invite materials, social media marketing, and a mass mailer to the community. Pastors should not look at this amount as an expense, but as an investment in reaching new people for Christ.

*Application #4 – Create a System to get People Connected*

Assimilation has been shown to be one of the defining factors of a rapidly growing churches. It is not enough to have converts in the church, but a proper assimilation process moves people from converts to disciples. Nelson Searcy remarked that the assimilation process should happen immediately.<sup>630</sup> All five rapidly growing churches have monthly assimilation classes that get people connected.

Church planters in metropolitan areas need to be thinking assimilation before they ever have their first public service. Planters should adopt the four-step system from Church of the Highlands,<sup>631</sup> or the three-step system from Action Church,<sup>632</sup> or the two-step system from Citizens Church<sup>633</sup> as a model for their church to follow.

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630. Ibid., 154.

631. Church of the Highlands, “Highlands Growth Track.”

632 “Steps.”

633. Church, “Life Track – Citizens Church – Pastor Chris Norman.” <https://citizenschurch.org/life-track/>.

*Application #5 – Generosity Fuels Church Growth*

Finances are a huge part of a church plant and necessary for the growth of the local church. As seen in chapter 2, the weight of fundraising and generosity falls on the lead pastor. Growing churches are generous churches. Church planters cannot assume people will give to their church. Growing church plants are transparent with their finances and financial systems. These pastors unashamedly ask people to fund the vision because the vision produces life change.

After assessing the cultures of generosity within the New Testament and the current rapidly growing churches, I believe every church plant needs to be doing the following things:

1. Pastors need to lead by example of what a generous life looks like. The lead pastor must model generosity. He or she needs to be a faithful tither and share stories of how generosity has impacted his or her life.
2. Pastors should preach a series on generosity or stewardship at least once a year. I encourage church planters to preach a generosity series within the first 6 months of the church being started. This will help ignite a passion for generosity and fund the vision that God has put in the heart of the pastor.
3. Pastors should explain in detail the churches financial structure of accountability and transparency. People do not give blindly. Clif Christopher told us, “Donors are saying to our churches today that you will have to earn our gifts.”<sup>634</sup>
4. Pastors need to celebrate life-change often. It is the job of the pastor to connect the generosity of the church with the life change that is happening on a regular basis. As

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634. Christopher, *Not Your Parents' Offering Plate*, 6.

Scott McKenzie wrote, “God’s people are not opposed to giving; they are opposed to supporting a weak and unclear purpose.”

For a church that is more established, cultivating generosity needs to continue to be a priority of the lead pastor. I am challenged to create more financial stewardship that will build trust with potential donors. The interviewed pastors also have been intentional about developing relationships with high capacity donors within their congregations. This is an area that we need to develop more and make a priority if we are going to continue to expand throughout Tampa Bay. Building a church is expensive and it is the responsibility of the lead pastor to create a culture of generosity that will fund the vision.

#### *Application #6 – Be an Unavoidable Presence in the Community*

As seen in chapter four, churches that grow are actively involved in their community. Action Church, New Hope Church, Citizens Church, Faith Family Church, The House Fort Worth are all intentional about finding consistent ways to serve the needs in their local communities on a consistent basis. Jesus made it clear that serving is the goal of every believer. He set the example by saying, “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”<sup>635</sup>

Church planters needs to create a strategy off of other best practices presented in this doctoral project to help their church become an unavoidable presence within their metropolitan area. The strategy should involve a once a month serve event that meets the needs of the community they are planting the church. The ideas are as various as the communities that the churches are planted within. The Association of Related Churches (ARC) has Serve Day

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635. Matthew 20:28

recommendations that can be used in various metropolitan areas.<sup>636</sup> At Radiant Church, we are taking the list from ARC and attempting to ramp up our monthly serve events. I am challenged to follow the lead of the interviewed churches by doing an annual serve week that will activate a majority of the church to serve the community.

### *Final Thoughts*

In this project, I have presented a major problem that the church is needing to solve.

Metropolitan cities in the United States are growing at a rapid rate, while at the same time many churches in America are dying. The overwhelming consensus among the church planters I interviewed, and the literature I reviewed is that in order to reach new people we need to plant new churches. These churches cannot be planted randomly, but need to be strategic in both their approach and their style. The hope is that church planters will be able to take this material and use what is applicable for them to plant healthy, growing, evangelistic, churches in the cities all across the United States.

This project involved me identifying growing church plants and then interviewing them for an extended period of time. The goal was to discover common themes that can work across the nation. I believe the themes discovered are best practices that have been used from the very beginning of the church in the book of Acts. Once the themes were identified I created a strategy of what a future church planter should do when they plant a church in a growing metropolitan area. My desire is that this results in a model that I believe will work for church planters in growing metropolitan areas of the United States.

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636. No name, "Resources | Serve Day," accessed March 10, 2020, <https://www.serveday.com/resources/>.



There is not one feature that creates a growing church plant: there needs to be a wholistic approach to becoming a thriving church plant in a metropolitan area. Cities are going to continue to grow and God desires to continually build His church. The words of Jesus are still true for the United States today: when Jesus saw the crowds he responded with: “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”<sup>637</sup>

The greatest harvest fields in the United States are the cities. They continue to be infiltrated by the next generation who have walked away from the church. This is the perfect opportunity for new, life-giving churches to be planted. Each church that will be planted represents the potential of thousands of lives being transformed for eternity. The five interviewed church plants represent over 40,000 total decisions for Christ. The churches planted are working hard at not just creating decisions but creating disciples for Christ. If future church planters can use the themes identified by these planters we will see that number multiplied in metropolitan areas across the United States. It is not too late to see the statistics changed and see people won for Christ in the growing metropolitan areas of the United States.

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637. Matthew 9:37-38

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