

Great Plains Presbytery

Church Planting Strategic Plan

Introduction and Vision

It is with great joy and anticipation that we embark on this journey together, fueled by a shared commitment to advancing Christ's kingdom through church planting within the Great Plains Presbytery. Our strategic plan is more than a document; it is a call to action, a rallying cry for each church to embrace the vision of being actively engaged in planting kingdom seeds across our region. As we set our sights on this noble endeavor, we are reminded of the words, "If you aim at nothing, you'll hit it every time." Thus, our goal is clear: to steward our resources and our witness effectively for the cause of Christ, with church planting at the forefront of our collective mission.

The history of church planting within our presbytery is rich and diverse, reflecting the tireless efforts of faithful servants who have gone before us. Yet, as we look to the future, we recognize the pressing need to expand our reach and deepen our impact. The missional heart of God beckons us to venture into new territories, to break barriers, and to sow seeds of grace in places where the light of Christ is most needed. Our commitment to planting more churches is not merely a response to statistical trends or cultural shifts but a faithful obedience to the Great Commission entrusted to us by our Lord and Savior.

As we delve into the reasons behind our mission, we are confronted with sobering realities—the decline of the Church in America, the rise of post-Christianity, and the urgent call to reach the lost and the unreached. Yet, in the midst of these challenges, we find hope in the transformative power of the gospel and the promise that God's kingdom will prevail. Through strategic planning, intentional collaboration, and unwavering faith, we believe that we can turn the tide and usher in a new era of growth, vitality, and kingdom impact.

In the pages of this strategic plan, you will find a roadmap for action—a blueprint for how each church can play a vital role in the mission of planting churches. Whether as patrons, partners, or parents, there is a place for every congregation to contribute to this sacred work. Together, let us heed the call to be builders of bridges, inspirers of purpose, and bearers of Christ's love to all who dwell within the Great Plains. May our collective efforts be guided by wisdom, fueled by passion, and empowered by the Holy Spirit as we labor together for the glory of God and the advancement of His kingdom.

Summary

This strategic plan serves as a rallying cry for all churches within the Great Plains Presbytery to unite in the shared mission of planting new churches and advancing the kingdom of God. It is a comprehensive and collaborative blueprint designed to inspire action, cultivate partnership, and provide practical pathways for each church to actively engage in church planting. This effort is rooted in the unchanging principles of Scripture, yet it allows for the flexible, context-sensitive methods necessary to meet the diverse needs of our communities. While our theological foundation remains fixed, our approach is adaptable, recognizing that each church planter brings unique gifts and that every church plant will look different based on its context and vision.

The importance of this strategic plan cannot be overstated. We live in a time where the church in America is facing unprecedented challenges, with cultural shifts and secularism on the rise. The statistics on church decline are sobering, but they also remind us of the incredible opportunity before us. The Great Plains is a vast and growing region, and our presbytery has a chance to reach unreached and underserved communities with the gospel. Church planting is the most effective way to reach new people, and it must become a central focus of our collective mission. This plan offers the guidance and resources necessary for every church, pastor, and member to be part of this transformative work.

Guiding Principles and Flexible Methodology

At the heart of this plan is the understanding that while we are united by a shared mission, we recognize the importance of diversity in how that mission is accomplished. The principles that guide us—faithfulness to the Great Commission, commitment to sound theology, and reliance on the Holy Spirit—are unwavering. However, the methodology for planting churches will vary based on the unique contributions of each planter and the context of each community. We honor the individuality of our planters, acknowledging that no two planters are the same and that their diverse giftings are essential to the health and vibrancy of the churches they will plant.

This plan celebrates the variety of churches that will emerge across the Great Plains. Some may be small, community-focused congregations; others may grow into larger, regional churches with a broad reach. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to church planting, and that's why this plan is structured to accommodate different models and goals. Whether it's a missional community, a parish church, or a larger mobilizing church, each model plays a vital role in fulfilling the mission of God's kingdom in our presbytery.

The Role of Every Church and Pastor

A key component of this strategic plan is the investment in new residency training programs. These residencies are not only about equipping future church planters but about building a culture of leadership development within every church in our presbytery. We are calling on all churches, whether large or small, to be part of this effort. Training new planters is not a task for a select few but a responsibility shared by the entire presbytery. By developing a network of residencies, apprenticeships, and internships, we ensure that there is a steady pipeline of qualified and passionate leaders ready to take on the challenge of planting new churches.

Pastors and churches throughout the presbytery must also shift from an aspirational mindset to an actionable one. It is easy to speak about the need for more churches, but it is far more challenging to do the work necessary to make it a reality. This plan provides practical steps for churches to get involved at different levels—whether as parents, partners, or patrons. Each congregation can play a vital role in supporting church planting, whether by providing financial support, offering mentorship, or sending out members to join new

church plants. This strategic plan calls every church and pastor to be active participants in this gospel movement.

Moving from Aspiration to Action

While the vision laid out in this plan is ambitious, it is not unattainable. The real work begins when we move from aspirational thinking to actionable steps. The Great Plains Presbytery has a long history of faithful service, but now is the time to focus our efforts on the future. We must commit to doing the hard work of organizing, investing, and sending out church planters. This plan is not just a vision for what could be—it is a roadmap for what will be if we faithfully follow through.

Together, we can turn this vision into an experiential reality. Church planting is not a quick or easy process, but it is one that yields lasting fruit. By uniting as a presbytery, pooling our resources, and leaning into the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we will see new churches rise up across the Great Plains. These churches will be beacons of light in their communities, offering the hope of the gospel to those who desperately need it.

Conclusion

This strategic plan is a call to action for the Great Plains Presbytery. It unites us in a shared mission while honoring the diverse ways in which that mission will be carried out. By investing in new church planters through residency programs, supporting new plants at various levels, and committing to the work of planting churches, we will fulfill the Great Commission in our region. Now is the time to move from vision to action and make this plan a reality for the glory of God and the advancement of His kingdom. Together, we will plant the seeds that will grow into a thriving, gospel-centered movement across the Great Plains.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction and Vision
2. Historical Context and Call to Action
 - Great Plains Church Planting History
 - Survey Data and Historical Insights
3. Why Do We Need to Plant More Churches?
 - Biblical Mandate for Church Planting
 - Decline of the Church in America
 - Impact of Church Plants on Reaching the Lost
4. How Can You and Your Church Support Church Planting in the EPC?
 - Involvement Levels: Parent, Partner, and Patron
5. Types of Church Plants
 - Missional Community Church Model
 - Parish Church Model
 - Mobilizing Church Model
6. Types of Church Planters
 - Prophet, Priest, and King Giftings
 - Balancing Strengths and Weaknesses
7. Methods of Church Planting
 - Planting a Daughter Church
 - Planting a Core Team Church
 - Planting a Scratch Church
 - Entrepreneurial Plants
8. Stages of Church Planting
9. Models of Financial Support
 - Bi-vocational Model
 - Daughter Staff Model
 - Church Planting Fund
 - Graduated Runway Model
10. Developing a Planting Pipeline
 - Farm Teams and Step-by-Step Development
 - Residencies, Apprenticeships, and Internships
 - Identifying and Recruiting Planters
 - List of Churches with Residency/Apprenticeship/Internship Programs
 - How to Begin a Residency Program
11. Education and Ordination
 - Candidate Educational Equivalency Program (CEEP)
 - Role of the Commissioned Pastor
 - Options for a Master of Divinity
12. Current Great Plains Church Plants
 - Detailed Information on Existing Church Plants
 - In-Process and Formational Church Plants
13. Top Ten Priority Cities
 - Demographics and Growth Trajectories
 - Gospel Presence and Contextualization

- 14. The Process of Calling a Church Planter
 - Role of the Regional Director
 - Church Planting Committee and Ministerial Committee
 - 15. Recommended Resources for Church Planting
 - Books, Articles, and Podcasts
 - 16. Succinct Cover Letter/Abstract: Talking Points
 - Principles and Overall Vision
 - Goals for Church Participation
 - 17. Local Church Participation: Per Church Asking
 - Existing Churches and New Church Plants
-

Why Do We Need to Plant More Churches?

God Commands It.

Church planting is a response to and result of Jesus' Great Commission to His disciples, as recorded in Matthew 28:18-20. Jesus instructed them to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). It is the mission of God to establish His kingdom by proclaiming the gospel, gathering in faith communities to worship, making disciples, and sending those disciples out to do likewise (See Acts 2:42-48 and Acts 6:7).

The natural outflow of church health is church planting (See Matthew 24:14; Acts 12:24; 13:2; 16:9, Titus 1:5). God has commanded us, His called children, His church, to advance His kingdom.

The Church is Declining in America.

We need more church plants because fewer and fewer people know Jesus as their Savior in our country. According to Pew Research, in 1972, 92% of Americans claimed to be Christian, but by 2020, this percentage dropped to 64%. Experts predict that if this trend continues, the rate of Americans identifying as Christian will drop below 50% by 2070, with the number of religious 'nones' likely surpassing that of Christians. As of 2023, the U.S. has the fifth largest component of non-Christians of any nation in the world.

Even though 64% of Americans claim the title of 'Christian,' how many of them are actually born again? The most telling statistic comes from The American Worldview Inventory done through Arizona Christian University. Their research claims that in 2023, among self-identifying Christians, "only 4% have a biblical worldview" (defined as believing that they will go to heaven after they die but only because they have confessed their sins and accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior).

George Barna, who has been leading this study, noted:

"When you put the data in perspective, the biblical worldview is shuffling toward the edge of the cliff. As things stand today, biblical theism is much closer to extinction in America than it is to influencing the soul of the nation. The current incidence of adults with the biblical worldview is the lowest since I began measuring it in the early 1990s."

Statistics from our denomination (the EPC) tell a similar story. The latest data from the 2022 annual report has the EPC totaled at 125,870 members and 627 churches. This is roughly a 17% decrease in membership from 2016 to 2022. In the EPC, 77% of churches are below 150 members in attendance, and 65% of churches are under 100 members. In 265 of the 580 EPC churches that self-reported, membership decreased from 2021 to 2022. This does not include churches that reported membership remaining the same. That is around 45% of churches that are actively decreasing in membership.

The statistics in the EPC are even more discouraging regarding churches that are seeing professions of faith and baptisms. Among the 583 reporting churches in 2022, only 329 reported at least one profession of faith; that is, only 56% of churches have seen a single profession of faith or more.

According to recent LifeWay Research, national statistics reveal that in 2019, roughly 4,500 churches closed their doors, which is up from their previous number of 3,700 in 2014. The number of churches started in 2019

was only 3,000, which is actually down from 2014 when there were 4,000 churches planted. (Note that these are pre-pandemic statistics. It is likely that post-pandemic data will reflect even more discouraging trends).

These are not winning numbers; they are not Great Commission numbers. We are struggling to keep up with just the rate of closing churches – this has nothing to say about the other churches needed to meet the rise in population. LifeWay noted, “On average, Christians need to net gain nearly 2,000 churches per year between now and 2050 just to keep the same church-to-population ratio we have today.”

We clearly have a lot of work to do. We don’t have nearly enough churches to keep up with closing churches, population rates, and the sheer amount of unreached, unchurched people. Statistically, we could not possibly plant ‘too many’ churches in any area. If everyone who was lost came to church tomorrow in your town or city, you would not be able to minister to them all. We don’t have enough churches or pastors.

Church Plants Do the Best Job at Reaching the Lost.

Ed Stetzer and Warren Bird found that the average established church has a baptism rate of “3.4 people per 100 resident members (this is more generous than the EPC data), while church plants average 11.7 per 100.” That makes church plants, on average, nearly three and a half times as effective. Why is this?

Will Mancini and Cory Hartman, authors of *Future Church*, note that many current dying churches were planted in the “golden era of denominationalism (1960-1980)” that fostered churches founded to “accommodate denominational preferences.” This created a “come to church to be served rather than to serve” mentality where everything ran on “outstanding customer service.” They argue that many dying churches still maintain this identity and need an entire culture shift. Church planter Stuart Murray identified this when he said:

“Churches have been leaking hundreds of members each week for many years. Planting more of these churches is not a mission strategy worth pursuing. But planting new kinds of churches may be a key to effective missions and a catalyst for the renewal of existing churches.”

What are these ‘new kinds of churches’? They are missional. Missiologist Ed Stetzer and church planter Daniel Im define missional as “adopting the posture of a missionary, joining Jesus on a mission, and learning and adapting to the culture around you while remaining biblically sound.” Missional is a useful theological term that orients the church to live faithfully as missionaries in their world in light of God’s mission. Stetzer and Im go on to list examples of what a missional church might look like:

“Congregations that are on mission might be ones that partake in community events in order to establish contact and relationships with those who usually avoid church; participate in community projects in an effort to bless the city; or create a “third place” such as a coffee shop, child care service, or community center that provides a service for the community.”

Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch argued this point at the turn of the 21st century: “A missional church is the hope of the post-Christendom era... We suggest that if the church in the West does not embrace such a radical recalibration, it will find itself increasingly imperiled.” George Barna found in his multi-church study that becoming missional is the key to being an effective church:

“The missional church is incarnational, not attractional, in its ecclesiology. By incarnational, we mean it does not create sanctified spaces into which unbelievers must come to encounter the gospel. Rather, the missional

church disassembles itself and seeps into the cracks and crevices of a society in order to be Christ to those who don't yet know him.”

Therefore, successful churches and church plants focus on being missional. Existing dying churches tend to struggle to become missional because they were founded with a different identity, method, and culture when people in the West were expected to just attend church. For example, in 20th-century America, you could reasonably plant a Presbyterian church and attract dozens of Presbyterians in the area, but not anymore.

Unfortunately, many churches still operate from this perspective and spend much of their time simply attracting existing Christians to join their church. Lifeway research has estimated that only 6-7.5% of growing churches are growing through new conversions. “The majority of growing churches are simply recirculating the saints.” This pool of people is only getting smaller.

The 21st century has proven to be a whole different landscape that looks much more like our foreign unchurched mission fields. We can't expect people to just walk in the doors out of cultural expectation or allegiance anymore. We need to go after them. Therefore, if a church is going to be effective, it needs to look more like the missionaries it supports rather than a club of denominational members or transfers. Aubrey Malphurus said it best, “The church will not survive unless it intentionally and aggressively pursues nonchurched people.” That is what church planting in the EPC is all about, and there are simply not enough churches making the unreached their focus.

How Can You and Your Church Support Church Planting in the EPC?

Our goal is that each church in our presbytery be involved in church planting at some level. Our denomination has curated the language of “parent, partner, and patron” to identify a variety of avenues available for each of our ministers and churches to participate in this gospel priority.

Parent (Fostering)

When an existing church incubates and plants a congregation from its budgeted resources, often with a core group of members committed to forming the basis of the planting congregation, reporting to their leadership.

Practical Ways a Parent Church Can Serve and Care for a Church Plant:

Comprehensive Financial Support:

- Finance 80-90% of the new church startup costs for a minimum of three years, including the planter’s salary, benefits package, office/worship space, part-time staff, and miscellaneous costs.
- Establish a dedicated budget line for ongoing financial support to ensure the church plant has the resources it needs to thrive.

Recruitment and Human Resources:

- Recruit and hire a church planting pastor, providing comprehensive HR, finance, and bookkeeping support under the direction of the parent church’s business office.
- Identify the target area and commit human resources from within the parent congregation to create a launch team working with the planting pastor.

Building and Supporting Teams:

- Assist in establishing a core team of 20-60 individuals, couples, or families committed to attending and supporting the ministries of the new church plant.
- Encourage church members who live close to the new church plant to prayerfully consider leaving the parent congregation and joining the new church plant.

Ongoing Prayer and Spiritual Support:

- Set apart a specific prayer team to pray for the church plant regularly and include ongoing prayer support in public worship services.
- Ensure that the planting pastor receives spiritual oversight and support from the parent church head of staff and Session.

Mentorship and Oversight:

- Provide regular review and oversight of the planting pastor by the parent church head of staff and Session, ensuring accountability and support.
- Offer continuous mentorship and guidance to the church plant’s leadership team, helping them navigate challenges and opportunities.

Patron (Resourcing)

Offering financial or other tangible resources to the ministry. It is also being a verbal advocate, speaking well of the plant, and providing encouragement and/or strategy.

Practical Ways a Patron Church Can Serve and Care for a Church Plant:

Financial Support and Fundraising:

- Organize and host fundraising events such as charity dinners, auctions, or community fairs to raise additional funds for the church plant.
- Set up a dedicated fund within their budget specifically for supporting the church plant, ensuring a steady stream of financial support.

Prayer and Spiritual Support:

- Establish a dedicated prayer team within the patron church to pray regularly for the church plant, its leaders, and its mission.
- Incorporate specific prayers for the church plant into regular worship services, encouraging the entire congregation to support through prayer.

Resource Sharing and Donations:

- Donate physical resources such as office equipment, musical instruments, children's ministry supplies, and other essentials that the new church plant might need.
- Offer use of the patron church's facilities for church plant events, meetings, or temporary worship services until the new church can secure its own space.

Mentorship and Training:

- Provide mentorship and training opportunities for the church plant's leadership team, leveraging the experience and expertise of the patron church's seasoned leaders.
- Organize workshops and seminars on various aspects of church management, discipleship, community outreach, and other relevant topics.

Communication and Updates:

- Regularly share updates and progress reports about the church plant during patron church services and through newsletters, keeping the congregation informed and engaged.
- Establish a communication channel between the church plant and the patron church to share prayer requests, success stories, and specific needs.

Partner (Collaboration)

Joining with the church in its ministries, providing boots on the ground. It may also be supported in tech, legal, worship, coaching, and maintenance.

Practical Ways a Partner Church Can Serve and Care for a Church Plant:

Collaborative Financial Support:

- Pool financial resources with other partner churches to provide substantial funding for the church plant, easing the burden on individual congregations.
- Establish a joint fund that all partner churches contribute to, ensuring consistent and reliable financial support for the church plant.

Shared Leadership and Oversight:

- Form an oversight team with representatives from each partner church to provide guidance, support, and accountability to the church plant's leadership.
- Assign specific roles and responsibilities to each partner church, ensuring all areas listed in the parent model are covered.

Resource Sharing and Donations:

- Coordinate with other partner churches to share resources such as office space, equipment, and volunteers, maximizing the use of available assets.
- Provide access to each church's facilities for events, meetings, and temporary worship services as needed.

Mentorship and Training:

- Offer joint training sessions and workshops led by experienced leaders from each partner church, covering topics relevant to church planting and growth.
- Pair church planting leaders with mentors from each partner church to provide ongoing support and guidance.

Community Building and Integration:

- Encourage members from each partner church to attend events and services at the new church plant, fostering a sense of community and support.
 - Organize joint events such as community service projects, social gatherings, and worship services to strengthen relationships between the partner churches and the new church plant.
-

The EPC Church Planting Community

The EPC Church Planting Community is centered on planting together rather than in isolation. We understand that healthy and holistic church planting begins with a robust theological vision, rooted in the good news of the gospel. Through our coaching, peer cohorts, and training, we equip our planters to compellingly communicate how the gospel offers rest, renewal, and restoration to our communities. We prioritize the ongoing spiritual formation of our planters, recognizing that healthy leaders plant healthy churches.

In our commitment to healthy and holistic church planting, we are determined to create a collaborative community where planters can share ideas, bear each other's burdens, and encourage one another through the unique journey of church planting. We recognize the importance of caring for the needs of our planters' spouses, understanding that ministry is a shared endeavor. Together, we seek to embody the transformative grace of Christ and bear witness to His love in the world.

Our core values drive our mission forward. We are gospel-centered, kingdom-minded, healthy, holistic, diverse, neighbor-loving, and reproducing communities of faith. Through these values, we aim to foster a movement of church planting, instilling in our planters and churches the conviction to be "plants that plant." We believe that healthy, growing churches are not merely financially stable and theologically orthodox but redemptively reproducing. The EPC Church Planting Community, under Dr. Hunter Bailey's and Rev. Richard Rieves's leadership, serves both as a strategic catalyst and an instrument of care.

The EPC Church Planting Community offers a paradigm shift from the approach of simply resourcing individual planters. This approach foolishly leaves planters to "figure it out" and to reach out when they feel they need a little help. History shows that planters often end up so overwhelmed with all the demands of planting that they rarely know what they need until it's too late to be helpful. This overburdens planters, their families, and young congregations to be self-reliant. However, there's a better way. Planters don't have to be alone. They plant in the context of deep relationships and wise counsel. The EPC Church Planting Community supplies planters with much-needed friendship for the church planting journey along with guidance and accountability. The community planting model replaces the "Me" approach to planting with the much healthier and more sustainable "We" approach.

Another fundamental conviction of the EPC Church Planting Community is that a planter's character and competencies take priority over charisma. Sadly, it's often the case that church planting networks and mother churches overly value the salesmanship and charisma of a planter as the primary indicator of future planting success. This is shortsighted. Charisma never covers a lack of character and competency.

The development of core competencies and kingdom character in a church planter is not an instant achievement but a lifelong process of growth and sanctification. No single planter will possess all of these traits and skills perfectly, and that is not the expectation. Rather, the journey of church planting is one of continual learning, refinement, and dependence on God's grace. It's essential to recognize that these competencies are developed over time through experience, mentorship, and community support. As planters grow in their gifts and character, they will become more effective leaders, but they should never feel the pressure to do it all on their own.

That's why gathering a team of gifted individuals is so crucial. Planting a church is a community effort, not a solo endeavor. The most successful planters understand the importance of empowering and equipping others to join them in the work. By surrounding themselves with a diverse team that complements their strengths and

fills in gaps, planters can build a healthy, sustainable church. Whether it's administrative support, worship leadership, pastoral care, or evangelistic outreach, each team member plays a vital role in the church's mission. This collaborative approach not only alleviates the burden on the planter but also creates a vibrant, united community that mirrors the body of Christ. Together, they can more effectively carry out the mission of the gospel, multiplying their impact in ways one person alone never could.

The EPC Church Planting Community identifies eight kingdom character traits and twenty-one core competencies:

Kingdom Character Traits

1. Dependence and Repentance ("poor in spirit")
2. Suffering/Lament ("mourn")
3. Humility/Teachability ("meek")
4. Hopeful ("hunger and thirst for righteousness")
5. Grace-giving ("merciful")
6. Honest ("pure in heart")
7. Submissive ("peacemaker")
8. Bold ("persecuted for righteousness' sake")

Core Competencies

1. Vision & Values (Church Culture)
2. Contextualization (Theological Vision)
3. Fundraising (Sustaining Ministry Model)
4. Theology (Reformed Orthodoxy)
5. Cultural Apologetics (Applied Evangelism)
6. Evangelism (Ambassadors)
7. Preaching (Compelling & Contextualized Teaching of the Bible)
8. Liturgy/Music (Worship)
9. Core Team/Launch (Foundational Leadership)
10. Small Groups (Missional Communities)
11. Leadership/Disciple-Making (Multiplication)
12. Technology (Systems/Process)
13. Business Plan/Budgeting (Stewardship)
14. Polity/Credentials (Presbytery Partnership)
15. Adult Ministries (Formation)
16. Children/Student Ministries (Catechesis/Formation)
17. Pastoral Counseling (Soul Care)
18. Church Officers (Shared Ministry)
19. Staffing (Roles/Team Dynamics)
20. Volunteer Teams (Body Life)
21. Navigating Ministry Landmines (Wisdom/Equipping)

Avenues of Ministry within the EPC Church Planting Community

The EPC Church Planting Community not only recruits and assesses potential church planters but also commits to the ongoing development and care of our planters. We provide development and care through three primary avenues: coaching, cohorts, and bi-annual training.

Coaching

Coaching plays a pivotal role in a church planter's professional development and encouragement, providing invaluable support, guidance, and accountability throughout their journey. Through personalized coaching sessions, church planters receive targeted assistance in honing their leadership skills, refining their strategic vision, and navigating the complexities of ministry. Coaches offer a safe space for reflection, empowering planters to identify their strengths, address challenges, and leverage opportunities for growth. Beyond skill development, coaching also serves as a source of encouragement, offering planters a listening ear, empathetic understanding, and unwavering support in the face of adversity. By fostering a dynamic relationship built on trust and mutual respect, coaching empowers church planters to flourish personally, professionally, and spiritually as they advance the kingdom of God through their planting efforts.

Cohorts

Church planter cohorts play a vital role by creating a supportive space where planters can build relationships, share experiences, and explore new ideas together. These cohorts embody the community's commitment to planting churches collaboratively rather than in isolation. They serve as a strategic catalyst and instrument of care, ensuring that church planters are not left to navigate the complexities of planting alone. Cohorts also offer a place to grieve and lament together through the struggles and strains that inevitably evolve. By fostering deep relationships and providing wise counsel, the cohorts help planters bear each other's burdens, encourage one another, and engage in ongoing spiritual formation.

Bi-Annual Training

Bi-annual in-person training is essential to the EPC Church Planting Community, providing a space where church planters can be stretched and taught, relax and be refreshed, and share their experiences with fellow planters. These gatherings are a key component of the community's commitment to planting together rather than in isolation. Through these training events, planters receive robust theological education rooted in the gospel, helping them to communicate its message of rest, renewal, and restoration effectively. The sessions also offer a unique opportunity to collectively consider timely cultural and theological trends, ensuring that planters remain contextually relevant and theologically sound. By prioritizing the spiritual formation of planters, these training events foster healthy leaders who, in turn, plant healthy churches. The EPC Church Planting Community offers several "tracks" based on the stages of planting and unique group demographics.

Types of Church Plants

Missional Community Church Model

The missional community, micro-church, or cell-church network model represents a unique and strategic approach to church planting that emphasizes an organic and relational mode of church life. This model contrasts with the traditional church model by fostering smaller, more intimate gatherings that function as dynamic faith communities. The benefits of this approach are manifold, offering a profound impact on both the believers and the broader community.

At the heart of the missional community model is the belief that church should be lived out in close-knit, relational contexts. This organic approach facilitates genuine relationships where individuals can know and be known, love and be loved. It moves away from the often impersonal nature of larger congregations, creating spaces where hospitality and authentic community thrive. These smaller groups meet in homes or public spaces, fostering a family-like environment where members share life together, support one another, and grow in their faith through shared experiences and mutual discipleship.

The missional community model inherently creates opportunities for hospitality. By meeting in more informal settings such as homes, these communities are naturally more welcoming to both Christians and non-Christians. The atmosphere is less intimidating than traditional church settings, making it easier for newcomers to feel comfortable and accepted. This model encourages members to open their homes and lives to others, embodying the biblical call to love one's neighbor. Hospitality in this context is not just about hosting but about integrating people into the life of the community, making them feel a part of the family.

Central to the missional community model is Jesus' command to "make disciples." This approach places significant emphasis on the church planter's role in making and equipping disciples who can then reach out to and care for their friends and neighbors. Rather than relying solely on the planter or a few leaders, every member of the community is seen as a potential disciple-maker. This multiplication of discipleship ensures that the gospel's reach extends far beyond the initial group, fostering a movement of believers who are equipped and empowered to live out their faith actively.

In a post-Christian context, where traditional church structures may seem irrelevant or unappealing, the missional community model is particularly strategic. It allows non-Christians to develop personal relationships with believers in a non-threatening environment. Through these relationships, non-believers can witness firsthand the transformative power of the gospel. They see believers' actions of love and service, which often speak louder than words. This lived demonstration of faith makes the message of the gospel more plausible and attractive, breaking down barriers of skepticism and misunderstanding.

The missional community model bridges the gap between proclamation and demonstration. It emphasizes not only the importance of speaking about God's love but also living it out in tangible ways. This holistic approach ensures that the community's faith is visible and credible. By caring for the needs of those around them and engaging in acts of service, members of the missional community provide a compelling witness to the truth of the gospel. This integrated approach of word and action creates a powerful testimony that can lead others to faith in Jesus Christ.

The missional community, micro-church, or cell-church network model represents a unique and strategic method of church planting that is particularly suited to contemporary contexts. By fostering an organic,

relational approach to church life, it offers genuine opportunities for hospitality and community. This model emphasizes making disciples and equips believers to reach out and care for their neighbors. In a post-Christian world, it provides a credible witness to the gospel, demonstrating the love of Christ through both words and actions. As such, the missional community model not only aligns with Jesus' command to make disciples but also offers a practical and effective strategy for advancing the kingdom of God in today's society.

As a general guideline, a healthy missional community church, when it matures, includes approximately 150 members.

Parish Church Model

The parish model of church planting is a strategic and impactful approach that emphasizes a deep commitment to a specific geographical area. This model offers unique benefits for both the planter and the members by providing greater clarity about their mission field and fostering a strong sense of community and purpose.

A key benefit of the parish model is the clarity it provides regarding the church's target area. By defining a specific geographic boundary, the planter and church members can focus their efforts on understanding and meeting the unique needs of their community. This geographical clarity allows the church to develop a deep, contextualized ministry that is highly relevant to the people it serves. It enables the church to build meaningful relationships, understand local issues, and engage more effectively with the community.

A parish church exists for its community, investing in the wholistic development of its community. The church seeks not only the spiritual and immaterial good of the people but also their material and social well-being. Members of a parish church sow themselves into the community, engaging in acts of service, and advocacy while boldly proclaiming the gospel of God's grace. The parish serves as an embodiment of the grace we preach. This commitment to holistic ministry breaks down barriers of hostility and suspicion between Christians and non-Christians. By adopting a posture of serving rather than taking, and of loving the city rather than being defensive, the parish church becomes a trusted and valued presence in the community.

The parish approach helps to dismantle walls of hostility and suspicion that often exist between the church and the broader community. As the parish church serves and invests in the well-being of the community, it demonstrates genuine love and care, which fosters trust and openness. This service-oriented posture contrasts with perceptions of the church as insular or self-serving, paving the way for more meaningful relationships with non-Christians and those skeptical of the church. The focus on justice, compassion, and service resonates deeply with the broader society's values, making the gospel message more accessible and compelling.

The parish model fosters an integrated approach to ministry where worship, work, and play are seamlessly woven together. In this model, church life is not confined to Sunday services but permeates every aspect of daily living. Worship is expressed not only through corporate gatherings but also through acts of service, community engagement, and everyday interactions. This holistic approach ensures that faith is lived out authentically in every sphere of life, creating a cohesive and vibrant community that reflects the love of Christ in tangible ways.

By focusing on a specific area, a parish church can develop a sustained and meaningful presence in the community. This presence enables the church to build long-term relationships, address systemic issues, and be a stable and reliable source of support. The church can collaborate with local organizations, schools, and

businesses to address community needs, enhancing its impact and reach. This consistent engagement helps to weave the church into the fabric of the community, making it an indispensable part of the local ecosystem.

The parish model of church planting offers a unique and strategic approach to ministry that emphasizes clarity of mission, community service, and holistic engagement. By focusing on a specific geographical area, the parish church can develop deep, contextualized relationships and address the unique needs of its community. This model fosters trust, breaks down barriers between Christians and non-Christians, and integrates worship, work, and play into a cohesive whole. As the church serves and loves its community, it embodies the gospel in tangible ways, making a lasting and transformative impact. The parish model not only fulfills the biblical call to "do justice" but also creates a vibrant, loving, and engaged community that reflects the heart of Christ.

As a general guideline, a healthy missional community church, when it matures, includes approximately 250 members.

Mobilizing Church Model

The mobilizing church model represents a unique and strategic approach to church planting, designed to reach and impact large groups of people through a blend of missional and attractional ministry philosophies. This model seeks to grow larger, pooling kingdom resources to make a significant impact and creating multiple inroads into a community or region.

One of the defining characteristics of a mobilizing church is its ability to reach and impact large groups of people. By aiming for growth, the church can draw in a diverse congregation, providing a robust platform for widespread influence. This larger size allows the church to create various programs and initiatives that cater to different segments of the community, effectively meeting a broad range of needs and interests.

A mobilizing church is the best blend of missional and attractional church philosophies. It combines the proactive outreach and service-oriented mindset of a missional church with the welcoming and engaging elements of an attractional church. This dual approach ensures that the church is not only reaching out to the community but also providing an inviting and enriching environment for those who come in. The result is a dynamic church that is both outward-focused in its mission and inward-focused in fostering a vibrant, supportive community.

A key advantage of the mobilizing church model is its ability to leverage useful facilities for both internal programming and community events. A well-equipped facility can host worship services, educational programs, social gatherings, and a variety of community activities. This makes the church a hub of activity and a central part of the community's life. By opening its doors for community events, the mobilizing church builds bridges with the local population, enhancing its presence and influence.

With its larger size and pooled resources, a mobilizing church is well-positioned to diversify its missional opportunities. It can support multiple ministries and outreach efforts simultaneously, ranging from local service projects to global missions. Financial resources can be allocated to support a variety of initiatives, while a larger congregation provides a broader base of volunteers and leaders. This diversification allows the church to be agile and responsive to the needs of the community, maximizing its kingdom impact.

A significant benefit of the mobilizing church model is its capacity to host residency programs to train future church planters. With ample resources and a strong leadership structure, the church can invest in developing new leaders, providing them with practical experience and mentorship. These residency programs equip

emerging leaders with the skills and knowledge necessary to plant and grow healthy churches. By raising up and sending out new church planters, the mobilizing church contributes to the multiplication of churches and the expansion of God's kingdom.

The mobilizing church model offers a unique and strategic approach to church planting, characterized by its ability to reach and impact large groups of people. By blending missional and attractional philosophies, utilizing facilities effectively, diversifying missional opportunities, and hosting residency programs, a mobilizing church maximizes its kingdom impact. This model not only fosters a thriving internal community but also serves as a dynamic force for good in the broader region, embodying the gospel in action and word. As a result, the mobilizing church stands as a beacon of hope and a catalyst for transformation, fulfilling its mission to advance God's kingdom in powerful and far-reaching ways.

As a general guideline, a healthy missional community church, when it matures, includes at least 350 members.

Application: Discerning the Best Church Plant Model

Determining which type of church to plant is not a formulaic decision; it's more akin to creating art, guided by sanctified wisdom and shaped by prayerful discernment. While a variety of factors must be considered, the decision ultimately rests on how God is calling each planter, church, and community to serve His kingdom. Below are the key factors that should inform this decision:

1. **Contextualization (Understanding the City, Demographics, and History)** The first step in discerning the best church model is to thoroughly understand the context of the city or community where the church will be planted. What are the demographics? What is the spiritual, social, and economic history of the area? Understanding the people who live there and their unique needs will help determine whether a smaller, relational church like a missional community or a larger, more resource-intensive model like a mobilizing church would be the best fit. The history of the church's presence in the area and the cultural climate also play a significant role in shaping this decision.
2. **Type of Churches in the Area** A critical question to ask is: what types of churches already exist in the target area? If there is already a large, established church presence, planting a smaller missional community might better fill the gaps in intimate relational ministry. Alternatively, if there is a lack of large-scale evangelical presence, a mobilizing church might be able to engage a wider range of people by creating a more visible, multifaceted ministry. The choice should complement and enhance the spiritual landscape, not duplicate what already exists.
3. **Gifts, Abilities, and Vision of the Planter** Every church planter brings a unique combination of gifts and abilities, which should directly inform the type of church planted. A planter who is highly relational, passionate about discipleship, and gifted in fostering close-knit communities may be better suited for a missional community church. In contrast, a planter with strong organizational skills, a vision for large-scale ministry, and a heart for empowering multiple leaders may find the mobilizing church model a better fit. The key is aligning the planter's strengths with the church model's demands.
4. **Needs of the Target Community** The needs of the target community should be at the forefront of the decision-making process. If the community struggles with social fragmentation, economic hardship, or relational isolation, a missional community that fosters deep connections and mutual support might be the best approach. If the area is marked by a growing population, educational needs, or social injustice, a parish or mobilizing church might provide the broad, structural support needed to address these issues on a larger scale.

5. **Resources and Finances** Available resources and finances will significantly shape what type of church can be planted. Missional community churches typically require fewer financial resources upfront because they are smaller and more relationally focused. On the other hand, mobilizing churches require substantial financial investments in facilities, staff, and programs. Churches and presbyteries must honestly assess what resources are available and whether the financial commitment required for a larger-scale plant is sustainable.
6. **Population and Human Geography** Population size and geographical factors also influence the best church model. In densely populated, urban areas, a mobilizing church may have the space and resources to draw large groups and impact multiple social spheres. In contrast, rural or suburban areas with smaller, more dispersed populations may benefit more from a parish church model that serves a defined geographic area or a missional community that prioritizes relationships and discipleship over size.

Conclusion Choosing the right church plant model is a matter of carefully balancing these factors while seeking God's direction through prayer and counsel. The goal is not to force a formula but to use sanctified wisdom to discern how best to engage the target community with the gospel, align with the planter's gifts, and honor the unique context in which the church will grow.

Types of Church Planters

In the EPC Church Planting Community, we recognize that not all church planters possess the same mix of spiritual gifts. Each set of gifts offers distinct benefits and character traits that can greatly enhance a planter's ministry. However, these gifts also introduce potential blind spots and weaknesses if they are not supplemented by the gifts of other leaders and the accountability provided by a church planting coach. Understanding the diversity of gifts through the lens of the "offices of Christ"—prophet, priest, and king—helps us appreciate the unique contributions and challenges each planter brings to their church planting journey.

These three categories, often referred to as the "offices of Christ," are illustrated throughout the Bible and culminate in the redemptive work of Christ. Jesus Christ embodies the perfect prophet, priest, and king, saving His people from their sins and leading them towards the new heavens and new earth shalom. Within the EPC Church Planting Community, we often say that most planters orient to a primary "office" or gifting—prophet, priest, or king—and then usually have a secondary gifting, regularly facing a deficiency regarding the third. This dynamic interplay of strengths and weaknesses necessitates a balanced approach to church planting, incorporating diverse gifts and perspectives.

The Prophet

A prophet is a seer, endowed with great discernment and wisdom, future-oriented and capable of making macro-movements towards long-term goals. Prophets are goal-oriented over people-oriented, objective over subjective. They are truth-tellers, usually bold and flexible, able to envision and articulate a compelling future for the church. Prophets excel in casting vision, identifying strategic opportunities, and challenging the status quo.

However, the prophetic gift comes with potential blind spots. Prophets can sometimes overlook the immediate needs and feelings of individuals, focusing more on the destination than the journey. Without the balancing influence of priests and kings, prophets might struggle with implementation and relational aspects of ministry. Their boldness and objectivity can occasionally come across as insensitivity or rigidity, making it crucial to complement their vision with the pastoral care of priests and the systematic planning of kings.

The Priest

Priests are primarily shepherds, caretakers of people who are present and past-oriented. They possess a great deal of attunement to the feelings and needs of the congregation, enjoying the daily rhythms of caring for God's people. Priests judge their effectiveness largely on individual stories and personal transformations. Their ministry is marked by compassion, empathy, and relational depth, making them invaluable in fostering community and providing pastoral care.

The primary challenge for priests lies in their potential difficulty with long-term vision and strategic planning. Without the forward-thinking perspective of prophets and the structured approach of kings, priests might struggle to navigate complex organizational growth and future challenges. Their emphasis on relationships and the present can sometimes lead to a lack of direction or momentum, highlighting the need for collaboration with visionaries and builders.

The King

Kings are primarily builders who think through how God's people develop incrementally. They are micro-movement future-oriented, solution-providers, and system builders. Kings focus on the advancement of God's people towards their growth in grace, creating structures and processes that facilitate development. They are also goal-oriented but usually more linear and less malleable than prophets, providing stability and order to the church's operations.

Kings' strengths can become limitations if not balanced by the relational sensitivity of priests and the visionary boldness of prophets. Their focus on systems and solutions can sometimes lead to a bureaucratic or impersonal approach, missing the nuances of individual needs and the broader strategic vision. Kings benefit greatly from the prophetic insight that sets direction and the priestly care that maintains relational health within the community.

Understanding that each church planter tends to have a primary and secondary gifting, with a deficiency in the third, underscores the importance of a balanced leadership team. For instance, a planter who strongly exhibits priestly gifts coupled with the secondary gift of a king tends to lack prophetic vision. This deficiency can be addressed by surrounding the planter with prophetic voices that can articulate and drive the broader vision.

Within the EPC Church Planting Community, we encourage planters to embrace their primary and secondary gifts while actively seeking out team members who complement their weaknesses. Additionally, the accountability and guidance provided by a church planting coach are essential in helping planters navigate their blind spots and leverage their strengths effectively.

The diverse gifts of prophets, priests, and kings are all vital to the health and growth of a church plant. Each gift mix offers unique benefits, shaping the character and direction of the ministry. However, recognizing and addressing the potential blind spots associated with each gift mix is crucial. By fostering a collaborative leadership approach and leveraging the support of church planting coaches, the EPC Church Planting Community ensures that each planter can fulfill their calling effectively, embodying the fullness of Christ's offices in their ministry. This holistic approach to church planting not only honors the diversity of gifts but also maximizes the impact and sustainability of new church plants.

Methods of Church Planting

In the following section, we will explore four different methods commonly utilized to plant new churches. Though all church plants are governed by an essential set of guiding principles, it's wise to account for the variances among these four methodologies to establish firm foundations of expectations, communication, and leadership.

Planting a Daughter Church

Planting a daughter church from an existing congregation provides a solid foundation for the new plant, leveraging the parent church's proven missional track record, knowledge of the local area and demographics, and often a more sustainable financial base. This approach involves the parent church defining what is essential and non-essential in terms of DNA transfer. The parent church must clearly delineate the non-negotiables of the vision and values, and sometimes specific programs and practices, that they wish to be included in the new church. Simultaneously, they should identify which aspects can be flexible and determined by the church planter. This careful definition helps ensure that the daughter church retains the core identity and mission of the parent while allowing room for contextual adaptation and innovation. The connection between a parent and a daughter church plant can serve as a powerful missional catalyst by expanding regional reach with trusted ministry partners. This approach fosters a collaborative spirit and a shared vision for expanding the kingdom, ultimately strengthening the broader church community.

There are two common models for planting a daughter church: the scratch plant and the hive model. In the scratch plant model, the new church starts from scratch with an open invitation for anyone from the parent church to join if they feel particularly called to serve with the plant. However, in the scratch plant model, the primary source of new core team members comes from outside the existing church from the target planting area. This model allows for a fresh start and the potential for new dynamics, but it also runs the risk of the new plant feeling disconnected from the parent church if the planter does not definitively draw the connection. In contrast, the hive model involves a core team from the parent church forming the nucleus of the new plant. While this provides a ready-made community and initial critical mass, it can sometimes lead to a tendency to skip the essential steps of gathering and vision casting because the planter starts with an established group. Both models offer distinct advantages and challenges, requiring careful consideration and strategic planning to ensure the success of the new church.

In terms of governance, it is common for a daughter church plant to be overseen by the parent session or a sub-committee/commission of the parent session. This structure helps maintain alignment and accountability. However, in some cases, it might be strategic to include a few outside voices from the presbytery on the governing commission to bring additional perspectives and support. Furthermore, the EPC Church Planting Regional Director should be invited into discussions about planting a daughter church as early as possible to offer wisdom and strategic partnership.

Planting a Core Team Church

Planting a church from a local core team presents a unique set of opportunities and challenges. This method involves starting with a larger group of interconnected people, whether established from a parent congregation or organically through relationships among Christians in a community. The core team might form around demographic interests, geographic proximity, or a shared theological vision. One of the critical principles for a core team that forms prior to a planter's involvement is the commitment to defer to the vision of the planter. It is

essential that the core team remains flexible and avoids adopting the posture of a tiny established congregation, which could lead to an ingrown perspective from the outset.

One of the significant benefits of a core team plant is the ability to invite newcomers into a welcoming group early in the planting process. Many newcomers are searching for community, and a core team plant offers them not only the concept of a new community but also a foretaste of real community. This sense of belonging and connectedness can be incredibly attractive to visitors and potential new members. The core team's existing relationships can provide a supportive and engaging environment, making it easier to integrate newcomers and foster a sense of unity and purpose from the beginning.

However, this approach also comes with challenges. A core team that begins to form before a planter's involvement must be explicitly guided to commit to the planter's vision. Without this commitment, there is a risk that the group might develop its own agenda, leading to potential conflicts and misalignment with the planter's goals. It's crucial for the core team to maintain a posture of flexibility and openness, allowing the planter to lead and shape the direction of the new church. This can prevent the plant from becoming inward-focused and help ensure that the church remains outwardly missional and adaptive.

To maximize the effectiveness of a core team plant, it is strategic to involve the church planting regional director early in the process. The director can play a crucial role in recruiting and guiding potential planters while also shepherding the core team through the initial stages. This guidance helps manage expectations and provides the core team with a clear understanding of the planting journey ahead. By aligning the core team with the planter's vision and maintaining a focus on flexibility and mission, the new church can develop a strong foundation that supports growth and community engagement.

Planting a Scratch Church

Scratch church planting, starting with no previously organized groups of people, presents both unique benefits and challenges. One of the primary benefits is that the planter has the freedom to establish the DNA and systems for every aspect of the new church. This model offers a greater degree of missional flexibility compared to daughter and core team models. Without pre-existing structures or traditions, the planter can take the necessary time to discern the Holy Spirit's guidance regarding specifics like location, demographics, style, and programmatic approach. This ability to tailor the church's mission and methods from the ground up can result in a deeply contextualized and relevant ministry.

In contrast, daughter church planting typically involves launching a new church as an offshoot of an existing congregation. While this model provides substantial support and resources from the parent church, it often comes with inherited traditions and expectations. The planter may have less flexibility to innovate or deviate from the established patterns of the parent church. Similarly, the core team model, which gathers a pre-formed group of committed individuals to start a new church, brings built-in relational stability and shared vision. However, it can also lead to challenges if the core team's existing dynamics or preferences limit the church's adaptability to its mission field.

On the other hand, the entrepreneurial church planting model emphasizes leveraging business and strategic skills to launch and grow a church, often with a strong focus on sustainability and scalability. This model can attract individuals with a strong vision for church growth and financial viability but may sometimes prioritize organizational success over spiritual depth or community integration. While entrepreneurial planters often excel in creating innovative and effective church structures, they may face challenges in maintaining a balance between growth and relational discipleship.

One of the significant challenges of scratch church planting is the immense creative and leadership responsibility placed on the planter. Without the immediate support of a parent church or core team, the planter must be exceptionally compelling and confident, capable of casting a vision that attracts and retains members. This approach demands a high degree of resilience and adaptability, as the planter navigates the complexities of establishing a church community from the ground up. Despite these challenges, the scratch planting model holds the potential for creating highly personalized and contextually relevant churches that are deeply rooted in their communities and responsive to the Holy Spirit's leading.

Entrepreneurial Plants

The entrepreneurial church planting approach offers unique benefits, particularly in its ability to embed the planter into the full life of the community they seek to reach and serve. In an increasingly post-Christian culture, traditional church buildings and programming can be less attractive to non-affiliated individuals. This approach allows the planter to move into the marketplace, engaging with people where they are rather than relying on them to come to a church building. By providing goods and services alongside preaching the gospel, the planter can create a more plausible and attractive presentation of the gospel, allowing people to experience grace in their daily lives as well as hear about it.

In contrast, the daughter church planting model, which involves launching a new church as an offshoot of an existing congregation, provides substantial support and resources from the parent church but often comes with inherited traditions and expectations. This can limit the planter's flexibility to innovate and may result in a church that is less adaptable to the unique needs of its mission field. Similarly, the core team model, which gathers a pre-formed group of committed individuals to start a new church, offers relational stability and a shared vision. However, it can be challenging if the core team's existing dynamics or preferences constrain the church's ability to respond dynamically to the community.

Scratch church planting, starting with no previously organized groups, gives the planter the freedom to establish the church's DNA and systems from the ground up. While this model offers a high degree of missional flexibility and the opportunity to deeply contextualize the ministry, it places immense creative and leadership responsibility on the planter. This can be overwhelming and requires a uniquely compelling and confident leader capable of casting a vision and building a community from scratch.

One of the significant challenges facing entrepreneurial church planters is the difficulty of balancing a covocational lifestyle, serving both the market and the church. The demands of running a business or engaging in the marketplace while also leading a church can be intense, often leading to burnout if not managed well. However, when successful, entrepreneurial church planting leverages the networking and value creation provided by business to form communities of Christ followers among unchurched people. This innovative approach can create vibrant, contextually relevant churches that are well-integrated into the fabric of the community, providing both spiritual and practical support to those they serve.

Developing a Planting Pipeline

Investing in "pipeline" development for church planting is crucial for the future vitality and expansion of the church. The days of passively waiting to see which students emerge from seminaries to fill church planting roles are behind us. Instead, we must proactively raise up the next generation of church planters by fostering relationships with various ministries that can serve as "pipelines" for future leaders. By doing so, we can ensure a continuous flow of well-prepared and passionate individuals ready to take on the challenges and opportunities of church planting.

Potential pipelines include existing EPC Associate and Assistant Pastors, EPC Youth Ministers, pastors from sister denominations, seminaries, campus ministries, Bible colleges, community colleges, chaplains, ESL classes, and even prisons. Each of these sources offers unique strengths and perspectives that can enrich the church planting movement. By investing in these relationships and creating structured pathways for leadership development, we can identify and nurture potential planters early, providing them with the necessary training, mentorship, and resources. This intentional approach not only increases the quality and readiness of new church planters but also ensures that we are tapping into a diverse pool of candidates, capable of reaching a wide array of communities with the gospel.

The Farm System

The days of waiting to see what type of students trickle out of seminaries to fill church planting spots are over. In today's rapidly changing cultural landscape, we must proactively invest in raising up the next generation of church planters. To do this effectively, we must develop a "farm system" approach, wherein local churches and presbyteries invest in raising up their own people. This approach ensures a steady, healthy, and vigorous supply of future church planters who are well-prepared to meet the challenges of ministry.

We identify three different paths within a "farm system": residencies, apprenticeships, and internships. Each path plays a critical role in the development of future church planters, offering unique benefits and strategic training opportunities.

Residency Path:

The residency path typically involves a 2-3 year commitment to discipling and training a church planter. This comprehensive approach combines theological education with practical ministry experience. The EPC is partnering with Third Millennium Ministries and Knox Theological Seminary to provide theological training materials for our planters. A residency program not only supports theological education but also includes pastoral mentorship and opportunities to practice ministry skills in a church context. This mentor-based model allows students to immediately apply what they are learning, enhancing their education with real-world experience. Moreover, residencies can tailor training specifically for church planting, ensuring that residents are fully equipped to lead new congregations.

Current Church Planting Residencies

- Colonial Presbyterian
- Kirk of the Hills
- Kirk Crossing
- Eastminster Presbyterian

- Lighthouse Presbyterian
- GlenHaven

Apprenticeship Program:

An apprenticeship program is usually a year in length and serves as an essential bridge between education and full-time ministry. It can be the final year of theological education or a refining opportunity for those who have provisionally passed church planting assessments. Apprenticeships provide hands-on ministry experience and targeted skill development under the supervision of experienced church leaders. This program is designed to help potential planters gain the final skills needed to pursue church planting, offering a structured environment to test and hone their abilities before launching out on their own.

Internship Program:

The third component of a farm system is an internship program. The primary goal of internships is to expose younger individuals to the opportunities and realities of church planting. Internships can vary in length, from a summer program to a full year, and are targeted at college and even high school students who are exploring a potential call to ministry. These programs offer a taste of ministry life, providing valuable experiences that can inspire and inform their vocational decisions. Internships also allow local churches to identify and nurture potential future leaders from within their own communities, creating a pipeline of dedicated and passionate individuals ready to consider church planting as a career.

By developing a robust farm system, we can ensure that future church planters are well-prepared, theologically sound, and practically experienced. Local churches and presbyteries play a strategic role in this process by investing in their own people and providing structured pathways for ministry development. This proactive approach not only secures a steady supply of future leaders but also fosters a culture of discipleship and mentorship that strengthens the church as a whole. Through residencies, apprenticeships, and internships, we can raise up a new generation of church planters who are ready to advance the kingdom of God in dynamic and impactful ways.

Church Planting Residency Program

Vision: This one-year residency program equips church planting candidates who have completed their seminary degree. This program can be stretched into a 24 month program for those residents enrolled in seminary. Residents will focus on gospel foundations, leadership development, evangelism, discipleship, fundraising, and church planting strategies, culminating in a fully prepared church plant launch.

Months 1-2: Gospel Foundations & Personal Development

- Goal: Equip the resident to think, work, and live out of the centrality of the gospel while developing self-awareness in emotional and spiritual health.
- Reading:
 - *Center Church* by Tim Keller (Intro - Gospel)
 - *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* by Pete Scazzero
 - *Prayer* by Tim Keller
- Meetings:
 - Weekly with Pastor/Planter: Discuss gospel foundations and emotional/spiritual rhythms in ministry.
 - Bi-weekly with EPC cohort: *Center Church: Shaped by the Gospel* video series.
- Tasks:
 - Preach or teach 1x, evaluated by pastor/planter.
 - Write a one-page reflection on personal and ministry gospel power, noting tendencies to live by law vs. grace.
 - Meet with a spiritual director twice and set up a few ongoing spiritual disciplines.

Months 3-4: Contextualization, Vision, and Core Values

- Goal: Equip the resident to exegete the target area, and create a vision, mission, and core values for the church plant.
- Reading:
 - *Center Church* by Tim Keller (City: Contextualization)
 - *Generation to Generation* by Edwin Friedman
 - Demographic studies relevant to the target area.
- Meetings:
 - Weekly with Pastor/Planter: City exegesis and the dynamics of spiritual health and leadership.
 - Bi-weekly with EPC cohort: *Center Church: Loving the City* video series.
- Tasks:
 - Preach or teach 1x, evaluated by pastor/planter.
 - Write a one-page description of your target area, covering demographics, socioeconomic factors, and people.
 - Begin developing relationships with unchurched/de-churched individuals and track interactions in a journal.

Months 5-6: Leadership Development, Evangelism, and Discipleship

- Goal: Equip the resident with leadership principles, personal and church-wide evangelism, and discipleship strategies.
- Reading:
 - *Evangelism for a Post-modern Age* by Brad Kallenberg

- *Once Was Lost* by Everts and Schaupp
- *Getting Things Done* by David Allen
- Meetings:
 - Weekly with Pastor/Planter: Discuss leadership, evangelism, and discipleship strategies.
 - Bi-weekly with EPC cohort: Evangelism and Discipleship Discussions.
- Tasks:
 - Write a one-page evangelism plan for personal and church application.
 - Develop intentional relationships with unchurched individuals and continue journaling interactions.
 - Preach or teach 1x, evaluated by pastor/planter.
 - Develop a discipleship strategy for the church plant and yourself.

Months 7-8: Business Planning, Fundraising, and Organizational Leadership

- Goal: Equip the resident to create a business plan, learn fundraising strategies, and develop organizational leadership skills.
- Reading:
 - *The Advantage* by Patrick Lencioni
 - *Spirituality of Fundraising* by Henri Nouwen
 - *Working Genius* by Patrick Lencioni
- Meetings:
 - Weekly with Pastor/Planter: Discuss business planning, leadership style, and fundraising.
 - Bi-weekly with EPC cohort: Discuss organizational health and leadership.
- Tasks:
 - Develop a business plan, including a strategy for leadership and team recruitment.
 - Begin Kingdom Come Training and develop a fundraising plan.
 - Continue relationships with unchurched/dechurched individuals and discipleship relationships.
 - Preach or teach 1x, evaluated by pastor/planter.

Months 9-10: Strategic Plan for Church Launch & Worship

- Goal: Equip the resident to finalize a strategic plan for launching the church and create a worship plan.
- Reading:
 - *The Worship Pastor* by Zac Hicks
 - *Planting Missional Churches* by Ed Stetzer and Daniel Im
- Meetings:
 - Weekly with Pastor/Planter: Discuss strategic planning and worship philosophy.
 - Bi-weekly with EPC cohort: Discuss church launch preparation and worship planning.
- Tasks:
 - Finalize a strategic plan with clear launch indicators.
 - Preach or teach 1x, evaluated by pastor/planter.
 - Develop a strategy for corporate worship, involving the development of a worship team or partnerships with local churches.

Months 11-12: Launch Preparation, Fundraising, and Final Steps

- Goal: Prepare for the final steps toward launching the church plant, including fundraising, team building, and logistics.
- Reading:

- *Desiring the Kingdom* by James K.A. Smith
 - Meetings:
 - Weekly with Pastor/Planter: Final launch preparations, ordination, fundraising, and logistics.
 - Bi-weekly with EPC cohort: Discuss 501c3 setup, fundraising progress, and launch strategies.
 - Tasks:
 - Finalize fundraising and continue developing relationships with potential supporters.
 - Host church duties as assigned (preaching, leading small groups, etc.).
 - Preach or teach 1x, evaluated by pastor/planter.
 - Begin recruiting a launch team and finalize necessary logistics for the church plant launch.
-

Current Great Plains Church Plants

1. Latino Church Plant from The Kirk of the Hills

- Planter: Mainor Arcia
- Tulsa, OK

2. Latino Church Plant from Avery Church

- Planter: Looking
- Parish Model
- Bellevue, NE (Omaha)
- (Still waiting on more details from Gary Fuller)

3. Simple Church Overland Park

- Planter: Mary Brown
- Missional Model Church
- Mission: We are making disciples that make disciples to God's Glory
- Website: [Simple Church OP](#)

4. Renew EPC

- Planter: Nathan Edwards
- Parish/Mobilizing Model Church
- Lee's Summit, MO
- Vision: We want to be a church where God's power to make 'all things new' in the gospel is experienced and extended
- Values:
 - Team Minded: We are a wonderfully diverse people who are united in Christ, partners in ministry, and contributors to one another's spiritual formation, well-being, and security.
 - Broken-hearted: We are broken people, wholly known and wholly loved in the gospel, who welcome and serve everyone with humility, compassion, and generosity.
 - Gospel-saturated: We are committed to making known and progressing in the good news that we have been made new by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone to the glory of God alone.
 - Disciple-makers: We live by Him and for Him. We commit to being prayerful, authentic, and active witnesses for Christ in our lives. Together we work to be a multiplying church.
 - Truth-grounded: We stand on truth and believe that God's Word, the Bible, is Truth. Truth doesn't change; therefore, we are aligned confessionally with historic Reformed Christianity.
 - Worship-fueled: Jesus is our first love. Therefore, we are devoted to frequent, joyous, and reverential worship together.
 - Kingdom-centered: Jesus is King. He must increase, but we must decrease. We seek and serve His kingdom above all that it might be on earth as it is in heaven. Maranatha!
- Website: [Renew EPC](#)

5. Fountain City Church

- Planter: James Cottier
- Mobilizing Church Model
- Overland Park, KS
- Vision: A Christ-centered church making and sending disciples in this generation and the next
- Values:

- Dependence over autonomy: We are dependent on God for all of life; on Christ for our salvation; on the Holy Spirit for the power to live our Christian life; on Scripture as our authority; on our church for healthy growth and community.
- Formation over consumption: We are here to grow and participate, not watch and consume. We are all part of what God is doing in and through his church. We are purposeful and thoughtful in seeking God's work in our lives.
- Belonging by grace not performance: Our place with God and in his church is dependent on Jesus's perfection, not our own. All are welcome here. We know that Christ is our righteousness, not our resume.
- Conduit over container: We want to use our resources to pursue kingdom growth. We send more than we keep. When we mature, we multiply. We have been blessed to be a blessing.
- Courageous faith over maintenance: We are willing risk for kingdom investment and impact. We value big prayers and hopes. We pursue living full of faith in joyful surrender to the Lord.
- Living as family over acquaintances: We share our lives with one another. We may not always like, but we always love. In this community we want everyone to know and be known, and to believe they belong.

- Website: [Fountain City KC](#)

6. The Harbor

- Planter: Ian Johnston
- Missional Church Model
- Overland Park, KS
- Vision/Mission: A ministry focused on discipling and ministering to young adults and families in Overland Park, Kansas
 - While the primary focus is on young adults, they also incorporate multi-generational ministry, aiming to bridge generational gaps through community building and discipleship, fostering lasting Christ-centered relationships and mentorships.

7. New City Fellowship

- Planter: Chris Lemmon
 - Missional/Parrish Model
 - Downtown Kansas City, KS
 - Vision/Mission: A ministry focused on creating a multiethnic kingdom community to reach and serve the inner-city of Kansas City, KS
-

High-priority Locations

High-priority locations meet three criteria:

1. The area is fast-growing.
2. Relative to the population, there exists a small number of thriving evangelical and Reformed churches.
3. The location is close enough to one of our existing churches that a partnership could easily be established. It is best to see these locations as broad suggestions. Deeper studies would need to be completed before any final decisions are made.

In Oklahoma:

- Oklahoma City (676,492) (Oklahoma City University)
- Norman (127,988) (University of Oklahoma)
- Broken Arrow (113,588)
- Edmond (97,537) (University of Central Oklahoma)
- Lawton (93,265) (Cameron University)
- Moore (63,864)
- Midwest City (58,070)
- Stillwater (49,759) (Oklahoma State University)

In Kansas:

- Wichita (392,059) (Wichita State University)
- Gardener (23,287)
- Kansas City (152,945) (Multiple campuses)
- Olathe (142,906) (Johnson County Community College)
- Topeka (123,906) (Washburn University)
- Lawrence (101,211) (University of Kansas)
- Shawnee (65,429)
- Lenexa (56,453)
- Manhattan (53,467) (Kansas State University)
- Louisburg (4,994)

In Nebraska:

- West Omaha (480,871) (UNO & Creighton)
- Lincoln (295,618) (University of Nebraska)
- Bellevue (53,694)
- Grand Island (51,411)
- Kearney (34,683) (University of Nebraska Kearney)
- Fremont (26,119)
- Hastings (24,296) (Hastings College)
- Norfolk (24,260) (Norfolk Community College)
- Columbus (23,954)

In South Dakota:

- Sioux Falls (193,978) (Augustana University and University of Sioux Falls)
- Sioux City (IA, NE, SD) (175,000)
- Rapid City (81,502) (SD School of Mines)
- Aberdeen (27,660)
- Brookings (24,442) - (South Dakota State University)
- Watertown (22,156)
- Mitchell (15,637)
- Yankton (14,852)
- Pierre (13,468)
- Huron (13,422)
- Spearfish (12,023)

In North Dakota:

- Fargo (126,375) - (North Dakota State University)
 - Bismarck (74,429) (Bismark State College)
 - Grand Forks (53,445) (University of North Dakota)
 - Minot (47,163) (Minot State University)
 - West Fargo (39,452)
 - Williston (33,767) (Williston State College)
 - Dickinson (24,444) (Dickinson State University)
 - Mandan (23,409)
-

How to Start a Discussion with Your Church About Church Planting: A Positive and Visionary Practice Guide

Introducing the idea of church planting to your congregation is an exciting step filled with both opportunity and responsibility. Far more than just a new initiative, church planting offers the chance to participate in the redemptive work of expanding Christ's kingdom. While it's natural for some to have questions or concerns, framing the discussion in a way that captures the mission and joy of planting churches can inspire a congregation to embrace this calling with enthusiasm and faith.

Key Questions for Your Congregation to Consider

As you begin this conversation, guide your congregation toward asking the right questions that highlight both the privilege and responsibility of church planting:

- **What is the biblical and missional basis for church planting?**

Root the discussion in Scripture, showing how church planting is central to fulfilling the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20). It's not just about growing our church, but actively participating in God's mission to reach the lost and make disciples.

- **How can our church play a vital role in advancing the gospel?**

Encourage your congregation to see this as an opportunity to participate in a movement of gospel-centered multiplication. Whether your church leads a plant, supports one, or resources it, there is a place for everyone to contribute meaningfully.

- **What resources can we offer to support a church plant?**

Help your congregation take inventory of the gifts, skills, people, finances, and facilities that God has entrusted to you. These are tools that can be used for a new church plant, showing the congregation that they have something valuable to contribute.

- **How will church planting enhance, rather than hinder, our current ministry?**

Church planting is an opportunity to multiply impact, not diminish it. Help your congregation see how sending out leaders and resources can actually invigorate your current church by refocusing on the mission and raising up new leaders.

Essential Elements for the First Discussion with Elders

When discussing church planting with your elders, it's important to cast a vision that builds excitement while also addressing concerns with wisdom and grace. Here are some key components to include:

- **A Clear Biblical and Missional Foundation**

Ground the conversation in Scripture. Show how church planting is a direct response to Jesus' command to go and make disciples. This is not just about growth, but a gospel-centered mission to bring light to communities that need the hope of Christ.

- **A Vision Tied to a Strategic Plan**

Present a thoughtful, prayerful vision for church planting that aligns with your presbytery's or

denomination's overall mission. Help the elders see that this isn't a rushed decision but part of a larger, strategic effort to advance the gospel.

- **Addressing Concerns with Honesty**

Acknowledge the concerns they may have about leadership, finances, or the impact on your current church. Create space for questions and emphasize that these concerns will be handled with care and prayerful consideration.

- **A Spectrum of Involvement Options**

Outline the different ways your church can engage in church planting: as a parent church (leading a new plant), a partner (supporting with resources and people), or a patron (providing financial support). By offering multiple ways to get involved, you empower the church to participate at a level that fits your current capacity.

Overcoming Hesitations and Building Confidence

For some congregations, the thought of church planting may evoke anxiety about the unknown. Here are strategies to turn hesitation into hope:

- **Reassure with Stories of Success**

Share stories of successful church plants in your presbytery or denomination. Emphasize that these ventures often lead to growth and renewal for both the sending church and the new plant. Church planting is about multiplication, not division.

- **Provide Clear and Manageable Next Steps**

Rather than overwhelming your leadership or congregation with immediate decisions, outline a path of exploration. This could include further discussions, times of prayer, and consultations with other church planting leaders. Help them see this as a journey they don't have to take alone.

- **Keep the Focus on God's Mission**

Remind your church that this isn't about church growth for its own sake, but about participating in God's redemptive work. The ultimate goal is to see lives transformed, disciples made, and communities impacted by the gospel. This mission, not just the logistics, should be the driving force behind every decision.

Moving Toward Action

By approaching the topic of church planting with a focus on God's mission, a clear vision, and a heart for multiplication, you can create an environment where excitement grows and faith takes root. Church planting isn't just an idea to explore—it's a calling to embrace, an opportunity to step out in faith and trust that God will do abundantly more than we can ask or imagine through the work of His people.

Your role as a leader is to pave the way, reminding your congregation that the privilege of planting churches is both a responsibility and a joy. By asking the right questions, casting a compelling vision, and keeping the focus on the gospel, you can lead your church into a fruitful season of church planting that will have an eternal impact.

The Process of Calling a Church Planter

Preliminary Application

The process begins when an interested party completes the Potential Church Planter Questionnaire, provided by a member of the Network. Allow one to two weeks to complete and review.

First Interview (In Person)

Representatives from the Presbytery and Network then meet in person with the potential planter and spouse (if married) to discuss basic details, such as sense of calling, theological background, the EPC, pathways to planting, high-priority locations, and funding options. Allow one to two weeks to schedule the meeting.

External Assessment

With preliminary approval from the Presbytery GPO, the potential planter goes to our EPC Church Planting Network assessment. Allow four weeks for assessment.

Ministerial Committee

With a recommendation from the GPO and Network, the Chair of the Church Planting Committee (CPC) notifies the Ministerial Committee (MC) so that ordination examinations can be scheduled. Allow twelve weeks for examinations. Examinations occur concurrently with the remainder of the enlistment process, as outlined below.

New Church Prospectus

The potential planter writes a 5,000-10,000 word New Church Prospectus, outlining:

1. The demographics of the proposed location.
2. What the new church will look like when it is planted.
3. A proposed timeline and key steps of implementation, including the development of a core group.
4. A plan for fundraising.

Allow four to six weeks for the Prospectus to be submitted to and reviewed by the Task Force.

Second Interview (Zoom or In Person)

The Network Director and Chair of the CPC then meet with the potential planter to discuss the New Church Prospectus and next steps. Allow one to two weeks to schedule the meeting.

Church Planting Committee

The full CPC reviews the New Church Prospectus, conducts a final interview, drafts Terms of Call, and authors a motion for the next Presbytery meeting. The motion from the CPC must include:

1. Terms of Call for the Church Planter/Evangelist.

2. Stipulation of a governing commission, which can be the CPC or a group it deems willing and able to provide oversight.

Allow one to two weeks to schedule the CPC meeting.

Presbytery

The MC oversees the final steps of the ordination process and presents the CPC's motion to call the planter as an Evangelist (including Terms of Call). The CPC Chair and/or Task Force speaks to the process by which a planter comes to the Presbytery and to the call of this particular planter and project site. The Presbytery is the calling body. Allow approximately four to five months (or eighteen weeks) for the entire enlistment process.

Funding Options for Church Planters

Recommended Resources for Church Planting

List of Books, Articles, and Podcasts.
