

Why You Should Plant a Church

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Hello everyone, I'm Bob Hyatt and I am the Director of Equipping and Spiritual Formation for the Ecclesia Network. I'm glad that you have joined us on this church planting cohort journey. We want to talk right off the bat about why we plant churches and of course we can talk statistics, we can talk about the fact that the church to population ratio is declining rapidly. In 1900 there were 27 churches for every 10,000 Americans. In 1950.

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there were 17 churches for every 100,000 or 10,000 Americans. And in 2004 there were 11 churches for every 10,000 Americans. And many look at these numbers and assume, well it's fine because the size of churches... has increased, haven't they? The funny thing is, is that the median size of churches in the U.S. has remained the same for the past 100 years. We can talk about the fact that depending on who you ask, somewhere between 3,200 on the low end and 4,000 on the high end churches close their doors every year.

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So just to keep up with the population growth in the U.S., we need to plant 3,300 churches a year. So take into account the number of churches closing plus population growth, and you can see just how serious the situation is and how silly it is when people ask, do we really need another church? But I have a feeling that most of you already know that some of you have probably even put that in the chat.

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statistics very similar to that in your support raising letters, but even more than just helpful facts for fundraising, those statistics are why you're a part of this cohort. This is a church planting cohort, so I don't think that I need to work too hard to convince anyone who's taking part that we need to plant churches. Probably a deeper question for many of you is why you should plant a church. We planted a church community, Evergreen, in Portland, Oregon.

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in 2004. In the early days, just before we started, I did what no doubt many of you have done and are doing. I spent some time seeking out other church planters, hoping for some wisdom, some encouragement, and man, did I get a wake-up call. I found two distinct schools of thought in the church planting community. The first is, this is hard. Are you sure that you want to do it? You don't look like you've got what it takes.

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I'm not so sure that you should do this. Have you really prayed about it? Whenever I heard that, I would just think, Man, thank you. That is just so unhelpful. So frustrating. The second school of thought started off sounding much like the first, but then it would take a dramatic turn. The second one sounded more like, This is hard. What do you need? How can I help you? Man, what an adventure. Let me pray for you.

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Do you hear the difference? I didn't just hear the difference. I felt it, deeply. And the sad truth is, I heard a whole lot more of the first, than I did of the second. And to be honest, it was discouraging to hear such defeatist talk from those on the front lines of the revitalization and renewal of the church, church planters themselves. As I thought about why they would do that, I think you just have to be a certain type.

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of personality to jump ship from the institution, from the known, the safe, and head off into the uncharted waters of church planting. It's not for everyone. And for the A-type personalities who often make up the ranks of those who jumped, those who are sailing into those uncharted waters, when we see others getting ready to do the same, a common first impulse might be to wonder who they think they are. Don't they know that this church planting thing is for the few, the proud, the best.

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of the best? And let's just name something that we feel when someone tells us that they're going to plant a church not too far from us. We really don't need more competition, do we? I actually had church planters tell me... disdainfully that church planning was the sexy new thing and that I had better think twice before I just jumped on the bandwagon. I was assessed at.

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one point in a 45-minute conversation by a well-known church planner and found lacking, told I should think about house church. But now, 18 years later, having finished my journey of church planning, having planted a church, raised up others, handed it off, and after seeing so many connect and reconnect with God through what happened at Evergreen, I can say it's a good thing that I didn't listen.

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to any of that scourging talk that I heard. It's a good thing that I felt called to start a new community. And then I realized that God loves it when his people step out on the road. on mission, in faith, starting new things, and it's a really good thing that at a certain point I remembered, oh, this is kingdom, not competition. But I don't want to be too harsh on those I talk to.

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I get where they were coming from. It makes sense to weed out the weak. When

you start with the basic assumption that no one should step out and plant a church unless specifically instructed to by God, and unless they have what it takes. But I like to approach it from a different viewpoint. For me, I like to start with the question, why shouldn't you plant a church? Most people, when asking themselves that question, they usually come up with three common reasons.

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Fear, finances, and failure. Fear, is it scary? Yeah, of course it is. But for me, the turning point... I was realizing that I had never really done anything in my life that required actual faith. Yes, I picked up and moved to Europe for two years. Did that require faith? Well, sort of. I mean, I had a great salary waiting for me, a church community to integrate me,

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and the knowledge that if it didn't work out, I could always just find something else to fall back on. Faith? Sort of, but not really. I came to the point in considering church planning where I realized that I simply didn't want to get to age 70, and look back, never having taken an actual leap of faith, never having started something, never having begun a journey whose end I could not clearly see from the beginning,

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never leaning back and saying to God, If you don't catch me. Finances? Yeah, that was a consideration. When we decided to plant, we had just bought a house. My wife had gotten pregnant. I knew that looking back, this was either going to be the greatest thing I ever did, or the dumbest. But we had to decide, my wife and I together, that if taking this step cost us our house,

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it would set us back financially. That simply wasn't too big a price to pay for God's kingdom. If we did what we felt we needed to do, and there were financial costs, then so be it. If we did what we felt we needed to do, and people came into a relationship with God, we would rather have that than a house. We'd rather see those who had given up on church find community again, than have a new car.

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We had to ask ourselves, what is the absolute worst that could happen? And when we really started looking at it, it just didn't seem like that big a risk for the potential rewards. Failure. In a conversation with a good friend on the day that we decided to plant a church, he asked me a great question. He said, how will you define failure? And I realized through our talk that failure wasn't if we did this, if we launched a new.

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church community but had to close the doors in a year because not many people showed up, and we couldn't pay the bills. Failure would be if we failed to love the people that God did bring us, if we failed to love each other in community, if we failed to feed, clothe, otherwise care for anyone. So show the love of Jesus in

tangible ways. That would be failure. Not if we simply failed to achieve any kind of goal. long-term momentum or institutional stability.

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I realized that for me personally, failure would be if I didn't even try. So if you do this thing, might you fail? Well, I guess it depends on how you define failure. Some people like to throw around this statistic that 80% of church plants fail. Don't believe it. Ed Stetzer's research shows that four years in, more than 60% of new churches are still around.

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Of course, what if you're in the 40% that aren't? All I can say is that many church plants that seem to be failures, by the standard of did they make it, were probably great adventures for many involved. Probably introduced people to Christ, and made a practical difference in the lives of some people. really needed those small, failing churches. I don't think the biggest failures in the church planning world are the ones that function.

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as a community for one or for two or for five years and then disband and go do something else. I think the greatest failures in the church planning world are the churches that never even get started. For whatever reason, because of fear, because of lack of encouragement, or simply because no one asked, well, why shouldn't we? All this has left me in a place where I really want to encourage those who are considering starting new churches, feeling like those that they really love and want to see introduced.

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to Christ are beyond the reach of the churches they come from or have been involved in in the past. Those who are feeling the tug of the spirit out into new spaces, into uncharted territories. You can do this. It's not rocket science. You might be right. In my experience in church planning, I've learned that there's a hard way to do this and an easy way. And the hard way involves plans and proposals and hundreds of thousands of dollars in seed money and denominational strings and a host of headaches.

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Start big, they will tell you. Launch big. Mailers to every home in three zip codes, they'll advise you. Have a full band of complete children's ministry advertising. And just so you know, you can do it that way. There's nothing wrong with that, but you don't have to do it that way. You don't have to have all those things in place to start a church. You can start small. You can raise some support. You can trust God for the rest. Get a job at Starbucks if you need to.

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Let your community be what it will be. Refuse to do for the people that do come the ministry that they should do for themselves. Concentrate on laying a foundation of community. common core values and practices and let your church grow organically without superimposing some kind of grand vision on top of it.

Like I said, it's not rocket science. You can do this thing. Just look at the guys that Jesus started with. But to bring some balance here, no, not everyone should plan to church. Not.

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everyone has the right giftings or the right abilities, the right skills. I think some people are suited for the solo church planning thing, though no one really plants a church solo. Others need to find a team to be on because their gifts and talents are not broad enough and they need to join with others. But just the fact that you're here, a part of this tells me something. Just the fact that you want to explore church planning tells me a lot. And if you actually step out and do it, well that says volumes about you, and about your courage, and.

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about your faith in the God that you love. who is advancing his kingdom all around the world. So let's talk just briefly about the marks of someone who is called to plant. The first is, usually God does something in their heart to turn them towards church planting. For me, it was just a frustration with the larger church that I found myself at, and the way that, the way it seemed to move so slowly, and the way it seemed to be missing.

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the people who at that point were in my age group, the 25 to 35. Something in my heart said we can do better, and I wanted to do something different. Often the process involves a big initial risk, or several, a move, a lack of financial stability, a lack of support. But they move ahead anyway.

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One of the marks of people who are called to plan a church is that they're willing to let their call be affirmed, and refined by others they know and that they don't know through prayer, through assessment. And I do believe in assessment, even though I make fun of the fact that I was assessed in a 45-minute conversation and told to go do something else. I've told people for various reasons, I don't think you should plan a church or I think you need to do this with a team that helps make up for these weaknesses that I see.

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Assessment is a good thing. Having those conversations is a good thing. Just understand that not all of them will be necessarily over-the-top positive. People who are called to plan a church are willing to listen to counsel from current and past church planners because they realize they don't know it all. Their desire to get it as right as it can be outweighs issues of pride, of feeling self-sustaining,

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like you have the vision and you can make it happen. All the time, in the middle of the night, in the middle of the day, those who are called to plant churches, their mind is racing, dreaming about what a new expression of church might be like. And that dream begins to take over their conversations, whether with spouses,

friends, strangers, whoever. That desire becomes so strong to see a new community that reaches new and different people.

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They have come to believe that the gospel is the solution to the problems of both individuals. really is, come to rescue and renew all of creation through the work of Jesus on our behalf, then that's really good news. And that good news is the answer to what the people you are trying to reach are looking for. It's the answer to the issues of sin and selfishness that you will inevitably encounter among those.

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you do reach. And here's the thing, it's the answer to your issues as a pastor, as a ministry leader, your need for affirmation and for worth. And then finally, regardless of some bad experiences or disappointments, people who are called to plan a church still believe very deeply that the community of Jesus, the church, is the primary carrier of that good news. That the bride of Christ, regardless of her issues, is still God's plan A for bringing.

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people into a church. relationship with Jesus and there is no plan B. And they dream about and become passionate about seeing the church live out its calling in the world. Are any of those things descriptive of you? Then I think you're in the right place. But I'll bet that in amongst those things there are some other things as well. Maybe a desire to do things your own way. A difficulty working for others in their paradigm, serving their vision of ministry.

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Maybe a desire to accomplish something, to be known, to break out of the box that you feel stuck in, to stop being the junior high pastor and start being the lead pastor, planting my own church. Maybe a desire to do something great for God. But then to be known as the person, the man or the woman. We do plant churches because statistically new churches are much.

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more effective at reaching the lost than established congregations. We don't plant churches to show the people who fired us who we really are and what we can really do. We do plant churches because we recognize that all kinds of churches are needed to reach all kinds of people and the gospel is wonderfully adaptable in its ability to be contextualized down even to the neighborhood level. We don't plant churches because we need a job. We do plant churches because we feel the.

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call of God to step out in faith, on mission, to seek and save the lost and those who have wandered away. Because new communities more easily adapt and change to reach new groups of people. Because new communities have a revitalizing impact on even established churches. For all these reasons and more, we'd be foolish if we didn't acknowledge that among entrepreneurial.

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church planting types, there isn't a dark side. Our goal, rather than ignoring that, should be to understand it, to name it, and by preaching the gospel to it, to ourselves, see those reasons begin to fade in our hearts, and then be replaced by the fame and the glory of Jesus, and the advancement of His kingdom. And by preach the gospel to ourselves, what I mean is this.

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You won't be a church planter for very long before you begin to see and feel that you've got more pinned emotionally on success than you'd care to admit. The more you do that, the more you'll realize that you're not a church planter, but you're, The more you understand yourself, and the dark parts of your motivation, your desire to justify yourself, to show your worth, to earn your worth, the more you preach to yourself the good news that it's Jesus who saves you, not your preaching, not how many people show up on Sundays, how big the offerings get.

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The more you do that, the more effective you'll be at preaching the gospel to all those you are trying to love into the kingdom. So as we start this cohort off, I just wanted to say this, wherever you're at in the process of planting, whether you're just considering it, trying to discern, whether you have concrete plans in a core group forming, whether you've already launched and are here to get more training for the adventure, I just want you to hear right up front that God loves it when.

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His people take a step of faith, particularly the step of faith in starting new communities. It will go ahead of you, it will go with you, it will be behind you in this adventure. And if you hold up Jesus and do your best to love those he brings you, you'll be a success, whether it lasts for a year, two years, or the rest of your life. Thanks a lot.