

Reformed Theological Seminary
SMALL CHURCHES CAN PLANT CHURCHES

By

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To Debbie

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ABSTRACT

Can small churches plant churches? Absolutely! The Scriptures provide the foundation for this thesis, showing how God purposed to fill the earth with His people and how the world is reached with the Gospel through the planting and multiplying of churches. Throughout history God has demonstrated His tendency to reveal His greatness through weakness and smallness. The aim of this dissertation is to show why and how small churches can plant churches.

Analysis of the thesis is based upon bibliographical research and data acquired through qualitative interviews with pastors of twelve small churches in the Philadelphia area. The attitudes and involvements of small churches in church planting are critically examined, along with some of the common obstacles to small churches planting churches.

Several models of small churches that are planting churches are included as examples. These models provide the basis for the identification of the assets,

characteristics, and means of small churches for church planting.

This dissertation is largely based upon the development of the ministry of missions and church planting at Bucks Central Church in Newtown, Pennsylvania, a congregation of the Presbyterian Church in America. The principles and proposals presented in this paper have been field tested there since 1995. A statement of Bucks Central's vision, core values, strategy, and financial plan is provided as an example in Appendix E.

CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM

Small churches can plant churches. This declaration is intended to encourage, inspire, and challenge pastors of small churches to lead their congregations toward strategic and effective church planting in fulfillment of the Great Commission. Size alone is not the determining factor of whether a church can plant other churches. Rather, I contend that even a small church can plant other churches when there is the commitment, the vision, the plan, and the determination to do so.

The primary motivation for this study grew out of my own experience as a church planter and a pastor of a small church, Bucks Central Church in Newtown, Pennsylvania. My original vision for Bucks Central Church was that it be the first of several churches planted in Bucks County, located on the northeast border of Philadelphia. Appropriately enough, the church's motto is, "Covering the County with Bridges to God." Just as Bucks County is filled with its

treasured, historic covered bridges, so also Bucks Central Church wants to fill the county with growing disciples of Christ and with viable biblical churches. Our hope was that this initial church plant would grow quickly in numbers and strength so that other churches might be planted in the towns surrounding Newtown; thus, Bucks "Central" Church. We assumed that only large churches can plant churches, and thus thought it necessary for Bucks Central Church to become large as a prerequisite to planting other churches.

However, for various reasons Bucks Central Church has not grown as fast or as strong as we expected. Since its inception in 1986 the church has remained relatively small, with fewer than 100 adult members and less than 100 adults in attendance on an average Sunday morning. Because of this, the church has lacked the resources to implement its original vision and strategy for church planting. While the desire to be used by God to reach others and plant many churches has remained strong in the hearts of the pastor and members of the congregation, we have been frustrated by a strategy designed for much larger churches. This frustration has been expressed in the statement, "We

feel like a large church that is trapped in the body of a small church.”

Thus, Bucks Central Church has been faced with a choice. We could postpone indefinitely our vision to be active partners in church planting, while continuing to focus on expansion, or we could rethink our calling, vision, and strategy for church planting and adapt it to the realities of our size. This paper is a product of that rethinking process. Bucks Central Church is currently involved in several church planting projects in both the United States and Mexico, but our approach to church planting has undergone some radical changes. There is a growing conviction that small churches can plant churches, albeit with different strategies, along with a growing recognition that small churches have unique qualities that may actually enable them to be successful church planters.

This dissertation will challenge a widespread assumption among pastors of churches of all sizes: small churches cannot plant other churches. Many say, “Small churches lack the resources. They lack critical mass, as well as the vision and leadership to be involved in church planting.” They assume that for a congregation to be

involved effectively in planting other churches it must be large. After all, large churches are more likely to have the money to do this costly work; they are more likely to have leaders and members to give to the establishment of core groups or daughter churches; and they are more likely to have the vision for church planting and the administrative resources to implement that vision. Therefore, most people assume that church planting is a missionary activity in which only large churches can actively participate, with small churches passively watching from the sidelines until they grow. Kennon L. Callahan comments on the tendency to favor large churches over small churches, saying:

Some people think that large churches are great churches. Some people think that the more members a church has, the greater that church is. Pastors are frequently heard to speak of a given church as being one of the greatest churches in the country; more often than not, they're describing essentially a large church. (Callahan 1983, 3)

This study is intended to correct many of the aforementioned assumptions in an effort to prove that small churches can plant churches. My thesis is especially significant considering the vast number of small churches in the United States. It is estimated that there are

approximately 350,000 churches in America (Arn 1988, 41), and of these it is estimated that 95%, or approximately 330,000 churches, have an average Sunday morning attendance of "100 or so" (George 1992, 46). In the Philadelphia Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), the Presbytery in which Bucks Central Church is a member, thirteen of the twenty-five churches are small. Small churches are so common that church growth expert Lyle Schaller has said, "The small church is the normative institutional expression of the worshipping congregation among Protestant denominations on the North American Continent" (Schaller 1982, 11). Given these statistical realities, small churches may very well be the great untapped resource for church planting in the United States.

Definition of Key Concepts

For the purposes of this study the term "church" will be used primarily as a reference to a local fellowship of believers organized as a particular congregation under the authority of elders. In the New Testament, the word "church" (ἐκκλησία) is employed in a number of ways. It may refer to the universal and invisible Church comprised of

all persons, living or dead, who have been elected by God for salvation through Christ, as in Hebrews 12:23, "to the church (ἐκκλησία) of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven." When used in its plural form, the word "churches" (ἐκκλησίας) refers to the visible congregation of believers on earth which is comprised of many local assemblies in many places, as in Acts 15:41, "He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches (ἐκκλησίας.)" Calvin endorsed the distinction between the invisible and visible church when he wrote:

I have observed that the Scriptures speak of the Church in two ways. Sometimes when they speak of the Church they mean the Church as it really is before God - the Church into which none are admitted but those who by the gift of adoption are sons of God, and by the sanctification of the Spirit true members of Christ. In this case it not only comprehends the saints who dwell on the earth, but all the elect who have existed from the beginning of the world. Often, too, by the name of Church is designated the whole body of mankind scattered throughout the world, who profess to worship one God and Christ, who by baptism are initiated into the faith; by partaking of the Lord's Supper profess unity in true doctrine and charity, agree in holding to the word of the Lord, and observe the ministry which Christ has appointed for the preaching of it. (Calvin 1960, 4:1:7)

But most frequently in the Scriptures "church" (ἐκκλησία) refers to a local organization of the disciples of Christ who meet, worship, and minister together under the

authority of duly appointed officers or Elders, as in Romans 16:5, "Greet also the church (ἐκκλησία) that meets at their house." These local organizations are the principle concern of this dissertation. The specific subjects of research for this paper were local churches of the PCA in New Jersey and Eastern Pennsylvania. The Book of Church Order for the Presbyterian Church in America defines a church as follows:

A particular church consists of a number of professing Christians, with their children, associated together for divine worship and godly living, agreeable to the Scriptures, and submitting to the lawful government of Christ's kingdom. (4-1)

This is the guiding definition used by me and the local church leaders who provided the significant data for this study.

Several church growth experts have attempted to categorize local churches by their size, a complicated task considering that churches and denominations use different reference points for counting their members. These reference points can include Sunday morning worship attendance, formal members on the rolls, or Sunday school participation. Perhaps the most complete breakdown of churches according to their numbers is provided by Carl F.

George, former director of the Charles E. Fuller Institute of Evangelism and Church Growth. Using a "zoo" metaphor, George divides churches into seven categories, beginning with the "Mouse Size Home Group" of three to thirty-five members and ending with the "Metropolis-of-Mice Meta-Church" of 10,000 members or more (George 1992, 44, 50). While this seven-level categorization may be fascinating and useful for other purposes, it is far too complex for mine.

In his book, Making the Small Church Effective, Dudley provides only two categories of church size: "multi-celled" and "single-celled" churches, or those with more than 250 members versus those with less than 250 members (Dudley 1978, 34-35). Dudley's emphasis, however, goes beyond the mere size of a congregation to a concern for the qualitative uniqueness of a church. He writes:

"Small" is something more than a numerical description.

Small is practically defined by the available resources for an anticipated ministry. Those congregations with few members are usually less able to generate the human, material, and financial resources to retain an ordained resident pastor and support a full program of church activities. (Dudley 1978, 19)

I believe, however that small churches can create extremely high-quality ministries. In this work I do not sacrifice considerations of quality.

The precise number of members or attenders is not particularly important. For the purposes of this study it was necessary to choose congregations that were small enough in numbers of people and available resources so that the need for distinct strategies for involvement in church planting would be apparent by contrast to those of larger churches. Hence, I define a small church as one with fewer than 100 adults either in membership or at Sunday morning worship.

Church planting is a missionary activity of a local church by which new congregations are started, developed, and organized in fulfillment of the Great Commission of our Lord Jesus Christ. Malphurs defines church planting similarly when he writes, "Church planting is an exhausting but exciting venture of faith that involves the planning process of beginning and growing new local churches as based on Jesus' promise and in obedience to His Great Commission" (Malphurs 1992, 21). Chaney emphasizes the evangelistic nature of church planting when he defines it

as "those things that one existing Christian fellowship does to share its faith in Jesus Christ with another community of people and to form them into a new congregation of responsible disciples of Jesus Christ" (Chaney 1982, 39).

It is my firm conviction that church planting is at the very core of the mission of the church. Jesus commanded his disciples in the Great Commission to "go, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them . . ., and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20). Jesus expected that new converts would be baptized as a sign of their inclusion into the Body of Christ and as an indicator of their reception into the membership of a local congregation of believers. He also expected that disciple-making and extensive teaching would be a life-long process which would normally occur in the context of the ministry of a local church. Founding new congregations, therefore, was and is the key to the fulfillment of Christ's missionary mandate. Hesselgrave agrees when he writes, "The primary mission of the church and, therefore, of the churches is to proclaim the Gospel of Christ and gather believers into local churches where

they can be built up in the faith and made effective in service, thereby planting new congregations throughout the world" (Hesselgrave 1980, 33). I will save a more thorough examination of Matthew 28 and additional biblical support for the centrality of church planting to the mission of the church for Chapter 2.

Church planting is strategic when new congregations are started as a product of a specific purpose and an intentional plan. This study is not concerned with churches that are started accidentally; that is, when congregations split over differences of doctrine or philosophy of ministry. Rather, I am concerned with church planting that comes as a result of clearly stated and positive objectives. Dayton and Engstrom state, "There are few things more powerful than the idea of a goal. . . ." (Dayton and Engstrom 1979, 51). There must be a recognition by the leadership of a local church that Christ has commanded them to plant churches. Church planting is effective when the efforts to start churches actually result in the establishment of new congregations. This is a results-oriented study. I hope that many small churches

will discover their God-given potential for involvement in church planting and that they will be successful.

My purpose in this dissertation is to demonstrate that small churches can strategically and effectively plant churches. Indeed, God desires to show that His missionary work is not limited by the size of a church or the lack of human resources. Rather, He delights to reveal His power through smallness, "so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power" (I Corinthians 2:5). I will show that small churches have unique strengths and valuable resources that they can employ in planting new congregations, and that small churches must approach church planting differently. In this dissertation I will list the essential characteristics of a small church that can plant churches, followed by a list of strategies which small churches can use to help plant churches.

My desire is to validate and encourage the small church and the small church pastor. Most men are not gifted and called to be "rancher-style" pastors: those with the leadership and managerial skills needed to develop a system of ministry and care-giving through the mobilization of large numbers of laypeople (George 1993, 19). Most men

are shepherding/care-giving pastors by nature, gifts, and calling. They will never become the pastors of large churches nor will the congregations they pastor ever become large. The existence and planting of small churches is the best way to utilize the gifts of these men. Indeed, there are certain circumstances that may warrant the planting of small churches instead of one large church; i.e., in small towns, in urban situations where the cost of real estate is prohibitive to the construction of large facilities, or among specific ethnic groups where the target population is small. In these instances a small church may be best suited for the fulfillment of the missionary objectives.

My interest in the small church should not be taken as a suggestion that all churches must be small and stay small, or that small churches are necessarily better than larger churches. I believe that all churches should seek to grow numerically through outreach and evangelism. I affirm the value and usefulness of large churches in their roles as resource centers for ministry, missions, and church planting. I believe that the diversity of the church in terms of size is necessary, good, and pleasing to God. My specific purpose, however, is to uncover the

hidden potential for missions that exists among thousands of churches and pastors that have been largely neglected in strategies for church multiplication simply because they are small.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

The Biblical Roots of Church Planting in Old Testament History and Theology

While international missions and church planting are ordinarily thought of as concerns of the New Testament, their roots can be found deeply embedded in the soil of Old Testament history and theology. God's desire since the creation of mankind has been to fill the world with His people. As God commissioned Adam in the Garden of Eden, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it" (Genesis 1:28). From the beginning of human history the Lord has declared His intention to cover the earth with men and women who will know, love, and serve Him forever. But Adam, by violating a divine command, failed miserably in his responsibility and our fellowship with God was broken.

Yet God's purpose did not fail. From the moment of Adam's fall into sin, the Lord instituted His plan of redemption. Even as God was pronouncing the curses for violations of His commands, the Lord revealed His intention to fill the earth with His people. To Satan God said, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed (//rz,..) and her seed (eiou;/.;o][rz); He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel" (Genesis 3:15, NASV). Here God announces that, though the battle between good and evil would continue throughout human history, He would give many from among mankind (//rz) ultimate victory and eternal life. The world would surely be populated with those who know, love, and serve God.

The Nations Blessed Through Abraham

Through the covenant with Abraham God made His redemptive and missionary intentions even clearer. He chose Abraham from among the seed of Adam and Eve to be the recipient of many gracious promises:

I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all the peoples

on the earth will be blessed through you. (Genesis 12:2-3, NASB)

Abraham and his children would be the instruments of God through which He would implement His plan of salvation for fallen mankind. Though Abraham and his physical descendants would have a very significant role in the unfolding of God's redemptive purpose, the blessing they received from the Lord would have international implications. The phrase, "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Genesis 12:3), gives emphasis to the long-term and worldwide nature of this covenantal promise.

Leupold comments:

This word reaches back to the divided "families" of the earth, divided by their sins, as well as the curse of 3:17 which is now replaced by a blessing. A blessing so great that its effect shall extend to "all the families of the earth" can be thought of only in connection with the promised Savior. (Leupold 1942, 413)

In this divine pledge the seeds of New Testament missions and church planting are sown.

From this point forward in Old Testament history God's plan of salvation for the nations is regularly repeated in anticipation of its fulfillment in the New Testament. To Abraham's son Isaac God says, "I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and

will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, . . .” (Genesis 26:4). To Isaac’s son Jacob God says, “All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring” (Genesis 28:14). Generation after generation, the sovereign Lord of creation and salvation reveals His intention to fill the earth with those who will enjoy His blessing forever. This covenantal blessing will one day flow from one man, one family, and one nation to every nation in the world.

Even after the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were fully established as a people under Moses and David, the international interests of the Lord remained in their consciousness. From the moment of their constitution as God’s people under Moses, the Israelites were reminded of God’s desire to set them up as an example of His grace for the whole world to see:

Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.
(Exodus 19:5-6)

When David prepared psalms of worship for use among God’s people, he wrote, “Therefore I will praise you, O LORD,

among the nations; I will sing praises to your name" (2 Samuel 22:50; see Psalm 18:49). Though the people of Israel enjoyed the special attention of the Lord for many generations, they were never to forget His determination to bless all nations through them. And the focal-point of that blessing was increasingly placed upon the Messiah, that promised seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who would bring salvation to the Israelites, and through them to all the peoples of the earth. God speaks of the Messiah through David in this psalm: "Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession" (Psalm 2:8). Again, the international quality of God's plan is prominent. The Messiah will inherit and possess the nations.

Prophetic Anticipation of New Covenant Blessing

As the Old Testament era drew to a close the prophets continued to forecast the fulfillment of God's worldwide plan of salvation through the coming Messiah.

Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations . . . In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice

on earth. In his law the islands will put their hope.
(Isaiah 42:1,3-4)

All nations will experience the justice and hope brought
into the world by the chosen Messiah.

Many nations will come and say, "Come, let us go up to
the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of
Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk
in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word
of the LORD from Jerusalem. (Micah 4:2)

The prophets foretold the days when some from every tribe,
people, kingdom, and tongue on earth would seek the Lord
and the blessing He promised to the nations. Furthermore,
God's message of salvation would be spread beyond Jerusalem
to the uttermost parts of the earth, and people from
everywhere would gather to worship the Lord God of Abraham,
Isaac, and Jacob.

I have shown here that, far from being phenomena
which originated in the New Testament, international
missions and church planting are rooted in the history and
theology of the entire Old Testament. From the very
beginning it has been God's purpose to fill the earth with
His people. Since the fall of mankind into sin, the Lord
has been executing His redemptive plan through His chosen
people to bring the blessing promised to Abraham to the
nations. Specifically, the Messiah of Israel would enter

human time and space, bringing salvation with Him for all peoples everywhere. In the Old Testament the scene is set and the way is prepared for that One who would come in fulfillment of Old Testament expectations. After He had secured salvation for His people, He would command His followers to preach the good news, make disciples, and plant churches throughout the world. In this way the whole earth would be filled with people who would know, love, and serve God forever (Figure 1).

Church Planting and the Great Commission

Although the foundation of God's plan of redemption for the nations is laid in Old Testament history and theology, His missionary purpose comes to its fullest expression in the life of Jesus Christ. Through His ministry of word and deed, the desire of the Father would be satisfied. People from every nation on earth could now experience the promised blessing of salvation through Him.

No statement of Christ captures more fully the essence of God's saving intentions for the world than the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20:

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20)

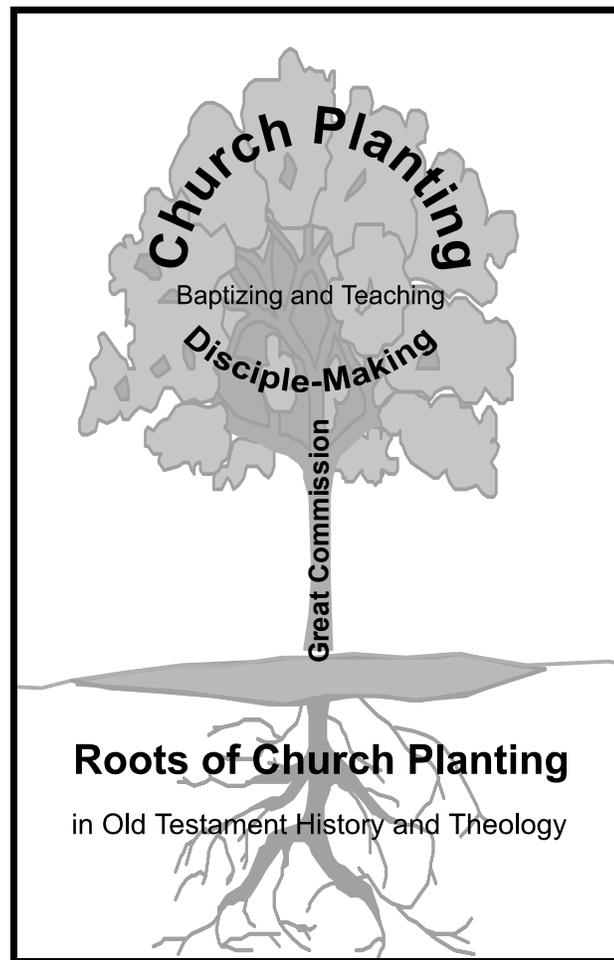


Figure 1: Old Testament Roots of Church Planting

This command, issued to Jesus' earliest followers, provides the New Testament foundation for international missions through church planting. "We might say that this passage is of such fundamental significance that something should be said about each word or combination of words" (Hendricksen 1973, 998). Two aspects of this commission statement are especially noteworthy.

The Authority for Church Planting

First, church planting is accomplished under Christ's authority and in Christ's power. Jesus said, "All authority (εξουσια) in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matthew 28:18). According to Kittel:

The word *εξουσια* is important in understanding the person and work of Christ. It denotes His divinely given power and authority to act. If He is the Son, this authority is not a restricted commission. It is His own rule in free agreement with the Father. (Kittel 1964, 568)

By virtue of His victory over sin and death, Jesus is vested with the authority of absolute Lordship, which He uses to bring God's redemptive plan to fruition.

Church planting is an expression of the concern that the way into the Kingdom be opened for all men, for every tribe and subtribe of humanity. It is a part of

the process of actualizing the lordship of Christ in the world. (Chaney 1982, 33)

Local churches, large and small, have been given divine orders to plant churches. This is not an option, but a sacred duty done in grateful obedience to their King.

Furthermore, the authority of Christ is shared with the church in the form of power, or enabling grace to fulfill the Great Commission.

In the varied use of *ἐξουσία* for the authority imparted to the community the outstanding characteristic is that the Church owes its existence and nature to Christ. It needs "enablement" even to enter the kingdom of God. . . . The concept is also indispensable in relation to apostolic action, with the emphasis on power. (Kittel 1964, 569)

The missionary task of God is not accomplished through human strength. Rather, Jesus' declaration of His Lordship over heaven and earth came with assurances that He would give His followers the ability to do what He commanded.

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. (Act 1:8)

The Holy Spirit is the source of power for missions and church planting. God Himself provides the explosive

energy necessary to break the hardness of human hearts and fill the earth with believing people and churches.

The commission is based on the infinite, eternal, and unchangeable power of Christ which is set forth in verse 18. Without this foundation verses 19 and 20 would be meaningless. Christ is not saying to this tiny handful of men: "You must increase your numbers quickly in order to develop a platform from which to command a hearing. Then you can wield the power of size, of organized lobbying, and of financial solutions to the problems of mankind in order to fulfill the purpose of the church." Rather, he is declaring that the power which the disciples need for success is already present and that consequently they will be able to fulfill his commission. (MacNair 1971, 2)

This same assurance of power is explicit in Jesus' declaration to Peter and the Twelve when He said, "I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it" (Matthew 16:18).

As a pastor of a small church, I am personally encouraged by the fact that the first missionary and church planting movement was begun with a small band of men who went out under the authority of the Lord and filled with His power. As they succeeded then, so can we succeed now.

The Anticipation of Church Planting

Second, church planting is anticipated as the context in which the Great Commission would be fulfilled. The various elements of missionary activity prescribed by Jesus assume the existence of local churches and the planting of others. Beginning with the word "Go" (πορευθεντες), an aorist participle from the verb πορευομαι, which literally means "to go, to pass from one place to another" (Moulton 1977, 337), there is a sense that existing churches would aggressively send some beyond their current boundaries to preach the Gospel and plant other churches. There would be an aggressive, ongoing campaign to expand the Kingdom of God until the earth is filled with God's people.

The primary goal of the Great Commission, however, would not be in the mere going, but rather in the making of disciples. μαθητευσατε is the main verb of the Great Commission, in the aorist, active, imperative tense, indicating that making disciples is the principle outcome of missionary activity expected by the Lord. A disciple, or μαθητης, "was not only a pupil, but an adherent; hence

they are spoken of as imitators of their teacher" (Vine 1966, 316). Disciple making, therefore, is not an act that can be accomplished in a moment, but is instead a life-long process. It encompasses all the aspects of mission and ministry that are required to take a person from the condition of being lost all the way to being an adherent and imitator of Jesus Christ. Discipleship assumes continuing relationships between those being disciplined and those doing the discipling. Discipleship can only happen in the context of consistently meeting congregations of believers; i.e., in the context of local churches.

The phrase that follows in the text makes even clearer the church planting and church multiplication character of the Great Commission. Disciples are to be made "of all nations" (*παντα τα εθνη*) (Matthew 28:19). Here Jesus makes the connection between the Old Testament roots of church planting and the New Testament realization. The blessing promised through Abraham would finally be taken to all parts of the world through the proclamation of the Gospel. *Τα εθνη*, from the root *εθνος*, "is used of men in the sense of a 'people'" (Kittel 1664, 369). It refers not only to those who share a common national or political tie,

but also to smaller groupings of people who share a common language, culture, or ethnicity. Other statements of the Great Commission in the Gospels, though less specific in content, are similar in their emphasis upon the worldwide extent of Christ's missionary mandate. Jesus said, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation" (Mark 16:15); and, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations ($\epsilon\theta\nu\eta$), beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:46-47).

It is clear that the particularism of the pre-resurrection period has now definitely made place for universalism. . . . The time to make earnest preparations for the propagation of the gospel throughout the world had now arrived. (Hendricksen 1973, 999)

Thus, through the Great Commission, Jesus envisioned a day when His disciples would be found in every nation, city, town, and group of people on earth. He also envisioned the planting and multiplication of local churches around the world through which these disciples would be made.

Jesus lists two specific aspects of disciple making that clarify even further the church planting context of the Great Commission. First, discipleship involves

"baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). The preaching of the Gospel would have the effect of bringing in some who were outside the Kingdom of Christ, and baptism is the outward and visible sign of this transition. It represents a convert's new relationship not only to Christ, but also to His Body, the Church. His or her faith not only joins the convert to Christ, but also unites the convert with Christ's people. Baptism anticipates the existence of a community of believers into which new converts will be added and in which these new converts can begin the process of discipleship.

Second, discipleship involves "teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:20). Disciple making requires a disciple and at least one teacher. New converts are brought into lifelong relationships with other believers who, by verbal instruction and modeling, teach them how to be obedient followers of Jesus Christ. The Great Commission would not be fulfilled merely by going and baptizing; rather, the Lord's desire to fill the earth with His people would only be complete when His disciples were fully conformed to His will. The teaching ministry of the

Great Commission further anticipates the planting of new churches among every group of people on earth.

Having begun His Great Commission with the assurance of authority and power, Jesus concludes with the guarantee of His presence, "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). Church planting may feel like a lonely venture to those who accept the challenge of the Great Commission, but Jesus has promised to be present with even the smallest congregation when they faithfully proclaim the Gospel, make disciples, and plant churches. His special presence is assured whenever His commands are taken seriously. Thus, church planting is accomplished under Christ's authority, with Christ's power, and in Christ's presence.

Church Planting in Apostolic Ministry

The need for church planting, implicit in the Great Commission of Jesus Christ, became explicit in the ministry of the Apostles. The book of Acts, in particular, shows how those who were commissioned by the Lord to make disciples did so by planting churches wherever they went. The sequence of this first church planting movement is

provided in Acts 1:8 where Jesus states, "you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). The witness of the early church would begin locally in Jerusalem, but ultimately would extend globally to the ends of the earth. The book of Acts shows that as the Apostles moved out from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth, they left newly organized congregations in their wake, congregations that were filled with disciples and disciple-makers.

The First Church Planting Projects

The first church planted was, of course, in Jerusalem, where the Gospel was proclaimed by the Apostle Peter. In response to his call to repentance and faith, we are told that "Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day" (Acts 2:41). Here it can be seen that baptism was not merely a way of marking individuals who trusted Jesus Christ as Savior, but also a sign of their inclusion into the community of His followers. Those who believed were immediately added "to the fellowship of the

already existing followers of Jesus, as is self-evident from the context" (Meyers 1883, 68).

Even in this initial stage of the church's development the existence and significance of the small church can be seen. As a response to this inaugural evangelistic campaign the disciples of Christ numbered in the thousands. We are told that "Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts" (Acts 2:46), perhaps because the outdoors was the only place that could contain such a large number of people. But the more ordinary gatherings of believers were much smaller. "They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people" (Acts 2:46-47). Throughout the city of Jerusalem, wherever a believer was willing to open their home in Christian hospitality, the followers of Christ met to make disciples and to be disciplined. Concerning these local fellowships, F. F. Bruce writes:

The community was organized along the lines of the voluntary type of associations called a *haburah*, a central feature of which was the communal meal. The communal meal could not be conveniently eaten in the temple precincts, so they ate "by households," (Bruce 1976, 81)

Indeed, it would be more accurate to describe the church at Jerusalem, consisting of thousands, as a collection of many smaller house churches which consisted of as many worshippers as might reasonably fit into a home.

The first missionary outreach of the early church did not occur by human initiative, but by the providence of God through the persecution of the church.

On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. . . . Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. (Acts 8:1,4)

Ordinary believers, forced from their homes by threats of violence, began to take the Gospel to the surrounding regions. And wherever they went, some were won to Christ and new churches were formed. The persecuted church was even more likely to meet in the privacy of smaller facilities than in the public square. Scattered believers would continue the expansion of God's kingdom by the multiplication of these small house churches.

Church Planting in the Mission of the Apostle Paul

It was not long, however, before efforts to multiply disciples and churches became decidedly more intentional

among the followers of Christ. The Holy Spirit made God's will clear to the church at Antioch when He said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them" (Acts 13:2). It would soon be clear that the work to which God had called them was nothing short of planting new churches. By the end of their first missionary journey Paul and Barnabas had retraced their steps to put the finishing touches upon their ministry.

Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. . . . Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust. (Acts 14:21-23)

It is significant to note that the outcome of their mission was not merely individual believers in Jesus who were gathered in a loose, informal association, but rather disciples who were formally organized into local churches under the supervision of elders.

In these cities they strengthened the young churches which they had so recently planted, putting their administration on a firm basis by appointing suitable members as elders, who would be true spiritual guides to their brethren, and giving them further instruction and encouragement in the face of the hardship and persecution which they would inevitably face as they maintained their Christian witness. (Bruce 1976, 296)

Only after churches had been planted and organized could it be said that they had completed the work to which they had been committed (Acts 14:26).

The Apostle Paul affirmed church planting and organization as the goal of His mission when he wrote to his co-laborer Titus, "The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you" (Titus 1:5). The words translated "straighten out" (επιδιορθωση) and "what was left unfinished" (λειποντα) are especially instructive in this regard. *Επιδιορθωση*, from the root noun *διορθωσις*, refers to:

a making straight, restoring to its natural or normal condition something which in some way protrudes or has got out of line, as broken or misshapen limbs. (Thayer 1974, 152)

The prefix *επι* on the verbal form of *διορθωσις* intensifies its meaning and stresses the need for straightening out the work. And *λειποντα*, a present participle from the verb *λειπω*, refers to the things that remain, but are wanting, lacking, or inferior (Thayer 1974, 375). In order to complete his mission the Apostle Paul considered it urgently necessary that Titus do what was left undone in Crete. The Great

Commission would not be fulfilled there until elders were ordained in every place where disciples had been made. Church planting was the end result or product of his ministry.

During Paul's second and third missionary journeys he continued to fulfill the Great Commission according to the pattern established in the first: the Gospel was preached, disciples were made, and churches were planted. It is again likely that many of these new churches were small enough to meet in a person's house.

It is now generally recognized that the church in apostolic times gathered in the homes of believers, and that any proper understanding of its worship, teaching, fellowship, mission and ministry must come from that perspective. (Prior 1983, 21)

When Lydia and the members of her household were baptized, for example, her home became a meeting place for future instruction (Acts 16:15). We are told that a believer named Jason welcomed Paul into his house in Thessalonica, where evangelism and Bible study occurred. Priscilla and Aquila also made good use of their home for ministry (see Acts 18:26; I Corinthians 16:19). Indeed, they were so effective in church planting that Paul put them first on a list of those he honorably mentions in his letter to the Romans:

Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. Greet also the church that meets at their house. (Romans 16:3-4)

It was not the custom of local first century churches to build a separate facility for church meetings on the corner of a major intersection in town. Rather, churches met wherever space was made available. Since this was often in homes, many congregations were obviously small. Murray relates the existence of small house churches to the Great Commission:

It was necessary and appropriate in apostolic times, as on some occasions today, for Christians to make their homes available for the congregations of the saints. It is not without significance that in our totally different present-day situation the practice of the house church is being restored and recognized as indispensable to the propagation of the gospel. (Murray 1965, 229)

Financial Support for Church Planting in the Apostolic Era

An additional consideration related to church planting during the period of the Apostles is the way in which it was financed. One particular passage is especially insightful as it concerns the issue of monetary support:

Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need. (Philippians 4:15-16)

Paul indicates that the Philippian church began its support of his church planting ministry "in the early days" of their acquaintance with the Gospel (εν αρχη του ευγγελιου).

Apparently the church at Philippi did not wait until it had reached a certain level of attendance, membership, or financial security. It seemed only natural for this church to support a work that had affected its members' lives so dramatically for the good. They helped to finance church planting from the earliest days of their congregation.

While contemporary small churches should be encouraged by the example of the Philippian church, the sacrifice of the Macedonian churches provides additional inspiration. The Apostle Paul boasts of their generosity:

And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will. (2 Corinthians 8:1-5)

Though the object of their financial support was not specifically church planting, their model of sacrifice out of a condition of poverty is especially noteworthy and motivational. In the Apostolic era smaller churches with limited resources significantly advanced the mission of God by their giving.

The Greatness of God and the Small Church

Old Testament Examples

Having traced the theme of church planting from its roots in Old Testament history and theology to its realization in the Great Commission of Jesus and the ministry of the Apostles, I will now examine the notion of church planting by small churches through the perspective of the greatness of God as revealed in Scripture. Throughout Biblical history God has demonstrated His inclination to use man's smallness as a means of manifesting His greatness. I already showed that God chose one man, Abraham, and his family to be the human agency by which salvation and blessing would be brought to all nations. From this small beginning the emphasis was

placed upon the greatness and power of the Lord to accomplish His purpose, rather than upon the insignificance and weakness of man.

God's greatness is further demonstrated through the experience of Gideon as he prepares to lead Israel in war against the Midianites. From the moment Gideon is chosen as a judge the contrast between God's greatness and man's smallness is in view. "But Lord' Gideon asked, 'how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manassah, and I am the least in my family'" (Judges 6:15). In His reply the Lord does not disagree with Gideon's self-assessment. Rather, God places the emphasis on His presence and power for victory when He answers, "I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites together" (Judges 6:16).

As Gideon prepares for the battle, however, the Lord shows obvious displeasure with the number of men gathered for the fight:

Early in the morning, Jerub-Baal (that is, Gideon) and all his men camped at the spring of Harod. The camp of Midian was north of them in the valley near the hill of Moreh. The LORD said to Gideon, "You have too many men for me to deliver Midian into their hands. In order that Israel may not boast against me that her own strength has saved her, announce now to the people, 'Anyone who trembles with fear may turn back

and leave Mount Gilead.'" So twenty-two thousand men left, while ten thousand remained.

But the LORD said to Gideon, "There are still too many men. Take them down to the water, and I will sift them for you there. If I say, 'This one shall go with you,' he shall go; but if I say, 'This one shall not go with you,' he shall not go."

So Gideon took the men down to the water. There the LORD told him, "Separate those who lap the water with their tongues like a dog from those who kneel down to drink." Three hundred men lapped with their hands to their mouths. All the rest got down on their knees to drink.

The LORD said to Gideon, "With the three hundred men that lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hands. Let all the other men go, each to his own place." So Gideon sent the rest of the Israelites to their tents but kept the three hundred, who took over the provisions and trumpets of the others. (Judges 7:1-7)

An army of 30,000 men was paired down to just 300 men, "In order that Israel may not boast against me that her own strength has saved her, . . ." (Judges 7:2). The Lord did not want the size of the army to obscure the revelation of His greatness in bringing about the victory.

While Gideon is an outstanding example of someone who demonstrated the greatness of God through smallness, David also exhibits this principle through his encounter with Goliath. Like Gideon before him, David was chosen by God from among the sons of Jesse even though he was the youngest, smallest, and weakest (1 Samuel 16:1-13). But Goliath was a giant, as the Scriptures attest:

A champion named Goliath, who was from Gath, came out of the Philistine camp. He was over nine feet tall. He had a bronze helmet on his head and wore a coat of scale armor of bronze weighing five thousand shekels; on his legs he wore bronze greaves, and a bronze javelin was slung on his back. His spear shaft was like a weaver's rod, and its iron point weighed six hundred shekels. His shield bearer went ahead of him. (1 Samuel 17:4-7)

The scene is set for a classic confrontation between one who was humanly strong and another who was humanly weak. But before David strikes the giant dead with his sling, he announces his goal, and God's:

All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give all of you into our hands. (1 Samuel 17:47)

Once again the greatness of God is exalted through the smallness of the human agent.

The examples of Gideon and David establish a principle that is repeated throughout the Old Testament: God's greatness is often revealed through man's smallness. Even the birthplace of the Messiah would conform to this principle. The prophet declared:

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from old, from ancient times. (Micah 5:2)

Gideon, David, and Jesus all show how God's greatness is proven through smallness. For this reason the Proverbs warn that one should not underestimate small things:

Four things on earth are small, yet they are extremely wise: Ants are creatures of little strength, yet they store up their food in the summer; coney's are creatures of little power, yet they make their home in the crags; locusts have no king, yet they advance together in ranks; a lizard can be caught with the hand, yet it is found in kings' palaces. (Proverbs 30:24-28)

Likewise, no one should underestimate the potential of a church to plant other churches.

New Testament Examples

The New Testament perpetuates the principle that "God's greatness is often revealed through man's smallness." In the context of the disciples' failure to cast out demons from a boy, Jesus says:

I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, "Move from here to there" and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you. (Matthew 17:20)

The smallness of man's faith is placed in sharp contrast with the great accomplishments that are possible because of the greatness and power of God.

The story of the widow's offering in Mark 12:41-44 also supports this principle. Jesus compares the sizable gifts from the rich and powerful, to the gift of a poor widow who gave "two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny" (Mark 12:42). He commends the widow's gift to his disciples because of the great sacrifice it represents for God's work. This is an instance of a small gift having a big impact upon the Lord and His work. I believe that these examples help prove my thesis that small churches, with small amounts of money and a small degree of faith in Christ, can accomplish great things for God.

We find specific application of the above mentioned principle to church planting in the calling of the Twelve. As Jesus prepares to launch a worldwide campaign to bring salvation and blessing to the nations, he could amass a huge company to which He might delegate the task. Instead He chooses a small group whose size is guaranteed to bring attention to God's greatness. Scripture says:

Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve--designating them apostles--that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons. (Mark 3:13-15)

The church and the first church planting movement began with twelve men who, within the span of their lifetimes, took the Gospel to the ends of the known world. God's greatness was revealed through the smallness of their number.

In 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5 Paul compares human wisdom and strength with God's in the context of his missionary activity: "For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength" (1 Corinthians 1:25). Like many today, the Corinthian Greeks were inclined to trust in worldly philosophies and human potential. Members of the young church at Corinth were tempted to continue this dependency on pagan notions even as they began their new relationships with God through Christ. Paul dissuaded them of this carnal tendency by explaining the sharp contrast between a worldly versus a godly view of life.

Specifically, Paul asserts that successful evangelism and church planting is accomplished on the basis of God's wisdom and through the exertion of God's power, "My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's

power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's" (1 Corinthians 2:4-5). The glory of God is revealed, not through those the world considers to be wise, influential, noble, or strong, but rather through the foolish, unimportant, poor and weak (1 Corinthians 1:26-30). When small churches with few members and limited financial resources plant churches this principle is expressed and our wise, powerful Lord is exalted.

The church in Philadelphia provides an additional example. Through the letter addressed to these believers in Revelation Christ shows how He could help them to overcome their human limitations in order that they might take advantage of an extraordinary opportunity. Jesus says:

I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. (Revelation 3:8)

It is significant that Jesus says that they have "little strength" (μικρον δυναμιν), words which emphasize their limited resources. "Apparently this church was small, poor, and uninfluential" (Ladd 1772, 60). But, because of the blessing and greatness of God, the church at Philadelphia was promised achievements which far surpassed its human

members' capacity. Their sovereign Lord Jesus had placed before them "an open door" (see Acts 14:27; 1 Corinthians 16:9; 2 Corinthians 2:12), a phrase "which may signify a door of missionary opportunity" (Morris 1976, 79). This to me is a clear example of a small church demonstrating God's greatness through church planting.

Summary

God's desire to fill the earth with those who know Him, love Him, and serve Him forever is made clear in the Old Testament, where the foundation of world missions and church planting is laid. Nothing could deter God's saving purposes, not even the sin of humanity. Abraham and his sons brought a blessing to the nations, and it is clear that Moses, David, and the prophets lived in anticipation of this blessing and the Blessed One who would bring it to pass. Jesus Christ, this very Blessed One, died and rose again to redeem some from every tribe, language, people, and nation. He then commissioned His disciples to preach the Gospel, make disciples, and plant churches around the world. All churches, large and small, follow in this lineage and thus are authorized and empowered by the Lord

to take part in bringing this blessing to all nations
through church planting.

CHAPTER 3
HISTORICAL AND
CONTEMPORARY STUDIES

Historical Antecedents

From the establishment of the New Testament Church in the 1st Century to the present day, church planting has been a central and strategic factor in the spread of the Gospel throughout the world. Among those missionaries and missionary movements which provide historical antecedents for the proposition that *small churches can plant churches* are Patrick of Ireland, Francis of Assisi, and the Methodist Episcopal Church during the western expansion of the United States. While there are many great examples of missionary activity in the course of church history, I chose these three examples to offer a special source of inspiration to the small church that is committed to the fulfillment of the Great Commission through church planting. In this chapter I shall examine them for the insight they bring to my thesis.

Patrick of Ireland

Over the course of the centuries the truth concerning the life and ministry of Patrick of Ireland has been embellished with grand legends and fanciful myths in the Irish tradition. Still, the facts have been uncovered through dependence upon reliable ancient documentation and from the writings of the patriarch himself. From these sources we have established that Patrick was an outstanding model of a successful church planter during the period of the early church.

According to what has from a very early date been the established tradition, Ireland was substantially converted to Christianity in the life-time of one great missionary figure, St Patrick the Briton, and as the result of his personal mission. (Corish 1885, 1)

Patrick was not Irish, but British; he was a citizen of the Holy Roman Empire. His first visit to the Emerald Isle came against his will when he was seized by pagan Irish raiders and taken across the sea as a slave. According to his own journal, it was while he was in servitude that he turned to God and believed in the Gospel of Jesus Christ (St. Patrick 1953, 28). After six long years tending sheep for his Irish captors, Patrick escaped and made his way back to his family in Britain. Sometime

after this, however, Patrick had a vision in which an Irishman implored him to return to Ireland and preach the Gospel. Patrick took this as a call from God and he pursued training for the ministry, probably in a monastery in Gaul (Moody 1984, 62). By the middle of the 6th Century A.D. Patrick had returned to Ireland as a missionary and a church planter.

Tomas Cardinal O'Fiaich, Archbishop of the church in Armagh, Ireland, the traditional home church of Patrick himself, provides an excellent summary of Patrick's ministry:

Without going beyond the saint's own words we can learn many details of his missionary work in Ireland. He "baptized thousands", "ordained clerics everywhere", "gave presents to kings", "was put in irons", "lived in daily expectation of murder, treachery, or captivity", "journeyed everywhere in many dangers, even to the farthest regions beyond which there lived nobody," and rejoiced to see "the flock of the Lord in Ireland growing splendidly with the greatest care and the sons and daughters of kings becoming monks and virgins of Christ." (Moody 1984, 62)

Patrick courageously and successfully led a church planting movement that filled the island with small congregations under the leadership of those he ordained to pastor them.

His mission was highly personal and successful. He preached to the limits of human habitation and baptized great numbers of people. Everywhere he ordained clerics to baptize and preach. (Corish 1885, 3)

The special significance of Patrick's work to small churches is found in the political situation of Ireland in the 6^h Century. Ireland did not have a single king to provide governmental unity for its people, as most other European nations had. Instead, the country was divided into small independent kingdoms, each with their own king and each with their own religious beliefs.

Ireland was divided into a large number of small districts, each of which was owned by a tribe, the aggregate of a number of clans or families which believed that they were descended from a common ancestor. (Bury 1905, 67)

Although there were certainly Christians in Ireland before Patrick's arrival, the vast majority of the population were pagan Druids who worshipped their local gods at the dictate of their Celtic kings. Thus, Patrick had to devise a unique strategy for the planting of many small churches, one for each of the tribal districts whose people were won to Christ. This is precisely what he did:

. . . in 6th century Ireland, St. Patrick and his successors developed grassroots communities which were perfectly suited to the village organization of the Celtic tribes of the region. (Prior 1983, 17)

Patrick of Ireland is one of the earliest examples of a church planting missionary who reached large numbers of people through the multiplication of small churches.

Francis of Assisi

Church historian Kenneth Scott Latourette calls Francis of Assisi "the ideal Christian of the thirteenth century" (Latourette 1938, II:358). Francis Bernardone (1182-1226) was born the son of a wealthy fabric merchant in the town of Assisi, Italy. As a young man Francis wasted his time and money pursuing the pleasures of the world. After fighting in a war, being captured, and being released at the age of twenty-two, Francis' life began to change. It was at this time, while recovering from a serious illness, that he abandoned his self-indulgence and sin, and believed completely in the sacrifice of Christ for his salvation.

For him, like St. Paul and St. Augustine, conversion was a radical and complete change, the act of will by which a man wrests himself from the slavery of sin and places himself under the yoke of divine authority. (Sabatier 1930, xxiii).

In 1209 Francis had a vision in which he heard the words, "Preach, the kingdom of heaven is at hand, heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, cast out devils. Provide neither silver nor gold, nor brass in your purses" (Schaff 1907, 396). Believing this to be God's call to the ministry, Francis gave himself fully to the Lord and to the Lord's work. He went about Italy preaching repentance and calling men to discipleship, with special emphasis on the virtues of poverty and charity.

By the early part of the 13th century, Europe was ripe for Francis' radical brand of Christianity. Moral, spiritual, and political corruption was widespread within the institutions of the church, giving the sincerity and devotion of Francis an added appeal by contrast. He organized his followers into small societies of men who were also committed to a modest lifestyle. "They were to preach, but especially were they to exemplify the precepts of the Gospel in their lives" (Schaff 1907, 397).

Evangelical zeal distinguished the Franciscan movement from most other monastic movements of the Medieval church. On those who entered Franciscan monasteries, Latourette comments:

. . . members did not, as a rule, as was the tendency of the older monastic houses and orders, seek seclusion in communities in rural districts, there to pursue the salvation of their souls. They were, rather, missionaries to both Christians and non-Christians, preachers who were most numerous in the centres of population. (Latourette 1938, 434)

Thus, the brotherhood of Franciscans increased rapidly in the lifetime of its founder, and continued to grow steadily into the next century. By the early 14th century the number of Franciscan houses was 1400, with an average of approximately 20 friars in each house. This would indicate a total of about 28,000 Franciscans at the peak of the development of the order (Southern 1970, 285).

. . . the unregulated movement which Francis brought into existence became an organization covering the whole of Christendom. . . . Francis was the reluctant head of an organization with branches in nearly every country in western Europe. (Southern 1970, 282)

The call to spiritual renewal which Francis issued, beginning in the small city of Assisi, had a far greater impact than the humble servant of God ever imagined.

The development of the Franciscan Order was not, properly speaking, a church planting movement. Francis' ministry occurred within the Roman Catholic Church and with the reluctant blessing of Pope Innocent III, but his mission can be seen as one of church planting within the

church. Francis successfully persuaded large numbers of nominal Christians together with many former pagans to forsake their apathetic and self-indulgent ways and devote themselves to Christ. He organized the devotees into small communities or societies called "houses." These houses of committed Christians then joined Francis in his ministry of mercy and of preaching around the world. The result was a movement of small houses of men, and eventually a corresponding movement of small houses of women, that cooperated together to reach others and to plant new houses.

The story of Francis shows how God can use a few devoted people who are committed to Jesus Christ to initiate an effective movement of evangelism and church planting. Francis was not a wealthy man. Indeed, he and his followers took vows of poverty and lived in dependence upon hard work and the generosity of some outside the communities of brothers who supported their mission. Francis was not familiar with church growth techniques or with the latest fads in how to market his movement. God blessed his ministry because of his simple, sincere desire to see the life of Christ reproduced in others. Francis

of Assisi and the rapid growth of the Franciscan Order during the 13th century provide an inspirational historical antecedent for the proposition that small churches can plant churches.

The Methodist Episcopal Church

Another historical example of small churches planting churches is the Methodist Episcopal Church of the United States of America during the time of the western expansion of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The Methodist movement itself began at Oxford, England when John Wesley and his friends gathered together regularly to encourage each other in their devotion to Christ and pious living.

In the Episcopal Church of England the living power of the gospel had evaporated into the formalism of scholastic learning and a mechanical ritualize. A reaction was set on foot by John Wesley, born A.D. 1703, a young man of deep religious earnestness and fervent zeal for the salvation of souls. (Kurtz unknown, 128)

When the early colonial settlers crossed the North Atlantic to the New World, the beliefs and holy practices of English Methodism went with them. Prior to the war for independence many small groups or "religious societies", as

they were called, were formed in America under the leadership of John Wesley and with the help of those he commissioned as missionaries. On October 24, 1769, the first Methodist missionaries arrived at Gloucester Point, a few miles below Philadelphia.

Immediately the English preachers began their work, Pilmoor preaching from the steps of the Old State House, now known as Independence Hall, on Chestnut Street. This may be called the official beginning of American Methodism, . . . (Sweet 1933, 48)

Methodists were especially concentrated in the Chesapeake Bay region, down through Virginia to North Carolina (Hudson 1973, 122). These societies were nominally related to the Church of England, and were not a separate denomination.

The Revolutionary War, however, brought the need for radical change if the Methodist movement was to survive in the independent United States. The Methodists responded to this need. After the war, in 1784, an autonomous church was formed in Baltimore, calling themselves the Methodist Episcopal Church. Departing Anglican clergymen were quickly replaced by native lay preachers under the supervision of Francis Asbury (1745-1816). Wesley himself broke the laws of the Church of England by ordaining ministers to provide for the administration of the

sacraments for the people of the new church on the other side of the Atlantic.

Thomas Vasey (1742-1826) and Richard Whatcoat (1736-1806) were two men ordained, and when they sailed for America they were accompanied by the Rev. Thomas Coke (1747-1814) whom Wesley appointed to be "joint superintendent" with Thomas Asbury "over our brethren in North America." (Hudson 1973, 123)

By adapting quickly to the new political and ideological circumstances of the independent states, the Methodist Episcopalians were in a position to dominate the religious future of America for the next three-quarters of a century.

In the years that followed their organization as a church, the Methodist Episcopalians carefully planned and aggressively prepared themselves to follow the western movement of the American population. The country was divided into districts, each with its own superintendent. "In 1800 a district was mapped out for all the Western circuits and a presiding elder was placed at its head" (Latourette 1938, 190-191). Districts were furthered divided into circuits, each with its own traveling preacher to oversee the churches within his geographical assignment. "To a surprising degree the formation of new circuits kept pace with the establishment of new settlements" (Sweet 1933, 153). Local lay preachers and class leaders were

employed to provide for the daily care of a congregation and its members. Latourette recognized the strategic effectiveness of the Methodist's organization when he wrote:

By its system of classes with lay leaders and its local preachers and exhorters, Methodism made a place for laymen, a feature which commended it to the democratic frontier. Its circuit riders, a large proportion of them unmarried, gave an itinerant ministry suited to the sparse population of the new settlements. In their devotion, their zeal, their poverty, their style of preaching, and their wide-ranging activity they had likenesses to the Franciscans and Dominicans who in the thirteenth century did so much to bring the Christian message to the nominally Christian masses of Western Europe. (Latourette 1938, 185-186)

The Methodists were prepared to meet the spiritual needs of a new nation of people who were on the move.

As large numbers of pioneers migrated west to Kentucky, Tennessee, Ohio, Indiana, and beyond, the Methodists went with them and, in some cases, ahead of them. They were there on the frontiers of the American south, north, and west to proclaim Christ and plant churches while other denominations, like the Presbyterians and Congregationalists, were left behind in the east debating theology. Often, it was the pioneers themselves who provided the impetus for a new church on the frontier.

The local preacher was a factor of immense importance to the development of frontier Methodism. Frequently among the early settlers of a new region were to be found local preachers, and as soon as their cabins were built and a few acres cleared for a crop the next year, the local preacher invited his neighbors to his cabin for religious service. (Sweet 1933, 147)

The willingness of the Methodists to use the spiritual giftedness of lay people was one of the most significant factors contributing to their success in church planting.

In 1784 at the time of the Christmas Conference, Methodists had numbered almost 15,000. Six years later, in 1790, there were 57,631 members. By 1820 they had overtaken the Baptists and had become the largest American denomination. (Hudson 1965, 123)

During a period of less than fifty years, the Methodist Episcopal Church spread its influence across the country through the multiplication of many small churches in the settlements, towns, and emerging cities west of the Appalachian Mountains. Sweet accurately captures the secret of their success:

The Methodist Episcopal Church is one of the two largest Protestant Churches in the United States today largely because it possessed, or developed, the best technique for following and ministering to a moving and restless population. (Sweet 1933, 143)

The Methodist Church is an inspirational model of a movement of small churches planting churches.

General Observations from Historical Antecedents

Patrick of Ireland, Francis of Assisi, and the Methodist Episcopalians of the United States provide historical precedents to the contention that small churches can plant churches. From these examples we can make several general observations.

First, we see the prominence of visionary leadership. Patrick was led by God to live among the people who had once held him captive so that he might fulfill his vision to plant a church in each small district of Ireland. Francis was called from wealth to poverty to become the catalyst for a movement of God's spirit that spanned the continent of Europe in his lifetime. Finally, John Wesley, together with his counterpart in America, Francis Asbury, anticipated the changes needed to serve God in an independent United States and on the western frontiers, and they made them. Visionary leadership is required for small churches to plant other churches.

Second, God used the personal holiness and devotion of these men, even though their formal theological training was minimal. Patrick's meager use of the Latin language in his writings proves that he did not stay long in the

seminaries of Gaul, yet his passion for the Lord and his zeal for the lost of Ireland sustained the success of his mission. In his journal Patrick wrote,

I am compelled by zeal for God; and the truth of Christ roused me, for the love of my nearest friends and sons, for whom I have not regarded my fatherland and kindred, yea nor my life, even unto death, if I am worthy. I have vowed to my God to teach the heathen though I be despised by some. (White 1920, 54)

Francis was openly criticized in the church for his lack of formal education, but God used his compassionate heart to draw many into His kingdom and Church. What the circuit riders of American Methodism lacked in classroom learning, they gained by reading books while on horseback between stops on the trail. It was, however, “. . . their devotion, their zeal, their poverty, their style of preaching, and their wide-ranging activity . . .” (Latourette 1938, 185) that the Lord used to bless their movement. While not minimizing the value of a sound Biblical and theological education, we must not underestimate the significance of personal holiness and devotion to God as prerequisites to effective church planting.

Third, there is no evident concern for the ultimate size of the churches planted among those who have provided historical antecedents. Indeed, smaller is often better in

these classical examples. Patrick's success was largely due to his ability to plant a small church in each of the many districts of the island. One large church could never have met the needs of the diverse population of 6th century Ireland. Francis kept the houses of brothers small so that the accountability offered to each member would not be compromised. The Methodist movement, beginning as it did on the foundation of the small "religious societies" in England, was successful on the frontier precisely because it made the small church its model for multiplication. History has shown that small churches can plant churches when there is visionary leadership, personal devotion to Christ, and when size is not seen as a limiting factor but as an opportunity.

Contemporary Influences

In order for small churches to strategically and effectively plant churches, they must carefully consider several contemporary influences which bear upon this missionary objective. These influences are both negative, such as the equation of success with size; and positive,

such as the increasing number of people who are searching for community.

Success Defined as "Bigness"

Small churches must carve out their significance in a cultural context that defines success in terms of size. The trend in both modern secular society and, for the most part, the Church is to exalt and reward those whose effectiveness can be measured quantitatively. In this value-system those who have degrees from Big Ten universities, big-time jobs with big-name corporations, big houses with big three-car garages, big SUVs, and big investment accounts are considered successful. There is an underlying assumption in our culture that bigger is better. We evaluate everyone and everything by size.

Sadly, the Church of Jesus Christ has adopted the world's definition of success as "bigness," exalting and rewarding pastors on the basis of the size of their churches. Guinness observes:

"Megachurch" has joined megabucks, megatrends, and the megamall as common American jargon. Megachurches, churches-for-the-unchurched with congregations over two thousand, are widely touted as "the inside track

to fast growth" and a "leading trend of the coming millennium." (Guinness 1993, 12)

Church-sponsored conferences and training seminars across the country showcase leaders of large churches as examples of God's blessing, while rarely recognizing the accomplishments of small churches. Chaney laments, "We are living in a 'big' church era. Church and church staff size have become status symbols" (Chaney 1982, 84). Further, there is an underlying assumption in much church growth and health literature that the bigger church is necessarily a better church. One church-planting pastor described the effect that this kind of literature had on him when he wrote, "To me success in the ministry meant growth in attendance. Ultimate success meant a big, growing church" (Hughes 1987, 29). Often inferences about size are subtle and can even be unintentional. Chandler, in Racing Toward 2001 for example, takes five churches as models of effective ministry for the future. All five model churches have memberships which number in the thousands (Chandler 1992, 246-290). George, in Preparing Your Church for the Future, predicts the decline of small churches and the continued multiplication of large ones in the 21st century. He writes,

I predict that many churches of the future will be larger than anything we've imagined. In fact, the next generation of churches will dwarf our current **successes** [emphasis mine]- including the world's largest, the great congregation in Seoul, which is rapidly pushing toward a three-quarter of a million figure! (George 1992, 22)

While small churches are placed on the endangered species list, the largest churches are "successes." The effect of these assumptions about success is to make small churches feel insignificant, ineffective, and unnecessary to the fulfillment of the Great Commission. The small church pastor may be lured into the belief that he and his church are not a part of God's great plans for church multiplication in the future.

But not all are being taken in by the hype of the big church. Hughes, for example, admits that after the church he had planted failed to grow quickly past the one-hundred and two-hundred member barriers, his belief that bigger is better backfired upon him in the form of depression. Through a painful self-examination and sorting-out process Pastor Hughes came to the following conclusion about church growth principles:

Certainly there is nothing wrong with the wise use of any of the above principles. They should be part of the intelligent orchestration of ministry. However, when the refrain they play is numerical growth - when

the persistent motif is numbers - then the siren song becomes deeply sinister: growth in numbers, growth in giving, growth in staff, growth in programs - numbers, numbers, numbers! Pragmatism becomes the conductor. The audience inexorably becomes man rather than God. Subtle self-promotion becomes the driving force.
(Hughes 1987, 29)

His is comparable to the experience of many church planters and pastors of small churches. The definition of success exclusively in terms of size and numbers has been a source of widespread discouragement and frustration in the church.

The Scriptures, of course, teach a different criterion of success. Instead of placing the emphasis on size, the Bible focuses on being faithful. First Corinthians 4:1-2 says, "So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God. Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful." Being faithful is not measured primarily by the quantity of members on the rolls, dollars in the budget, staff on the payroll, or the size of the building in which the church worships. Being faithful is a quality of the heart, a measure of a man's devotion to Christ and willingness to persevere even in the absence of outward numerical success. And, as Hughes observes, "Faithfulness, we learned, is possible for all believers,

regardless of the size of a person's ministry" (Hughes 1987, 37). When we use Scripture as the only infallible rule of success, smallness can equal success.

For a small church to plant other churches effectively, its leadership must rise above this misguided emphasis on size. They must see through the worldly fog that numbers-oriented ministry creates between their church and the role God has for them in church planting, and they must evaluate on solid biblical criterion what it means for their small church to be faithful to the Great Commission of Jesus Christ. Only then will the small church break free of the limiting influences which come as a result of defining success in terms of bigness.

Search for Community

While the first of these contemporary influences presents a limiting factor to the small church in church planting, the second influence presents an opportunity. As mankind stands on the brink of the 21st century a search for community is intensifying. Callahan defines this search as follows: "The search for community is the search for roots, place, and belonging. It is the search for sharing and

caring, for family and friends" (Callahan 1990, 102). It is a longing for deep, personal relationships that bring people into meaningful connection with one another and help them make sense of their lives and the world around them.

The search for community is largely a product of contemporary man's own progress. In his book, SoulTsunami, Sweet comments on the causes and consequences of the dilemma facing modern society:

Perhaps the best way to understand the "homes" we are building today is to compare them with the medieval castle. The function of a castle was to protect one's family and friends from the chaos and violence of an outside world. . . . Revival futurists Faith Popcorn and Richard Celente are both correct. People are both "cocooning" (Popcorn) and "de-cocooning" (Celente) or "bunkering" (Iconoculture) at the same time. We are "cocooning" in our smart castles and telecommuting from them, but at the same time we are tired of being cooped up and bolting from them with increasing velocity. Ray Oldenburg, in his book The Great, Good Place, argues that people have three primary places of human contact. The first two, where we work and where we live, are increasingly one. Upwards of 50 million USAmericans [sic] are now working out of their home full- and part-time, up from 11 million in 1985. Where we gather socially, what Oldenburg calls "third places" have become endangered by urban planning, materialistic values, suburban car-culture, social disorder, and fear of violent crime. Just when our culture needs "third places" the most, they are most in peril. We have pagers, answering machines, e-mail, phones, cellular phones, and modems. We're more connected than ever before, and we're more lonely than ever before. We are awash in missed connections. (Sweet 1999, 122-123)

The search for community is a consequence of modernity, with its faster cars, faster jets, and faster modems, things which have made us more technically connected to one another, but more personally disconnected from one another.

Culture-watchers have noticed, however, that a significant shift is underway, a reaction against the impersonal and depersonalizing effects of modernity which is expressing itself in a search for community. In

Reaching a New Generation, Roxburgh writes:

The search for community is a quest for values to heal a fragmented humanity. People want to come together out of their fragmentation to cooperate in the creation of a new world. There are numerous signs of this change. The rise in volunteerism and the receptivity to community recycling efforts are illustrations. Models of leadership are moving away from the individualistic heroes who, through the power of their might, change everything. Lee Iaccoca and Donald Trump have ceased to be our paradigms. Leadership is becoming participative, workplaces are being debureaucratized, hierarchies are being flattened, and work participation has become the new rule. (Roxburgh 1993, 95)

Our culture is moving rapidly away from its failed emphasis on individuality and self, characteristic of the "Me-Generation" of the 1980's, and is moving just as quickly toward ideas, places, and organizations that they hope will help restore the broken sense of connection in their lives.

Herein lies the opportunity for the church, and especially for the small church. By its very nature a church is a community, a family, a place of sharing and caring among friends who are united together by the grace of the Gospel as God's people. Local churches that understand their identity in Christ and seek to express the implications of their identity through loving relationships with those inside and outside the congregation can be the end of the search for community for many. Smaller churches may actually have an advantage over larger churches in this regard. Roxburgh observes:

Small communities living out their vision in a neighborhood will be powerful community-forming groups in our culture. Churches will effectively evangelize as they form such communities centered on a world-changing vision through Jesus Christ. (Roxburgh 1993, 103)

Small churches are characteristically more friendly, personal, close-knit, and intimate than large churches. They are thus perfectly suited to provide the kind of community for which many modern people are searching.

Conversely, Roxburgh seriously questions the ability of many larger institutionalized churches to be as responsive to this search for community:

Our culture does not need any more churches run like corporations; it needs local communities empowered by the gospel vision of a transforming Christ who addresses the needs of the context and changes polis into a place of hope and wholeness. The corporate churches we are cloning across the land cannot birth this transformational vision, because they have no investment in context or place; they are centers of expressive individualism with a truncated gospel of personal salvation and little else. Our penchant for bigness and numerical success as the sign of God's blessing only discourages and deflects attempts to root communities of God's people deeply into neighborhoods. And until we build transformed communities there is no hope for a broken earth. (Roxburgh 1993, 105)

The size of a large church may hinder it from creating the loving, caring, family atmosphere that is needed to satisfy our ever-intensifying search for community.

This has significant implications for church planting by small churches. Instead of waiting to plant a daughter church until the congregation grows past the point at which true community is possible, perhaps a small church should simply reproduce its close-knit kind of fellowship sooner rather than later. Instead of laboring to grow single churches of four or five hundred members, perhaps we should consider planting three or four churches of approximately one hundred members apiece. The search for community offers small churches an invitation to step forward and meet the need by planting other churches that

are small in size, are rich in relationships, and that help bring disconnected people into closer relationships with God, as well as with other people.

The Spiritual Need for Church Planting

The greatest contemporary incentive to church planting by small congregations arises from the need for spiritual revival in the United States today. Of course, the primary motivation for all missionary activity is and should be founded in the Great Commission. Small churches should seek to plant other churches simply because their Lord and Savior has commanded them to do so. "The church is called to mission for the integrity of mission, not for the sake of church growth" (Callahan 1990, 19). But grateful obedience to Christ is amply supported by the fact that vast numbers of people in the United States are unchurched and unsaved. New churches are always needed to reach the large and diverse population of Americans who live without the influence of the Gospel in their lives.

Population growth and the great percentage of unchurched and unsaved people in the United States

demonstrate the need for church planting today. Logan places this need in a global context:

The reality of a growing population requires the multiplication of new churches. World population has exceeded the 5 billion mark and is climbing rapidly. It is estimated that by the year 2000, somewhere between 6 and 7 billion people will inhabit this planet. (Logan 1984, 193)

Others, like Chaney, focus on the proportionate need for new churches that exists in this country:

There are 80 million people in the United States who do not claim to have an allegiance to any Christian group. There are only six other nations that have a total population larger than 80 million. This makes America one of the great mission fields of the world. (Chaney 1982, 40)

Additionally, the necessity of creating new churches is shown by the tens of millions of Americans who claim a nominal allegiance to a Christian group, but for whom this allegiance has no practical effect. On the basis of the large numbers of unchurched and unsaved people alone, Callahan summarizes the extent of church planting opportunity: "God has planted us on one of the richest mission fields on the planet" (Callahan 1990, 17).

Demographers and church growth experts have paid special notice to the urbanization of America, as vast numbers of people continue to move into the nation's

cities. Less attention is given to the fact that smaller communities are also growing. Sweet observes:

Small towns in the US are growing at a rate of twice that of urban growth--4.9% per year. One out of 4 USAmericans [sic] resides in a town of 2,500 people or less. In virtually every category--population, income, jobs, recreation, retirement base--small-town America is on the rise. Unlike suburbs, where people's lives overlap but don't connect, in small towns they interact and intertwine. (Sweet 1999, 122-123)

The growth of small American towns offers special opportunities for church planting by small churches.

Corresponding to the growing population in American towns is the declining influence of American churches. Arn asserts that between 80 and 85 percent of churches in America today are plateaued or declining (Arn 1988, 43).

Market research specialist George Barna predicts that:

By 2000, less than half of our adult population will say that religion is very important in their daily lives. . . . Less than 40 percent of the population will even associate themselves with a Protestant denomination. Barely one out of three adults will include church attendance on their list of things to do on Sundays. (Barna 1990, 118-119)

Ironically, as the task of reaching lost people in the United States is becoming more difficult, the capacity of existing churches to complete the task is becoming weaker.

Malphurs recognizes this growing weakness:

The church situation in the latter half of the century (in particular the 1980s and 1990s) form a stark contrast to the first half. Storm clouds have moved in and darkened the bright horizon of American Christianity. Rather than sending missionaries out from America and winning the world for Christ, America itself has become a mission field. (Malphurs 1992, 13)

At the very time when the large number of unchurched, unsaved Americans is growing even larger, the number of healthy, growing American churches prepared to reach them is becoming even smaller.

The diversity of the unsaved population adds to the need for church planting. Barna writes:

The 1990 census will show that America has approximately 250 million people. That is 23 million more people than in 1980, representing a 10 percent increase.

The bulk of this increase came from a new source: immigration. . . . Most of the nation's population growth can be attributed to the fact that the Asian population increased at twelve times the rate of the native-born population, and the Hispanic population increased at five times the native-born rate. (Barna 1990, 186)

Even in cities like Philadelphia, which has not experienced overall population growth in the past decade, there have been pockets of growth among certain cultural and ethnic groups. It is estimated, for example, that the Russian immigrant population in and around the city of Philadelphia has grown to approximately 80,000 people, most of whom are

not Christians. There are also an increasing number of ethnic Albanian immigrants in Philadelphia, a population that has grown rapidly since the war in Kosovo. Most of these new Americans have had little or no exposure to the Gospel. As Chaney comments, "Most of the 80 million are socially and culturally removed from the homogeneous units in which the majority of existing churches are established" (Chaney 1982, 40). This diverse population is best reached through the multiplication of culturally relevant churches planted with consideration for the unique ethnic, social, and linguistic needs of each people group. Barna states:

The health of the American Church will depend upon its ability to attract minorities to Jesus Christ, and to equip and activate them for ministry. We must establish new congregations offering worship services, music and prayer, educational programs, relational opportunities and social services in other languages, recognizing and celebrating different customs. (Barna 1990, 1994)

Chaney agrees:

Large numbers of homogeneous people-groups, who define their existence in terms of ethnic, racial, or cultural values, or in terms of socio-economic conditions or life styles prove that America needs thousands of new churches. (Chaney 1982, 151)

When we consider the Great Commission in the context of the increasing numerical size and ethnic diversity of the American people, the need for church planting is

magnified. Small churches may find special opportunities for church planting in growing small towns or in cities among the diverse ethnic subcultures. There is no shortage of opportunities, only a shortage of churches to grasp them. The words Jesus chose to express the urgency of evangelism in 1st century Palestine are just as relevant today. He said, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field" (Luke 10:2). The task is so great that every church, large and small, is needed.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF THE PROBLEM

Thus far I have shown that church planting by small churches has deep Scriptural roots and is at the core of the Great Commission of Jesus Christ. I have also shown that small churches should be encouraged by inspirational historical antecedents to plant churches and that small churches may meet the growing need for community in America by reproducing themselves through the planting of new churches. However, most small churches do not participate in church planting, primarily because they do not know how. I argue that most small churches do not believe they are able to participate in church planting, a conclusion I came to through research in the field.

Research Methodology - Interviews

As a means of inquiry into the thesis question, "How can a small church be strategically and effectively

involved in church planting?", I employed a technique called "Qualitative Interviewing."

A qualitative interview is an interaction between an interviewer and a respondent in which the interviewer has a general plan of inquiry but not a specific set of questions that must be asked in particular words and in a particular order. A qualitative interview is essentially a conversation in which the interviewer establishes a general direction for the conversation and pursues specific topics raised by the respondent. Ideally, the respondent does most of the talking. (Babbie 1998, 290)

With the help of an expert in the methodology of field research and qualitative interviewing, I prepared a general plan of inquiry (Appendix A). The goal of the interviews was to discover the beliefs, attitudes, experiences, and plans of small churches as they relate to church planting. I then chose twelve prospects to interview.

Choice of Prospects

These prospects were chosen on the basis of their relationships to small churches. As noted in Chapter 1, a small church is a local fellowship of believers which is comprised of fewer than 100 adult members or has fewer than 100 adults in attendance during an average Sunday morning worship service. The precise numbers were not particularly

important. For the purposes of this study it was necessary to choose prospects from congregations that were small enough in numbers of people and available resources so that the need for distinct strategies of involvement in church planting would be obvious. Prospects were either the senior pastor, the solo pastor, or in one instance, the key lay leader of a small congregation which had no pastor. Each prospect was the principle person with the responsibility to lead the ministry and mission of their local church.

Since my immediate concern is church planting in the northeastern region of the United States, especially in eastern Pennsylvania, all the prospects for the interviews were chosen because their church ministered within this area of the country. Nine of the twelve interviewees were from Eastern Pennsylvania; three were from New Jersey.

Ecclesiastical Context

Another significant factor which affected my choice of prospects was their ecclesiastical context. The subjects are all ordained officers in the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), founded on December 4, 1973, an association of approximately 1,400 churches in the United

States and Canada who are united by their commitment to the infallibility and inerrancy of Scripture and their conformity to the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms.

Of great significance to my thesis is the emphasis upon church planting within the PCA. This priority can be seen in a vision statement which was first presented to the PCA's 1987 General Assembly and subsequently posted on its Internet Website:

As one communion in the worldwide church, the Presbyterian Church in America exists to glorify God by extending the kingdom of Jesus Christ over all individual lives through all areas of society and in all nations and cultures. To accomplish this end *the PCA aims to fill the world with churches* [emphasis mine] that are continually growing in vital worship, in theological depth, in true fellowship, in assertive evangelism and in deeds of compassion. (Presbyterian Church in America, 1999)

The PCA is committed to church planting, both nationally and internationally.

To further the vision of church planting in the United States, the PCA has a permanent committee on Mission to North America whose purpose is to provide ". . . the leadership and the resources that enable the Presbyterian Church in America *to plant, grow, and multiply churches throughout the United States and Canada*" [emphasis mine]

(Presbyterian Church in America, 1999). Each subject ministers in a context in which church planting is clearly understood, highly prioritized, and widely practiced. In other words, the ecclesiastical context of the prospects would tend to predispose them positively toward participation in church planting, and I anticipated the effects of this predisposition on my research. I expected that the prospects would have an above average awareness of and commitment to planting churches.

Church size, geographical location, and ecclesiastical affiliation are common factors shared by the prospects who were chosen for this study. In many other ways, however, they differed. One was near retirement while another was newly ordained. Several planted the church they pastored while others had never planted a church. Some had worship that was formal and traditional while others had contemporary worship services in a casual atmosphere. Three of the churches represented in this study were in urban settings while the remaining nine churches were suburban to rural. It is reasonable to assume that the sampling of pastors and churches which were chosen for this study is generally representative of small

PCA churches throughout the United States. Thus, my findings have broad application and the concepts I identify in this dissertation are transferable.

The Interview Process

After preparing a general plan of inquiry as a guide for the interviews and developing a prospect list based upon the criterion listed above, I contacted the prospects. I asked each to commit one and a half to two hours of their time to a personal interview during which they would be asked questions about their church and its ministry. I did not tell them in advance that the primary concern of the interview was church planting by small churches, intentionally omitting this information so that the prospects would not be tempted to skew their responses in a direction which they thought I might desire. I made an appointment with each prospect, obtaining permission in advance to take detailed notes and to tape record the interview with a promise of confidentiality.

At the established times I met privately with each interviewee. Using the Qualitative Interview technique, I first asked the respondents general questions about their

church. They could describe their ministry in any way they wanted. Next, I asked them to describe how their church expressed its commitment to the Great Commission, giving no guidance toward the priority of church planting. Third, I asked each prospect specifically about his attitude regarding church planting, his past experiences, and his future plans. This was the first time that I introduced the topic of church planting. Finally, I asked the respondents about their unique experiences as pastors and leaders of small congregations. This last series of questions was designed to uncover some of the unique challenges and opportunities which exist in small churches in contrast to larger churches. The interviews were concluded within the prearranged time period.

General Observation on Methodology

Before proceeding to an analysis of my research findings, some general observations on the interview method may be useful. First, the subjects who were chosen for the research demonstrated a willingness to participate in the interview. It was extremely easy to secure an appointment with them. They seemed eager to help me with this study

and do something which they believed would benefit the church at large, even though they did not know specifically what that might be. During the interviews these prospects were open, honest, and helpful; the atmosphere of the interviews was congenial; and they were not concerned about my note taking or tape recording.

Second, I ordered the questions in such a way that my interest in church planting by small churches was successfully obscured. As social research specialist Babbie warns:

wording questions is tricky business. All too often, the way we ask questions subtly biases the answers we get. Sometimes we put our respondents under pressure to look good. Sometimes we put the question in a particular context that omits altogether the most relevant answers. (Babbie 1998, 291)

Upon completion of the interviews I asked the respondents when they figured out that church planting and small churches were my primary concerns. All said that they did not know until the latter part of the interview when they were asked specific questions about church planting.

Third, I observed an enthusiasm among the respondents for the notion that "Small Churches Can Plant Churches" once they were told that this was my thesis. Again, these were pastors and leaders of small churches in

a denomination that prioritizes church planting, and each was generally supportive of this commitment. However, each felt constraints and limitations in his small church which greatly affected its ability to participate significantly in church planting. Each was supportive of the present research. Therefore, most of the subjects were interested to see the specific results and proposals that might come from this dissertation. In and of itself, the interview process brought encouragement to all involved.

Findings

It was my concern in this study to understand the beliefs, attitudes, experiences, and plans of small churches as they relate to church multiplication. The process of Qualitative Interviewing yielded many interesting and useful results concerning church planting by small churches. The findings may be divided into three general categories: Attitudes toward Church Planting, Participation in Church Planting, and Obstacles to Church Planting.

Attitudes toward Church Planting

As a part of the interview I asked each respondent to rate on a scale of one to ten (one = not very important, not a high priority; ten = very important, a high priority) his attitude toward church planting and, separately, his perception of his congregation's attitude toward church planting. Figure 2 shows the totals of all twelve scores in both categories, pastors versus congregations; the average for both categories; and the difference between pastors and congregations in their attitudes toward church planting.

Attitudes about Church Planting in Small Churches
PASTORS VERSUS CONGREGATIONS

	Total of Scores	Average of Scores	Difference
Pastors	94	7.83	
Congregations	57	4.75	3.08

Figure 2. Attitudes about Church Planting

These ratings and the accompanying comments reveal several important findings concerning attitudes about church planting in small churches.

Overall, these pastors considered church planting to be very important and a high priority of their ministry. With the exception of one pastor, who rated his attitude as a three, all the other pastors rated their attitudes about church planting at or above six. Three of the twelve respondents rated their attitude about church planting as a ten (Appendix B).

Some of the comments made by pastors indicated a strong commitment to church planting:

"Church planting is an important part of our vision."

"We would love to plant a daughter church."

"I believe that my congregation can make the most impact through church planting."

"I would like to see us plant three churches in the region in the next ten years."

"My calling is, first, to preach the Gospel, then, to raise up men for church planting."

"Church planting is exciting."

"My king commands church planting."

"It is Jesus' intention for us to be effective in church planting."

Other pastors were still positive, but were more passive in the way they expressed their attitude toward church planting:

"I'm all for it."

"I'm happy to see it done."

"I support what's being done in my Presbytery."

There were no negative expressions about church planting from the pastors who participated in the study.

I found that the pastors of small churches have a very favorable attitude toward church planting. They believe that church planting is taught in Scripture and commanded by Christ through the Great Commission. They wholeheartedly support the church planting vision of the Presbyterian Church in America and church planting projects that exist within the bounds of their Presbyteries. Most wish that their congregations were more informed about church planting and more committed to it. Seven of the twelve respondents specifically indicated that they would like to see their congregation plant a daughter church at some point in the future.

When these same pastors were asked to rate their perception of the attitudes of their congregations about

church planting, however, the results were significantly different. On average, pastors believed that church planting was less important to the members of their congregations and a lower priority in the congregation's philosophy of ministry. Only four of the twelve respondents rated their congregation's attitude above five. The average of all twelve respondents was 4.75, or 3.08 below the average rating of the pastors (Figure 2). No pastor rated his congregation's attitude higher than his own. In one instance the difference between the pastor's and the congregation's attitude was seven (Appendix B).

Comments made by some pastors gave further evidence of their perception that their congregations held a substantially lower view of church planting:

"My people have no clue. They do not understand church planting."

"My congregation does not have a concept of the value of church planting."

"The Elders are generally suspicious of Presbytery and Presbytery projects."

"The average person in the church does not have much of a feel for church planting."

"My people ask, 'Why do we need more churches?'"

If these perceptions are correct, the results indicate that the members of small churches do not share the pastor's value of and enthusiasm for church planting in most cases.

It is obvious that congregations need more biblical and theological instruction about church planting before they will share the pastor's values. While several pastors said that they give regular reports on church planting activities in the Presbytery and the Presbyterian Church in America, most said that their congregations were poorly informed. Thus, being ignorant, church members do not share the pastor's support or enthusiasm for church planting projects. In several instances, the pastor's desire to see his church plant a daughter church at some point in the future was not made known to the congregation, which could not endorse a vision which they had not heard. The gap between the pastor's attitude and the congregation's attitude toward planting churches represents a significant obstacle. It is a gap that must be closed before small churches can plant churches.

Participation in Church Planting

A second area of inquiry in the interviews revealed the degree of participation of small churches in church planting. I asked the pastors to explain the ways in which their churches have been involved in church planting in the past, are involved in church planting presently, and plan to participate in church planting in the future. Initially these questions were open-ended, allowing the respondents the opportunity to answer as they saw fit. At the conclusion of the interview, however, I had the respondents indicate their involvement in church planting according to a prepared list (Figure 3).

The table shows that most small churches have participated in church planting in the past by offering both specific prayer for church planting projects and financial contributions toward these projects. More than half of the pastors interviewed indicated that their church had loaned an Elder to a provisional Session, trained an intern who went on to plant a church, or had someone in their congregation who served on the church planting committee of their Presbytery. Prayer and financial

support continued to be the primary means of participation at the time of the interviews.

Involvement in US Church Planting			
	Past	Present	Future
Specific Prayer	12	10	12
\$ Contributions	11	6	12
Loaned Members	1	1	10
Gave Members	2	1	12
Loaned Elders	8	1	12
CP Interns	6	3	12
CP Committee	7	3	12
Mentored OP	4	3	11
Loaned Facility	3	3	12

Figure 3. Involvement in Church Planting

Several pastors told stories about the ways in which their church had been involved in church planting. They commented:

"Our elders have been on commissions to organize other churches. Our members have made food for celebration services."

"We supported [church planter's name] in [town's name] for 2 years and it was exciting."

"We gave families to the church planted in [town's name]. We loaned our facility, free of charge, to an [ethnic] core group."

"I have helped to gather a core group for a new church in [town's name]."

"I am talking with a man in [town's name] right now about starting a church there."

These statements reveal the diverse ways in which small churches have participated in church planting.

Financial contributions provide a quantitative measure of participation in church planting by small churches. Pastors in the study were asked to supply information about their churches' missions budgets, specifically the amounts given to US Church Planting in 1998 (Appendix C). Figure 4 gives a summary of this data from all respondents.

Contributions to US Church Planting			
	Total Missions	Church Planting	Percent to Church Planting
Totals (12 Churches)	\$160,700	\$15,350	
Averages	\$13,392	\$1,279	9.55%

Figure 4. Contributions to Church Planting

The total given to missions by all twelve churches is impressive at \$160,000 in 1998. But the amount and percentage given specifically to church planting in the

United States is disappointing at \$15,350, or 9.55%.

Indeed, six of the twelve churches contributed no money to church planting in 1998. Only three committed 25% or more of their missions budget to church planting.

Similar to the gap we have seen between the pastors' attitudes toward church planting and the attitudes of their congregations is the gap between the pastors' positive attitudes toward church planting and the financial contributions of their churches. While the pastors rated church planting at the seventy-fifth percentile in importance and priority, their congregations gave less than ten percent of the total missions budgets to church planting. The disparity between attitudes and contributions indicates another significant obstacle to church planting by small churches.

As for the future, all the respondents expressed a desire to participate more fully in church planting (Figure 3). The pastors indicated an interest to involve their congregations in church planting in any and every possible way. This interest, however, was not in the form of specific plans. The pastors generally had only vague notions about how their congregations might participate in

church planting in the future. This can be seen in some of their comments:

"I want my church to plant a daughter church someday. But that seems far away."

"I want us to take part in church planting in a bigger way than we do now."

"We are likely to expand our current facility before we plant a daughter church."

"We have no specific plans. Church planting is not our focus at this time."

Only two of the twelve respondents had clear, specific, and measurable goals for church planting. One pastor said, "We are going to plant three churches in Northeastern Pennsylvania in the next ten years." Another pastor of a small, newly-planted church was even more specific when he said, "We want to plant a daughter church within five years of our start." He had a very clear idea about where the daughter church would be planted, who they would reach, and who would plant the church. But this kind of goal was the exception among the respondents and not the rule; most had no plans.

Obviously, if small churches are going to plant churches these vague notions must be translated into specific plans. The study reveals that the pastors of

small churches have positive attitudes and good intentions about church planting, but few have an idea of how their attitudes and intentions could result in new churches. Without clear plans these small churches are not likely to be effective or successful in church planting.

Obstacles to Church Planting

In addition to the clarification of attitudes and involvement of small churches in church planting, the process of Qualitative Interviewing helped me to identify a list of significant obstacles to church planting by small churches. Schaller writes, "The small church is different" (Schaller 1982, 15). While larger churches may face some of the same obstacles to church planting, the small church faces these obstacles differently.

Recognizing the distinctive institutional character of the small church, rather than assuming that all congregations are basically the same regardless of size, may be the essential first step in any effort to strengthen, reinforce, and expand the ministry and outreach of over one half of the Protestant churches on this continent. (Schaller 1982, 55)

For the small church to be effective and successful in church planting, each of the following obstacles must be

understood and overcome in the grace, wisdom, and power of the Lord.

Size of Membership

The number of adult members or attenders in a small local church presents a formidable obstacle to church planting. In the small church everyone is known and needed; there are no spare members. The average size for the twelve churches represented in this study is 68.08 adult members and 65.83 weekly attenders (Appendix D). The pastors indicated that their membership was stretched to the limit in an attempt to staff the existing ministries. Similarly, Schaller sites an elderly man from a 94-member church who said, "We need more members, especially young ones, or we're going to die off. . . . I think the number-one problem is getting more members to keep our small church going" (Schaller 1982, 57). In almost every instance the twelve churches were attempting to maintain a level of ministry that would be common in churches two or three times their size. As one can imagine, overload, fatigue, and burn-out are common feelings among the members of small congregation. The idea of adding additional

ministries or missionary emphases is inconceivable to many. The thought of giving away members, families, or leaders to a church planting project is unthinkable.

The pastors I interviewed relate the number of members in their churches to their potential in church planting:

"If we grow to double our size we would think about starting a daughter church."

"We're too small to plant a daughter church."

"We want to grow so that we can participate more."

"We don't have the resources to do church planting by ourselves."

Each understands that the small number of members is a significant obstacle to church planting.

It is more difficult for small churches to dedicate members to missions and church planting when they are needed so desperately elsewhere in the ministry. It is more difficult for a small church to loan one of their few Elders to serve on the provisional Session of a mission church, though more than half of the churches represented in this study had done so. It is more difficult for the pastor of a small church to mentor a church planter when the care-giving expectations of his church members are so

high. And when a church has fewer than one-hundred people in membership or attendance, the idea of planting a daughter church seems impossible.

Financial Resources

Money is a huge limiting factor in most small churches. For many small congregations, including one in this study, there is not enough money in the budget to have a full-time pastor on the staff. Schaller observes, “. . . the inflationary wave that traces back to the mid-nineteen-sixties simply has priced many churches out of the ministerial marketplace” (Schaller 1982, 84). Most small churches that can afford to pay a full-time pastor discover that his compensation may consume as much as 75-80% of the total budget, leaving little money for the support of their ministries and missions. In his book, Making the Small Church Effective, Dudley writes, “Money is a sensitive issue in most small congregations. They are always in need, often just surviving” (Dudley 1978, 63).

The average annual income of the small churches represented in this study is \$108,166 (Appendix D), with

more than half of this amount typically committed to the pastor's compensation. Schaller comments,

In general, whenever a congregation allocates more than 40 percent of the total budget for ministerial compensation (including cash salary, housing costs, pension, health insurance, travel costs, continuing education, and conference expenses) that often means that program costs, missions, and/or building maintenance are underfinanced. Whenever that proportion passes the 50 percent figure, it almost always means other needs and causes are underfinanced. (Schaller 1982, 85)

Approximately twenty percent of the budget is required to provide for the church facility, with another twenty percent used to pay for the ministries and programs of the church. This leaves the average small church with approximately twelve percent of the annual budget, or an average of \$13,392 per year, for all the missionary projects they support (Figure 4). And there is always pressure to use money budgeted for missions to meet a shortfall in another area of the church's expenses.

Once again, some comments made by the participants in this study provide insight into the financial obstacles faced by small churches:

"We struggle to pay our bills. I feel the burden of the lack of money that others do not feel."

"When I retire, I'm worried that the church won't be able to afford their next pastor."

"We have a hard time supporting our own mission, not to mention missions elsewhere."

"I'm frustrated over the tightfistedness in my church."

"Money is hard."

Money is hard because there is so little of it in a small church. Money is hard because the demands of the local church ministry consume most of it. Money is hard because there are many more needs than there are dollars to meet those needs in a small church.

Lack of Leadership and Vision

More than the number of members and the limitations of a budget, a lack of leadership and vision is an even greater obstacle to small churches planting churches. In his excellent book, On Leadership, John Gardner provides this definition of his central concern:

Leadership is the process of persuasion or example by which an individual (or leadership team) induces a group to pursue objectives held by the leader or shared by the leader and his or her followers.
(Gardner 1990, 1)

A leader is someone who persuades others to do what ought to be done. Church leadership is the process of persuading

the membership to do what pleases, honors, and glorifies God.

In Chapter 2 I showed how church planting fulfills God's desire to cover the earth with those who will know, love, and serve Him forever. Throughout the Old Testament the Lord leads His people toward this goal, and in the New Testament Jesus commands His followers to go, make disciples, baptize, and teach. The Great Commission of Christ is essentially a directive to plant churches through which disciples can be made, and church planting was the goal and outcome of the Apostle Paul's missionary work. I also showed how throughout Scripture God delights to use that which is small to accomplish His great purposes. Church leadership must persuade the membership to do what pleases, honors, and glorifies God, and among these things is church planting.

Gardner comments, "Shared values are the bedrock on which leadership builds the edifice of group achievement" (Gardner 1990, xii). I have already noted the gap which exists between the pastors' and congregations' attitudes toward church planting. This might be called the "leadership gap" (Figure 5).

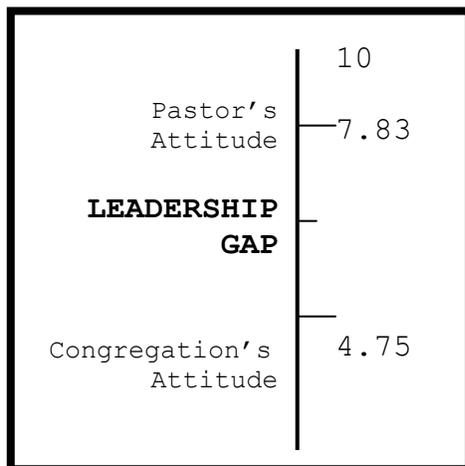


Figure 5: The Leadership Gap

It represents the degree to which a pastor has failed to transfer the value and priority of church planting to the membership of his church. This gap must be closed before people and money will be committed to church planting in a small church.

Closely associated with leadership is vision.

Pastors may only close the leadership gap if they have a vision for how their small church can plant churches. In The Power of Vision, Barna offers this useful definition:

Vision for ministry is a clear mental image of a preferable future imparted by God to His chosen servants and is based upon an accurate understanding of God, self and circumstances. (Barna 1992, 28)

Through prayer and meditation on Scripture a pastor-leader may develop a clear mental image of how his small church

might participate in church planting. One pastor in the study saw his congregation taking part in the planting of three churches in the next ten years. He could imagine how this could happen through his congregation and where those churches might be planted. It is especially important that a vision arise from an accurate understanding of both the obstacles to and opportunities for church planting by small churches. In most circumstances a vision for church planting that might be appropriate for a large church is not appropriate for a small church. I believe that as the vague notions of pastors are replaced by clear visions which are appropriate to the small church, we will close the leadership gap and overcome this obstacle.

Small churches are different; therefore, the leadership and vision of a small church that plants churches will be different too. Gardner asserts that context is an important consideration in determining how to lead, “. . . the attributes which make for effective leadership depend on the situation in which the leader is functioning” (Gardner 1990, 38). In Making It Work, a book written specifically about effective administration in the

small church, Walrath agrees with the need for contextualization of leadership:

Different kinds of contexts support and require different kinds of leaders. There are valid reasons that govern what those in different contexts admire and criticize in their leaders. Leaders prove their worth in different ways in different contexts because being an effective leader in each context required different attitudes, different approaches, and different skills. (Walrath 1994, 19)

Not only will the vision of a small church be different than that of a larger church, but the means of communication and methods of implementation of that vision will also be different.

"The small church is relational" (Schaller 1982, 31). Relationships in a small church play a large role in how small churches must be led and how vision must be implemented. The relational characteristic of small churches provides a significant point of contrast to larger churches.

In the large congregation, there is a tendency for people to conceptualize reality in terms of functional categories, whether it be in describing the greatest competence of the pastor, in categorizing people, in designing the organizational structure for the congregation, or in evaluating the performance of that congregation.

By contrast, in small congregations the members tend to think in terms of interpersonal relationships. The relationships of life, rather than the functions

of the church, top the priority list in the small church. (Schaller 1982, 32)

The pastor of a small congregation who wishes to lead his congregation toward the fulfillment of a vision to plant churches must carefully consider how the relational concerns of his congregation influence his leadership style. Church planting for the small church may not be presented as just another program or means of church achievement; it must be presented as an opportunity for meaningful relationships with a church planter and those persons who are reached through the mission church. Steve Burt says it well in Activating Leadership in the Small Church: "Good small church leadership will be relational, inspirational and transformational - but nothing happens without the first" (Burt 1988, 42).

Traditional Missions Approach

Another obstacle to church planting by small churches is the traditional approach to missions employed by most small churches. Most churches, especially small churches, approach missions and missions giving in a very haphazard way. They give very little thought to why they

have a missions ministry, what they are trying to accomplish through their missions ministry, how missionaries are chosen for support, or how the missions budget is allocated. The traditional missions approach may be characterized by the expression, "That's just the way we've always done it."

In the Qualitative Interviews I asked the respondents to explain how their churches expressed their commitment to the Great Commission, giving them great freedom to respond to this question in any way they thought appropriate. Typically the pastors answered by listing some of the ways in which their churches were involved in local evangelism and by referring to their missions budget. When asked more specifically about their missions ministry and budget, however, it became clear that the traditionally haphazard approach to missions was widespread among these small churches.

When asked whether their church had a written purpose statement for their missions ministry or a "mission of missions" statement, only one of the twelve churches represented in the survey had a written statement. Two pastors indicated that they were currently working on one,

and nine churches had no written statement. All said that it would be good to have one.

The following statements are indicative of the vague approach to missions among small churches:

"We support the taking of the Gospel where we cannot go."

"Our mission of missions statement is the Great Commission."

"Missions and missionaries are a great concern to this church. . . . We have nothing in writing."

Additional evidence of a haphazard approach to missions is found in the criterion by which small churches chose missionaries to support. When respondents were asked to explain how they decided to support one missionary or missionary project but not another, it was not unusual for them to respond by saying, "That's a good question," as though they were uncertain whether any such criterion existed in their churches. Only two churches had anything in writing on this subject. After giving a list of qualifications off the top of his head, one pastor said, "I am articulating to you what I have never articulated to anyone else about our approach to missions." Most of the respondents struggled to come up with a short list of qualifications for support by their churches.

Traditionally, small churches and their pastors have not articulated, verbally or on paper, their approach to missions.

Based upon the spontaneous responses of the pastors who participated in this study, however, several characteristic criteria for the selection of missionaries was observed.

PCA, all the way

The most frequently cited criterion of selection for missions support was the missionaries association with the Presbyterian Church in America or the PCA. In several cases this was the only significant criterion. The pastors and churches in this study, all being members of the PCA, demonstrated a high degree of loyalty to missionaries who were being sent by their denomination. One pastor said, "Any PCA missionary is welcomed at this church." On the whole, the pastors were greatly concerned that the missionaries supported by their churches shared their particular theological views and their commitment to the Presbyterian form of government. There was also a sense that there are so many missionaries in the PCA who are in

need of financial support that there is no great reason to look beyond the PCA for candidates.

The good buddy network

The second most frequently cited criterion for support was what I will call "The Good Buddy Network." Pastors said that it was very important to the members of their churches that they know the people they support. Often the missionary was personally related to someone in the church. They were chosen because they were fathers, mother, sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles, or good buddies of someone who was a member of the church or, in some cases, a member of the missions committee. On this subject Schaller writes:

Kinfolk ties are more important in the small church. . . . Kinship ties are also influential in the selection of officers, in the alignment of opposing sides when a controversial issue surfaces, and in maintaining certain customs and traditions." (Schaller 1982, 34-35)

The choice of relatives or friends for missionary support can be one of the old customs and a firm tradition in the small church. Good buddies in the PCA get support.

First come, first served

A third criterion for missionary support by a small church may be characterized by the expression, "First come, first served." Without any other basis for screening candidates than "our friends in the PCA," small churches often commit their missions money to those who ask for it first. When funds become available, the first to send a letter to the missions committee chairman, call the pastor, or show up on the doorstep of the church will get the support. When all the available money is committed, the rest are turned away. By this criterion, candidates are not screened by their strategic significance or by measures of effectiveness. Those who are first in line get the money; those who come later do not.

The longer, the better

Another factor which influences the selection of missionaries for support in small churches is the desire for a long support list. One church represented in this study supported twenty-eight different missionaries or missionary agencies with a total annual missions budget of

\$30,000. The average support per missionary was just over \$1,000. Another church supported thirty-six different missionaries with a \$30,000 budget, making the average support little more than \$800 per missionary. Still another church used their \$6,000 annual missions budget to support fifteen different missionaries or agencies, making the average support per missionary equal to \$400. The pastor said, "We believe it is wise for missionaries to spread out their support." With the average missionary in the Presbyterian Church in America needing \$92,284 (Kooistra 1998) in annual support, \$400 per supporting church is spreading them quite thin.

My study shows that small churches tend to have long lists of missionaries they support, which is way out of proportion to the amount of money they have available for missions. There seems to be an underlying unspoken assumption that a longer list is better than a shorter list. Happily, however, several of the churches represented in this study are moving toward shorter support lists with a more significant level of financial support for their missionaries. This also entails moving toward being more strategic and intentional.

Foreign is first

For most small churches, foreign missions come first. Further, according to my research, foreign missions come both first and last for missions support. Half of the churches represented in the study gave no money to church planting in the United States in 1998. Aside from a few local evangelists, benevolence agencies, and educational institutions, most missions money was spent in support of overseas missionaries. Pastors commented:

"We have a strong emphasis on foreign missions."

"My congregation is indifferent about church planting."

"My people just don't see church planting as viable missions."

Most small churches do not comprehend the need for domestic church planting or the strategic significance of expanding the base for overseas missions by multiplying churches at home. Logan comments:

The error of many contemporary churches is to ignore our neighbor but salve our consciences by designating our monies in support of missionaries in far away lands, thus thinking we have fulfilled our responsibility toward the Great Commission. (Logan 1984, 191)

The extreme bias for foreign first is a characteristic of a traditional missions approach and it presents a significant obstacle to the funding of church planting in the United States.

Cover the earth

The only strategic factor used in the selection of missionaries for support by small churches was the concern to spread the missionaries and budget around the world, or to cover the earth. Several churches represented here sought to express their missionary concern for the world by choosing missionaries in various parts of the world. No specific thought was given to other strategic factors nor to the missionary effectiveness of those selected on this basis. The singular interest was to see the supported missionaries spread out equally, like pins on the map of the world. This gave the congregation a sense that they were fulfilling the Great Commission as Jesus commanded them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation" (Mark 16:15). Ironically, however, a missionary/church planter to North America was often missing in the "cover the earth" strategy of the small

churches. People all around the world need to be reached for Christ, but apparently the need does not exist in the United States of America.

Ecclesiastical Inferiority

Just as an individual may feel a sense of personal inferiority to other individuals, so also a congregation may feel a sense of corporate inferiority to other churches. On this subject, Burt writes:

Small churches often feel insecure. Like teenagers, they may be involved in an identity search much of the time. Bigger kids (larger churches or denominations) threaten them and add to their feelings of insecurity. They are sometimes told it isn't right to be who they are, that they must change to be accepted. . . . They have had their self-esteem damaged by unfair comparisons to their bigger sistren [sic] and brethren churches (who also woo their pastors away). They have been made to feel inadequate with regard to mission giving and stewardship of money. They often feel like beggars at the feet of their denominations, picking up what's left or waiting for hand-me-downs to fill pastoral vacancies. Small churches don't feel first class in many ways. (Burt 1988, 69)

The sense of inferiority which is felt by many small churches presents a formidable obstacle to church planting. Feeling inferior, pastors and their congregations may draw the conclusion that church planting is not for them, but only for larger churches. They may decide that their small

budget and limited resources are insignificant in the cause of church planting. By accepting the notion that "bigger is better," the small church may choose to watch from the sidelines while larger churches with bigger budgets, more people, and bolder strategies do most of the work toward the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

Let me emphasize that feelings of ecclesiastical inferiority are merely feelings and not facts. Small churches are not, in fact, inferior to larger churches. Larger churches are not necessarily better churches in general, nor are they necessarily better equipped for church planting. This sense of corporate inferiority may be overcome as a pastor and his congregation build their identity by reference to Scripture and not by comparison to other churches. Then, and only then, will the small church realize its potential in church planting.

Paralyzing Fear

Another corporate emotion which presents an obstacle to church planting by small churches is paralyzing fear. This fear is comparable to that which the Israelites felt as they considered the prospect of taking possession of the

land God had promised them (Numbers 13:1-14:4). After the scouts returned with a report that the enemies were powerful and the cities were fortified, Caleb challenged the people by saying, "We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it" (Numbers 13:30). But the others discouraged Israel by comparing them to the enemy saying, "We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them" (Numbers 13:33). Paralyzing fear has been an historic obstacle to God's people fulfilling the mission which God has commissioned them to do.

The fear which can paralyze small churches takes two forms. First, small churches fear the unknown, that which they have never done before. This research shows that very few small churches have ever attempted to participate significantly in church planting. Most small churches, including their pastors and other leaders, have no experience planting churches. They are uncertain how it can be done. Church planting to the small church can seem as mysterious and dangerous as the land of Canaan did to the children of Israel.

Second, fear of failure can paralyze a small church. I interviewed several pastors who made reference to past involvement in church planting projects which failed. These failures created a sense that precious time and money had been wasted, discouraging members of core groups and crippling the careers of promising young church planters. Past failures can condition churches to think that church planting is so difficult that it should not be attempted. Thus, a small church can be paralyzed against making any future plans.

Large Church Models

Furthermore, I discovered that small churches are hindered from involvement in church planting by models which were developed by larger churches for larger churches. The most popular approaches to church planting assume that a congregation has several hundred members and several hundred thousands of dollars.

In Church Planting for a Greater Harvest Wagner lists what he calls "twelve good ways to plant a church" (Wagner 1990, 59-75). In most instances his church

planting strategies require larger numbers of people and dollars than a small church would have. He writes:

Hiving off is the most common way of planting a daughter church. It simply means that the members of a local congregation are challenged to form a nucleus and at a predetermined time, these people will move out under the leadership of a church planter and become charter members of a new congregation. This usually assumes that the new church will be in the same general geographical area so that the nucleus members will not be expected to make a residential move. (Wagner 1990, 60-61)

Wagner gives two examples of "hiving off." The first is that of South Presbyterian Church in the Denver area, which planted a daughter church beginning with 60 people in the original core group. The second example is from Paul Yonggi Cho's Yoido Full Gospel Church of Seoul, Korea, which planted three daughter churches, each beginning with a 5,000 member core group.

In his book, Beyond Church Growth, author and pastor Robert E. Logan lists church planting among the ten characteristics of a vital, healthy church (Logan 1984, 19). He encourages all churches to reproduce themselves through church planting, citing the six daughter churches which his congregation has planted. The only concrete example that he gives, however, is a large one:

In 1986 our third and most ambitious church-planting project was underway. As we progressed it soon became apparent that God was calling a large slice of our church to be a part of the project. This slice included about 100 people, including many key leaders, as well as much of our giving base. (Logan 1984, 195)

Given this model and these examples, small churches are bound to be discouraged. The very idea of "hiving off" a portion of their already-small membership to plant a daughter church is unthinkable, if not deadly. Yet, this is the model of church planting to which most of the pastors in this study have been exposed.

A second model of church planting which is commonly employed in the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), the denomination to which all pastors in this study belong, is to hire a qualified church planter to plant a church. In the PCA potential church planters are sent to an assessment center where their qualifications to plant a church are determined by specialists. Those who are approved are given an opportunity to plant a church and the necessary funding. It is not uncommon for these church planters to receive most or all of their financial support from one large church, with the new congregation becoming a distant daughter church of the larger mother congregation. The

annual cost to support a church planter is approximately \$75,000 or more.

The expense of supporting a church planter is intimidating and prohibitive for a small church. With average membership of 68.08 and average annual budgets of \$108,167, the churches represented in this study could not conceive of planting a church according to this model. This is a strategy which was designed by larger churches for larger churches.

In the church planting literature the models and examples of small churches planting churches are few and far between. All we see are large churches being used as examples of large church models. Neither "hiving off" a daughter church nor fully supporting a qualified church planter are strategies which are likely to be employed by small churches. If small churches are to plant churches, clearly new small church models must be developed and small church examples must be presented.

Practical Autonomy

Lastly, the interviews reveal that practical autonomy is an obstacle to church planting by small

churches. Although all the pastors and churches represented in this study are members of a connectional church, the PCA, the congregations think and act with autonomy in the area of missions and church planting. In theory, the Presbyterian form of church government provides a natural means by which churches can work cooperatively in missions and church planting; local churches are not autonomous, but rather are connected by a common system of doctrine, church polity and denominational vision; and regional Presbyteries provide a natural network through which partnerships can be formed and resources pooled in support of church planting projects.

This research shows, however, that the theoretical connections and networks that exist among congregations in the PCA are rarely considered as a means by which small churches could plant churches. Several comments made by these pastors are characteristic of autonomous thinking among leaders of small churches:

"The Elders tend to be suspicious of Presbytery and Presbytery projects."

"Our original vision was to plant three to five churches in this area, but now I can't see how this would be possible."

"We're just not big enough to plant a daughter church."

Most of the pastors conceive of church planting in terms of planting a daughter church from their own congregation. Given their present sizes and resources, most believe that church planting is impossible at this time. They give very little consideration to how the natural relationships and networks in the PCA or Presbyteries might be developed for the purpose of church planting. Surprisingly for those who profess to be connectional, their thought processes about church planting are more typical of independent churches than Presbyterian. When autonomy is added to larger church models, the result is a grand obstacle against small churches planting churches.

Summary

My qualitative interviews of twelve pastors of small PCA congregations in the greater Philadelphia area expose the problem of church planting by small churches. Pastors of small churches consider church planting to be important and a high priority, but they perceive that their members think of church planting as less important and a lower

priority in the overall ministry and mission of the church. Most small churches commit little or no money in their missions budget to church planting in the United States. While the pastors of small churches hope their congregations will be more involved in church planting in the future, very few have translated their good intentions about church planting into specific plans.

Additionally, I have identified several significant obstacles to church planting by small churches:

1. Size of Membership. The human resources needed to do church planting are already stretched thin. Most small churches barely have enough people to staff their current ministry and missions programs; thus it is difficult for them to consider adding an emphasis on church planting.

2. Financial Resources. Small churches have small budgets which are barely adequate to pay the pastor and meet ministry expenses. There is relatively little money available for missions and even less for church planting in the United States.

3. Lack of Leadership and Vision. There is a significant gap between the pastor's attitude and the

congregation's attitude toward church planting. Most pastors have not shared their vision and values about church planting with their congregations. Small churches that lack leadership and vision cannot plant churches.

4. Traditional Missions Approaches. Small churches usually do not have a clear direction in their missions ministry or clear guidelines for the selection of missionaries to support. Missionaries are chosen primarily because they are endorsed by the PCA, are known by members of the congregation, or are the first in line to ask for support. Small churches rarely give consideration to the strategic significance of missionaries or the effectiveness of their work.

5. Ecclesiastical Inferiority. Small churches frequently feel inferior to larger churches and, thus, they are inhibited from taking on the challenge of church planting. The corporate self image of a small church is often formed by comparison to other larger churches and not by a careful consideration of Scripture and a thorough assessment of the small church's assets.

6. Paralyzing Fear. Fear of the unknown and fear of failure can paralyze the small church from church planting.

Most small churches have never participated significantly in church planting, and most are more aware of failures than successes in church planting.

7. Large Church Models. Most models for church planting and most examples of church planting have been developed by large churches for large churches. The prospect of planting a daughter church or supporting a full-time church planter are models which are inconceivable to a small congregation.

8. Practical Autonomy. Pastors of small churches rarely consider the possibility of developing networks for the purpose of church planting. Even Presbyterian pastors, who are committed to the theory of ecclesiastical connection, exhibit a practical autonomy in their thinking about church planting.

If small churches are to be strategically and effectively involved in church planting, pastors must work to elevate church planting in the importance, priorities, and budgets of their congregations. Good intentions about the future must be translated into specific plans. Obstacles must be seriously considered and overcome in the wisdom, grace, and strength of the Lord. New models must

be developed and new examples must be forwarded that specifically demonstrate how small churches can plant churches.

CHAPTER 5

SYNTHESIS: A TRANSFERABLE MODEL

Small churches can plant churches when church planting is made a missionary priority and adequate funds are committed to the task, when obstacles are understood and overcome by wisdom and the power of the Holy Spirit, and when size-sensitive models and methods are employed. Most contemporary church growth and church planting literature has focused on the large church, providing models and methods for church planting that are tailored for a larger congregation. I am not aware of any book that specifically concentrates on church planting by small churches. The underlying assumption seems to be that small churches ought to concentrate on becoming large churches before they consider how they might become involved in church planting. Thus, models and methods for church planting by small churches have been largely ignored.

In this chapter I will present several examples of small churches that are planting churches. I will show

that there are various ways through which small congregations might be involved in church planting. These examples provide models for how small churches can plant churches strategically and effectively. Then, using these models as a foundation, I will explain the unique assets, characteristics, and means of small churches that plant churches.

Models of Small Churches Planting Churches

Model #1 - Bucks Central Church

As I stated earlier, Bucks Central Church began without a core group in Newtown, Pennsylvania during the summer of 1986. Our original vision was to plant a church of more than 500 members in the heart of Bucks County, a central church which would eventually plant at least five other churches in the surrounding towns and communities. For various reasons and in the providence of God, this vision has not been realized. Instead the church grew to approximately 100 members and has remained small. Since the financial and personal resources to plant daughter

churches have not been available, we set the original vision based upon large church assumptions aside.

In its place, however, we developed a new vision and new strategies for church planting which corresponded to the strengths and weaknesses of this small church. In 1995 Bucks Central Church established a missions ministry called "Global Impact," with a stated purpose "to impact the nation and world with the Gospel by participating in an international church-multiplication movement through intercessory prayer, personal involvement and financial provision." Its motto is, "Partners in proclaiming Christ and planting churches" (Appendix E). The congregation formally committed itself to making church planting its priority both nationally and internationally. Forty percent of all future contributions to missions was designated for church planting in the United States, with another forty percent designated for church planting overseas. We made these commitments before raising any money toward the budget and choosing any projects to support. Among all the possible directions a missions ministry might take, Bucks Central Church chose to major in church planting.

Since 1995 Bucks Central Church has raised and contributed more than \$35,000 to church planting projects in the United States and around the world. Locally, we have taken part in the planting of Hope Church in Scranton, Pennsylvania; New Life Northeast Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia; and Hanover Valley Presbyterian Church in Hanover, Pennsylvania. Currently the church supports a young intern preparing for a church planting project in West Philadelphia. Additionally, Bucks Central Church was instrumental in forming a network of three American churches to support a church planter in Cuautla, Mexico. Although this project is not in the United States, it is an example of how a small church can initiate project-oriented networks for church planting.

Missions and church planting at Bucks Central Church are not measured exclusively in dollars and cents support. Three of the church's five previous pastoral interns have gone on to plant churches in the United States, in part because of the vision they saw during their time at Bucks Central Church. The congregation takes special delight in giving the church planters they support more prayer, encouragement, and friendship than is usually provided by

much larger churches. Even when the mission no longer needs financial support, the personal relationships between the people of Bucks Central Church and the mission churches continue. Past church planters are considered to be heroes, and are regularly invited to participate in the annual Global Impact Conference, renewing the vision for church planting. Bucks Central Church is an example of how small churches can and do plant churches.

Model #2 - New Life Northeast Presbyterian Church

New Life Northeast Presbyterian Church was planted in Philadelphia by Dave Miller beginning in October 1995, and was organized as a particular church in the PCA in April 1997. The church was begun as a daughter church of another congregation in the city, New Life Philadelphia Presbyterian Church. The mother church gave families, leaders, and financial support to plant New Life Northeast, which was born out of a vision to see the city reached for Christ through church planting. In fact, New Life Northeast is a great-granddaughter congregation of the original New Life Presbyterian Church which was planted by

C. John Miller in the mid-1970's. Today there are five related congregations in the New Life family of churches.

Since its beginning in 1995, New Life Northeast has remained small, but this has not kept the pastor or his congregation from participating in church planting. Miller has said, "It is Jesus' intention for us to be effective in church planting" (Miller 1999). From the start they have given most of their missions support to national or international church planters. They expect these commitments to continue and grow in the future.

The most exciting development for New Life Northeast Church, however, is the emergence of the New Life Ministry Network. In recent months the New Life family of churches met together to plan the formation of a church planting network. New Life Northeast Church and Dave Miller are crucial participants in the planning process. Miller is a member of the preliminary board of directors which has the responsibility of preparing a vision statement, philosophy of ministry, and strategy for the network (Appendix F). New Life Northeast, though it is the second smallest congregation in the network, has a church planting project

which is likely to be the first to receive the support of the Ministry Network.

New Life Northeast is an example of how small churches can plant churches by forming or joining church planting networks. It demonstrates how small churches often have the personal resources for church planting when larger churches only have money. Whether New Life Northeast Presbyterian Church grows larger or remains small, there is little doubt that it will continue to plant churches strategically and effectively (Miller 1999).

Model #3 - Princeton Presbyterian Church

Princeton Presbyterian Church was organized as a particular church in the PCA in 1981 with fewer than 100 adult charter members. Founding pastor Ken Smith was among the first to plant a PCA church north of the Mason-Dixon Line. Princeton Presbyterian Church had no plans to plant another church. The focus was entirely on the numerical and spiritual growth of this new congregation which met in a school building just outside Princeton, New Jersey.

Smith describes what happened then as "providential" and "opportunistic." In the spring of 1986, when Princeton

Presbyterian was still quite small, several families from Somerville, New Jersey began to make a forty-minute drive to attend worship services. After about three months the visitors fell in love with the church, but disliked its distance from their homes. Ken presented them with a proposal. He agreed to teach a Bible study in Somerville for three months with the conditions that there would be at least five families participating and that the core group would make the physical arrangements for the study. The group agreed.

At that same time, Pastor Smith had a serious talk with a young seminarian by the name of Worth Carson about his future in the ministry. In a step of faith, Ken offered Worth a position at Princeton Presbyterian Church with the understanding that he would spend half his time in Princeton and the other half with the core group in Somerville. The Session of Princeton Presbyterian Church hired Worth for the purpose of planting a new church. Worth attended the Bible study in Somerville from the beginning.

When the three months of Bible study were complete, Ken announced to the core group the intention to plant a

church in Somerville with Worth Carson as the church planter. At a subsequent meeting, which was opened to the public, a plan and philosophy of ministry for a new church was presented. Grace Community Church was begun. Today Grace Community has more than 200 adults at their worship services each Sunday, and is on the verge of occupying its first facility. Most importantly, the congregation is planting a daughter church of its own in nearby Randolph, New Jersey.

Ken Smith says that he never intended to plant a daughter church while the mother church was so small. Princeton Presbyterian Church was not in a position to give away leaders or members. But Ken was sensitive to what God was doing. He believed in the power of the Gospel and the urgency of outreach. He was willing to do something that benefited the greater kingdom of God, even if it might temporarily hurt Princeton Presbyterian Church. God used Ken's faith and the support of the Elders in Princeton to prove that small churches can plant churches (Smith 1999).

Assets of Small Churches for Church Planting

Based upon these models and from observations drawn from bibliographical research, one can see that small churches possess assets that have great value in church planting, assets that are common characteristics of small churches which are worthy of reproduction in new congregations. Schaller encourages the recognition of these assets when he writes:

Instead of seeking to copy the style of ministry of larger congregations or yielding to the pressures to fit into a pattern developed for other churches, the small congregation should affirm its own distinctive character. (Schaller 1982, 46)

In particular, four assets of small churches are especially notable: personal care, effective evangelism, ability to focus, and tenacity.

Personal Care

Throughout the interviews with pastors of small churches in the Philadelphia area it is evident that personal caring, friendliness, and the family-feel among the members are the most cherished assets of these

congregations. When asked to tell about their churches, pastors described their small congregations as follows:

"Our people are very caring. They minister to each other very effectively."

"Our members are friendly and sincere. They go out of their way to meet and greet visitors."

"My church is close and genuinely loving. We have a strong sense of community."

"We are genuinely concerned for one another and very responsive to those in need."

These comments coincide with what experts have observed on a national scale. Dudley says:

To understand the small church we must begin with the feelings of the members. When asked, members show a strong sense of ownership and deep feelings of belonging. "This is our church," they say. . . . Members have a strong, positive attitude toward belonging, because it is a significant experience in their lives. . . . Belonging to the church is like being a member of the family. (Dudley 1978, 29)

Schaller writes:

The small church is relational. . . . in small congregations the members tend to think in terms of interpersonal relationships. The relationships of life, rather than the functions of the church, top the priority list in the small church. (Schaller 1982, 32)

And Burt observes, "the small church places a high value on fellowship, intimacy, and meeting relational needs" (Burt 1988, 22).

The atmosphere of personal care which is found in most small churches is an asset of great value when applied to church planting. Church planters and their families need more than money when they take the field to plant a church. They need encouragement, prayer for their specific needs, friends who will stand with them during the difficulties of the ministry, and people who will think of them as heroes in the cause of Christ. The small church is well equipped to meet these relational needs. Even when a small church has little or no money to contribute toward the support of a church planting project, their friendship can be more valuable than the finances.

The first projects supported by Bucks Central Church received far more in personal care than dollars and cents. Even as the amount of financial support has grown, the members of the missions committee, or Global Impact Team, make sure that church members have opportunities to meet and to know the church planters, their wives, and their children. It is very important that they are supported and helped to feel the love of the church family. During the year, we send birthday and holiday greeting cards and exchange regular e-mail messages. Monthly progress reports

usually include vital information about the man and his family. And when the opportunities arise, church planters are invited to visit Bucks Central Church, to preach and to receive home-coming hospitality among their friends in Christ.

Interviews with pastors reveal that knowing and caring for their missionaries is a high priority in small churches. Usually, personal relationships are the basis upon which missionaries are chosen for support. Personal care is something in which small congregations often excel.

Effective Evangelism

It may come as a surprise to learn that small churches are generally more effective in evangelism than larger churches. Even the pastors of small churches might be amazed by this observation. Effectiveness in evangelism was not listed among the strengths of small churches by the pastors who were interviewed for the present research. I base my conclusion, however, upon two studies conducted by independent experts on church health and growth.

Based upon a statistical analysis of Southern Baptist Churches in the United States, Chaney found that:

Small churches are much more efficient in terms of evangelism than large churches in the Southern Baptist Convention. In 1979, for instance, SBC churches between 2,000 and 3,000 in membership averaged fifty-seven baptisms. That same year the churches with memberships of 200-300 averaged seven baptisms. Ten of the smaller churches (200-300) would have baptized thirteen more people than one large church (2,000-3,000). In Illinois, small churches (fifty to ninety-nine members) baptized four each. Larger churches (1,500-1,999 in membership) averaged twenty-three baptisms. Thirty churches with fifty members each would have won to Christ almost 300 percent more people than one church with 1,500 members. (Chaney 1982, 84-85)

These numbers stand in sharp contrast to the common assumption that larger churches are the leaders in evangelism today.

An even more impressive study was done by Christian A. Schwarz of the Ecumenical Church Institute. Based upon a survey of more than 1,000 churches in thirty-two countries on all five continents, Schwarz concludes that many of our size-based assumptions about church growth are wrong. On the subject of evangelistic effectiveness he writes:

Those familiar with church growth literature regularly encounter the names of a number of large churches which are held up as models to be imitated. The presupposition is that large churches are by definition good churches. Is this tenable? Our research revealed for the first time that the opposite is probably true. . . .

Churches in the smallest size category had won an average of 32 new people over the past five years; churches with 100-200 in worship also won 32; churches between 200 and 300 averaged 39 new individuals; churches between 300 and 400 won 25. So a "small" church wins just as many people for Christ as a "large" one, and what's more, two churches of 200 in worship on Sunday will win twice as many new people as one church with 400 in attendance. (Schwarz 1998, 46-47)

Furthermore, when Schwarz compares the relative evangelistic effectiveness of megachurches, with an average attendance of 2,856 at worship services, to that of minichurches, with an average attendance of 51, he observes:

In raw numbers, a single megachurch won many more people than a single "minichurch." If we remember, though, that the megachurches are 56 times the size of the "minichurches," then the following calculations express the potential of the two categories far more realistically. If instead of a single church with 2,856 in worship we had 56 churches, each with 51 worshippers, these churches, statistically, win 1,792 new people within five years - 16 times the number the megachurch would win. Thus we can conclude that the evangelistic effectiveness of minichurches is statistically 1,600 percent greater than that of the megachurches! (Schwarz 1998, 47-48)

It would appear that small churches are far more effective in evangelism than most people think, including the pastors and members of small churches.

This being the case, we should recognize that evangelistic effectiveness is an extremely valuable asset

in church planting. When this asset is present and acknowledged in a small church, the church can impart its passion for the lost, zeal for the Gospel, and success in reaching new people for Christ to a mission church. We should also give serious consideration to the ultimate size which would be most desirable among the churches which are planted. Is it possible that planting five churches with one-hundred members each would be better than planting one church with five-hundred members?

Ability to Focus

These days most people expect that large churches will present their membership and the community they serve with a full range of ministries for every age group, felt-need, and life-situation. Having a youth group, for example, is not an option for a large church; it is required. The large church must spread itself out and diversify its ministry to meet the wide variety of needs among its constituency. Its members expect that the missions budget of the large church will also express this diversity. The list of supported missionaries is likely to be long and diverse.

The small church, on the other hand, is able to focus and specialize its ministries. It is unrealistic to expect that a small church will be able to provide the wide variety of ministries which can be found in larger churches. They must choose between many options and decide to do those ministries which are essential to the life, health, and growth of the congregation. They cannot afford to spread themselves too thin by attempting to mimic the diversity of a large church (Schaller 1982, 184).

It is equally unrealistic to expect that the small church will be able to support a long list of diverse missionaries with its limited funds. Small churches that plant churches must make choices. They must choose to make church planting a high priority, like a student who chooses a major course of study in college. Small churches that do plant churches, like those described above, have made this decision; they believe in the biblical-theological and strategic significance of church planting. They acknowledge that they cannot do it all; that is, they cannot invest significantly in every missionary or kind of mission that asks for their support. They focus on that method of missions which is at the heart of the Great

Commission and at the forefront of evangelistic effectiveness all around the world: church planting.

Tenacity

A fourth asset of the small church which has value in church planting is tenacity. Of the church in ancient Philadelphia, Jesus said, "I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name" (Revelation 3:8). This small but faithful church was commended by our Lord for their tenacious spirit.

Dudley remarks that:

Small churches are tenacious. Some would call them tough. They do not give up when faced with impossible problems. Neither do they experience rapid shifts of membership. . . .

Often financially starved, frequently without a pastor, sometimes deprived of denominational connections, the small congregation will persevere. (Dudley 1978, 21)

Schaller says:

The small church is tough! . . . one of the most distinctive characteristics of the small church is that it is a hardy institution that usually can survive a succession of disasters. (Schaller 1982, 28)

Small churches are characteristically tenacious and tough, a quality which lends itself well to church planting.

Church planting is a challenging venture. There are many obstacles that must be overcome for a new congregation to be born. There are difficulties, setbacks, and satanic opposition, especially if a newly planted church is effective in evangelism. During the course of most church planting projects there are moments when the church planter or core group members will feel like quitting. These are times when the encouragement and example of a tenacious small church would be helpful.

Small churches that can and will plant churches are those that appreciate the unique assets that God has given them for ministry and mission. As Schaller says:

The members of the small church should not be hesitant about lifting up and affirming their distinctive characteristics and the unique personality of their congregation. After these assets are identified, and after the implications are widely recognized, it will be easier to begin a constructive conversation on alternative methods of strengthening, reinforcing, and expanding the ministry and outreach of that congregation. (Schaller 1982, 48)

Personal care, effective evangelism, the ability to focus, and tenacity are just a few of the assets which are common in small churches. These few assets, however, are especially valuable when they are applied to church planting. In fact, their presence in small churches

suggests that there may be some aspects of church planting that small churches can do better.

Characteristics of Small Churches That Plant Churches

While many small churches may possess the assets of personal care, effective evangelism, the ability to focus, and tenacity, most small churches do not invest these assets in church planting. Small churches that do plant churches, however, also exhibit certain distinctive attributes that facilitate their ability to plant churches. Among the small churches whose pastors were interviewed for this study, those involved in church planting invariably had developed the characteristics of small churches that plant churches.

A Church Planting Vision

Small churches that plant churches strategically and effectively do not do so by accident. While the occasions to plant a church might be described as "opportunistic" and "providential," these opportunities and acts of providence

are anticipated by the small church that plants churches. It has a vision for church planting.

I discovered through the interviews that most small churches do not consciously think about, plan for, or look for opportunities to plant a church in the near or distant future. Traditional approaches to missions often preclude the possibility that a small church would plant a church. Most small churches go happily about the business of taking care of the local ministry and supporting their international missionary friends in such a way that the possibility that God might be leading them to plant a church would never cross their minds. This is not part of the paradigm of how they go about doing ministry and missions.

But small churches that plant churches have a clear vision and an expressed desire to see churches planted through their ministry. As I mentioned above, Bucks Central Church began with a vision to plant one large church that would, in turn, plant at least five other churches in the area. Even when the leadership set this specific vision aside, they redefined it to reflect their continued desire to be used by God in church planting.

Pastor Dave Miller of New Life Northeast Presbyterian Church clearly wants his congregation to multiply in Philadelphia. He has a burden for the lost, a burden for the city, and the vision to see churches planted in the neighborhoods and among the ethnically diverse people groups of Philadelphia. He and his Elders are presently putting their specific vision down on paper in preparation for their participation in the New Life Ministry Network. Ken Smith of Princeton Presbyterian Church says that while his congregation did not specifically plan to plant Grace Community Church when Princeton Presbyterian was so small, he and his Elders sensed the initiative of God in the project. Although they were not looking to plant a church, they had eyes to see what God was doing and a desire to be a partner in it.

Small churches that plant churches see church planting as a part of their identity. They think of themselves as church planting churches. It is who they are and what they do. Thus, when God initiates a project, small churches that plant churches have the vision to see His initiative and the willingness to get involved. A

church planting vision is characteristic of small churches that plant churches.

Clear Missionary Objective

Kennon Callahan, in Twelve Keys to an Effective Church, makes "specific objectives" number one on the list. He writes, "Indeed, the first and most central characteristic of an effective, successful church is its specific, concrete, missional objectives" (Callahan 1983, 1). Callahan mainly applies the need for missional objectives to a local church's ministry to their community through church programs which offer people help and hope through the Gospel. But the same need for clear objectives exists in the missions ministry of the church.

I have already shown that most small churches have no clearly stated and written purpose for their missions ministry. While many pastors interviewed for this study said that they had a clear, written purpose for the church and specific objectives for other ministries of their church, few could produce anything in writing about their missions ministry. Usually the only written document that existed about their missions programs was a list of

missionaries and a line-item budget of support for each. There was no overarching purpose or goal that tied these lists together so that they represented a specific, concrete missional objective for missions.

Small churches that plant church, however, are clear and concrete about their desire to do so. Bucks Central Church incorporates its commitment to national and international church planting as a part of its purpose and vision statement which is published in the bulletin on Sundays (Appendix G). The missions or Global Impact Ministry is directed by the motto, "Partners in Proclaiming Christ and Planting Churches" (Appendix E). The congregation is regularly reminded of this direction during monthly missions updates which are given during worship services. The Elders have established clear policy guidelines for the commitment of financial resources which direct eighty-percent of the missions budget toward the support of church planting missionaries in the United States and around the world. They have chosen church planting as their clear missionary objective.

Small churches often try to act like large churches in their missions ministry. They try to spread their

commitments around the world by supporting a missionary on every continent. They try to spread their missions commitments across the whole spectrum of emphases by supporting Bible translation, Christian radio broadcasts, theological education, campus ministries, diaconal missions, and local evangelists. Most small churches are spread too thin and, therefore, lack clear direction in their missions ministry.

Small churches with limited financial resources would be better advised to choose one of these emphases and make it their major. They could choose Bible translation or theological education, but most small churches should choose church planting as their clear missionary objective because church planting is so central to the fulfillment of the Great Commission of Jesus Christ. Small churches that plant churches make this choice.

Involved Church Members

Small churches that plant churches know how to involve their members in the planning and the process. The vision to plant churches does not remain in the minds and hearts of the leadership. The vision is communicated to

the laity of the local church in such a way that they want to take an active role in church planting.

At New Life Northeast Presbyterian Church members are involved in a project to plant a church among Russian-Jewish immigrants in the Philadelphia area. Some members participate in Bible studies which are offered to those who are seeking to know more about Christ and Christianity, some help to facilitate classes that teach English as a second language to Russian-speaking Americans, and others help to plan and conduct outreach events which use music and messages to bring the Gospel into the community. New Life Northeast does not have a lot of money to finance this project, but it does have people who are willing to spend their time and to use their spiritual gifts in this church planting effort.

At Bucks Central Church the people are involved in church planting in other ways. Groups of members have taken road trips to visit the worship services of mission churches which have received their financial support. Cards, letters, e-mails, and Christmas gifts have been sent to church planters and their families; members host church planters in their homes when they come to town for the

annual missions conference; and small groups have been assigned a church planter and his project to support with their corporate prayers.

If church planting is to become a part of a church's identity, the members of the small church must be involved. I have already shown how small churches have a great capacity for personal care. This capacity can provide the strategic link between the small church and its involvement in church planting.

Cooperation with Other Churches

Small churches that plant churches are not likely to do so alone. Church planting is too costly, too time-consuming, and too demanding for most small churches to manage by themselves. By the nature of the case, the small church that wants to plant churches is forced into vital partnerships with other like-minded churches. They must combine their financial resources and pool their ministry resources together with others. This kind of cooperation is not only necessary, but is also good.

When Princeton Presbyterian Church members took the initiative to plant Grace Community Church in Somerville,

New Jersey, they did not act alone. Princeton Presbyterian Church had the core group and the location, the plan and the church planter. But they did not have all the money which was necessary for the support of the new church. Rather, they partnered with several other churches who help support the project financially.

Likewise, New Life Northeast Presbyterian Church has a man who is willing to lead the church planting effort among Russian-Jewish immigrants in Philadelphia. They have lay-people who are involved in the mission. The pastor and Elders are supportive of the project, giving oversight of the ministry. But New Life Northeast will depend upon the partnerships of churches in the New Life Ministry Network for financial and moral support.

Bucks Central Church also does not act alone. Members have either formed or joined partnerships for the support of their church planting projects. For a project in Cuautla, Mexico, Bucks Central Church was in on the ground floor. The congregation supported the church planter during the years he was in seminary. When the time came for him to return to Mexico and plant a church, Bucks Central Church helped to organize a network of churches for

his support. A partnership was formed between Bucks Central Church, a church in Florida, a church in the state of Washington, and several small churches in Mexico. Though others in the partnership committed larger dollar amounts than Bucks Central Church was able to commit, none were more dedicated to the project or supportive of the church planter. For other projects, Bucks Central Church has followed the initiative of others and become a financial partner in projects that have originated in other churches.

All across the country more and more networks for church planting are being formed. The Presbyterian Church in America has church planting networks in New York City, Atlanta, Texas, and Southwestern United States, with each of these networks including small churches as full-fledged partners. The pastors of small churches are made members of the board, the projects of small churches are given serious consideration, and the resources of small churches are pooled together with others to compound their potential impact in church planting. Small churches that plant churches do so in cooperation with others by forming or joining networks.

Means of Participation in Church Planting

Once a small church has identified assets that can be of value in church planting and has developed the characteristics of a small church that plants churches, it needs to know and employ the specific means by which it can participate in church planting. While the following list of means may not differ significantly from the means employed by larger churches, they are presented here with special application to the uniqueness of the small church. It is my desire that the leaders of small churches might choose from among these involvements in church planting those that are most appropriate for their congregation.

Prayer

One of the first ways by which small churches easily can become involved in church planting is prayer. In Serving as Senders, Neal Pirolo notes how God uses prayer to advance His kingdom, even when the number of those praying is few. He writes:

Today one can stand in the bedroom where John Wesley and the members of the "Holy Club" held their prayer meetings, a force that God used to ignite a revival that was felt around the world. . . .

In no greater arena of human activity is this mysterious union of our prayer and God's work seen than in the mission of the Church. (Pirollo 1991, 95)

Small churches should be encouraged to pray for church planting by historical examples that prove how He has used prayer to reach others for Christ and plant churches.

Pastor and church planter Robert Logan emphasizes why prayer is so important to the mission of the church:

Planting or growing churches puts you on the front lines of spiritual warfare. Anyone on the front lines will catch a lot of flak. Your shield of faith will be extinguishing a great many of the enemy's fiery darts, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, will find itself handily employed between the chinks of many a foe's armor.

But you'll find the key in Ephesians 6:18, "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints." (Logan 1987, 33)

Praying for church planters and their work will put the small church on the front lines of the battle for souls and the extension of God's kingdom on earth.

All church planters and newly planted churches need the prayer support of others. This is especially true when a church is planted either without a core group or outside a mother-daughter church relationship. In this circumstance a small church may adopt a church planter and his project for the purpose of prayer. Even when there is

no money available to financially support the work, the small church can serve the mission church in a necessary and powerful way. Being prayer partners in church planting will also provide the avenue through which the personal caring of the small church can be released upon the church planter. Others may give large sums of money, but the small church can give the moral and spiritual support that means so much to a church planter on the field.

Financial Support

Churches always have money for the things that matter the most; they always afford to support those ministries that they consider their highest priorities. Bucks Central Church operates on the core value that "God will provide the funding necessary to support the right people and the right projects" (Appendix E). Their philosophy of missions defines the right people as church planters and the right projects as mission churches. There is an underlying belief that the Lord pays His bills and that He will direct some of His financial resources to support His work through the church. Their first connection to a church planting project is through prayer.

Then, they believe that God will provide the money that they should give to support a church planting project. There is always money in the missions budget for church planting because church planting is their highest missionary priority. The leadership of the small church must first decide on the priority of church planting for their congregation before they consider the decisions concerning the budget.

When church planting is made a priority in a small church there are several practical ways by which funds can be made available. First, the small church should designate a specific percentage of their budget for church planting. New Life Northeast Presbyterian Church is preparing to contribute five percent of its annual operating budget to church planting through the New Life Ministry Network (Appendix F). By faith they will commit this amount above and beyond what they already give in support of their current list of missionaries. This is a great sacrifice for this small congregation, but one they believe God is calling them to make toward the priority of church planting. In 1995 Bucks Central Church established a goal of giving ten percent of its annual operating budget

to church planting by the year 2005, beginning with one percent in 1995 and adding one percent each year until the goal is reached (Appendix E). In 1999 they were right on schedule, giving five percent of their operating budget to church planting. Each year the Elders face the tough decision about whether to follow the plan or not. Each year, thus far, the Elders have taken the necessary step of faith. When a small church decides that church planting is a high priority, this priority will begin to impact the way the church makes its budget each year.

The second way in which funds can be made available for church planting in a small church is by establishing a separate budget for church planting. Schaller has observed:

. . . a review of the history of the Protestant churches on this continent in the past century suggests very strongly that it is easier to raise money through special, designated, second mile giving than through a unified budget. (Schaller 1982, 67)

Furthermore, Schaller explains why having a separate budget for church planting is especially useful in small churches:

The laity in congregations with fewer than 150 members are also more likely to believe that knowing how the money will be used influences a person's giving level than is the case with the laity in the larger churches. (Schaller 1982, 66)

People in small churches want to know their missionaries personally, and they want to extend the caring of the local church to those they support. They are more likely to give money in support of church planting if they know that the total amount they give will go to those for whom they care.

In conjunction with their decision to give an increasing proportion of the operating budget of the church each year, Bucks Central Church also established a separate budget for the support of church planting, the Global Impact Fund. Believing that some people have a special passion for missions, the Elders decided to enable those people to give directly to church planting. They were encouraged to make these contributions above and beyond their regular giving to the operating budget of the church. The hope was that this designated giving would increase one percent each year until the total amount given to church planting was equal to or greater than twenty percent of the operating budget (Appendix E). Theoretically, however, there was no limit to the amount of money that God might provide for church planting through Bucks Central Church.

In the five years since the inception of the Global Impact Fund contributions have exceeded expectations. Of

the \$36,518 that has been given to church planting, \$14,704 has come by transfer of funds from the operating budget and an additional \$21,814 has come from designated gifts to the Global Impact Fund (Figure 6). The financial resources for church planting have been more than doubled because of this approach.

Funding for Church Planting at Bucks Central Church Operations versus Designated Funds January 1, 1995 through September 30, 1999			
	Operations Funds	Designated Funds	Total Funds
1995	\$900	\$3,313	\$4,213
1996	\$1,800	\$4,580	\$6,380
1997	\$3,000	\$3,807	\$6,807
1998	\$4,000	\$5,964	\$9,964
1999	\$5,004	\$4,150	\$9,154
Totals	\$14,700	\$21,267	\$36,518

Figure 6: Funding for Church Planting at Bucks Central Church

Church Planting Internships

When church planting is a high priority in a small church and this priority is expressed through generous

personal and financial support, a passion for domestic church planting is spread throughout the congregation. Seminarians and pastoral interns who are brought into this environment are more likely to catch a vision for church planting than those who serve in churches with more traditional missions approaches. In the PCA there is a great need for more qualified and willing church planters. The opportunities to plant churches are many. The money to support church planting tends to follow the selection of a location and a man. But the biggest need is for those who are willing and able to plant a church.

Small churches can meet this need. Worth Carson was recruited by Princeton Presbyterian Church for church planting while he was still in seminary. At New Life Northeast Presbyterian Church the effort to plant a church among Russian-Jewish immigrants is being led by a pastoral intern who has accepted the responsibility on a tent-making basis. Three of the five pastoral interns who have served at Bucks Central Church went on to plant churches. They commented on the influence that their internship at Bucks Central Church had on this decision:

My internship at BCC originally influenced me away from church planting. I had seen church planting from

the inside, or at least I thought I had, and I wanted to steer clear of that kind of pain. It was a great experience and education, which I enjoyed immensely, but at the time I was scared out of my mind to take the risks that I knew you were taking. Having been subsequently called to church planting, I have treasured my BCC experience all the more because I go into this "fly by the seat of your pants" endeavor with the brutally amazing truth before me. Only now I see what I failed to see before and that's the strength, power, joy, and blessing that God gives to those living by faith. (Derreth 1999)

My time at Bucks Central Church helped to confirm my call to the ministry. It was not so much church planting per se, but just an affirmation that I am called to be a minister of the gospel. Once that was affirmed then I felt that I would go wherever the church calls, church planting being one option, though not the only one or the one I would have chosen for myself. At Bucks I did see some of the peculiar difficulties presented by church planting and then knew what to expect here or what to try and avoid. (Casselli 1999)

My experience at BCC was wonderfully tailored to confirm my call to church planting. In the past 7 years, our church has planted 6 churches (counting our own), and mentored the men who have planted an additional 4 churches. My time at BCC and with Pastor Finn was exciting, challenging, and productive in helping to formulate my own church planting vision. (Schoenleber 1999)

When young men do an internship at a church where church planting is a high priority, their experience can also have the opposite effect:

When I came to Bucks Central I thought of church planting as a very likely ministry objective. I would say that I had an idealized idea of Church planting (not to mention of the ministry in general) upon

coming out of seminary. Five years at Bucks Central was excellent training for me. I'd say that being at BCC pretty much knocked the wind out of my desire to church plant. I'd say that by the time I left BCC I'd gone from: Church Planting? --Cool! to Church Planting? -- Do you think I'm crazy? to Church planting?-- Well, maybe, but I rather doubt it. (Walton 1999)

These examples show that a small church that plants churches will always influence its interns one way or the other. Some interns will plant churches, and others will not. Both decisions serve the kingdom of God and the best interests of the interns themselves.

Mentoring Church Planters

Pastors and Elders of small churches may be well suited to be mentors of church planters. Quite often leaders in small churches excel in their ability to give personal care to others. They are true shepherds of the flock who, by necessity and practice, have developed the skills of biblical encouragement. These spiritual gifts have great value when used in support of church planters.

Church planting is hard and exhausting. Church planting can be a very discouraging enterprise for the man on the field. Church planters need those in their lives

who will personally care for them and their families. Even when a small church has no money to give, they can participate strategically and effectively in church planting by providing pastoral care.

Provisional Eldership

In the PCA many mission churches are placed under the supervision of a temporary board of Elders or a Provisional Session (Book of Church Order 1997, 5-3). The members of the temporary board are usually borrowed from other churches in the region. In these cases the Provisional Session is given responsibility for the reception of members, the administration of the Word and the Sacraments, the pastoral care of the church and its members, and church discipline. The Provisional Session remains in existence until a mission church is organized as a particular church with its own permanent board of Elders (Book of Church Order 1997, 5-9).

Supplying Elders to serve on a Provisional Session is an excellent way for a small church to participate in church planting. It does not cost any money, it creates a healthy partnership between the small church and the

mission church, and it supplies the mission church with an Elder who is likely to be gifted in pastoral care. The mission church benefits from the oversight of an experienced Elder, while the small church benefits from its connection with a new work of God through which people are coming to know Christ and learning how to be His disciples. The excitement and enthusiasm which exists in mission churches can be a contagion which may infect and revitalize the small church. It is a win-win situation.

Loaning or Giving Members

Loaning or giving members is problematic for most small churches. It would be a rare circumstance for a small congregation to plant a daughter church by hiving off members when there are so few on the roles and in attendance at the mother church. In most cases loaning or giving members to a church planting project would weaken the ministry of the small church to its own members and community. This means of participation in church planting would obviously be the exception and not the rule in small churches.

These exceptions do exist, however, and a small church with a church planting vision will recognize these exceptions when they see them. Princeton Presbyterian Church gave away three families that might have continued to worship in Princeton had not Pastor Smith proposed that a church be planted closer to their homes. Bucks Central Church has seen several individual families move to other parts of the country and become involved in mission churches near their new home. While these instances do not establish a model for giving or loaning members to church planting projects, they do show how God can use members of small churches to extend His kingdom through church planting. The pastors of small churches that plant churches are sensitive to God's leadership and delight to see the Lord use people in this way, even when it involves a loss to their small church.

Opportunities also exist for small churches to loan members or leaders to church planting projects on a short term basis. Elders, Deacons, staff members, or gifted lay people might agree to minister in a mission church for a predetermined period of time with the understanding that they would return to their home church when the period was

complete. Bucks Central Church benefited from this kind of arrangement with nearby churches when it was planted in 1986. Three families from three different churches took part in the ministry for the first full year. Their attendance at Bible studies and worship services, the use of their spiritual gifts in the ministry, and their financial contributions to the mission church were of great value to the new congregation. Then, as agreed in advance, they went back to their original church families. When they returned, however, they were excited, invigorated, and more enthusiastic than ever about what God was doing in their lives. Their home churches benefited from the experience.

Summary

I have shown that small churches can and do plant churches. Bucks Central Church plants churches by creating or joining project-oriented networks where its resources are combined with others to support a specific work. New Life Northeast Presbyterian Church will plant churches by forming long term partnerships with other congregations in the New Life Ministry Network, a network that is not

project-oriented, but is instead oriented around a shared vision and philosophy of ministry. Princeton Presbyterian Church is an example of how, on occasion, the Lord may provide an opportunity for a small church to take the initiative to plant a church in a nearby town.

Small churches have assets of great value to church planting. Small churches can connect with church planters and mission churches through their ability to provide excellent personal care. Since several studies have proven that small churches are more effective in evangelism than larger churches, a small congregation can encourage outreach in a mission church by word and deed. Small churches have the ability to focus their ministry on specific objectives, and some small churches choose planting churches as their focus in missions. The tenacity and toughness of a small church can also be of great encouragement to church planters who face the great obstacles to getting a new work started.

Several significant characteristics have been observed in small churches that plant churches. First, they have a church planting vision, making church planting a definitive aspect of their philosophy of ministry.

Second, small churches that plant churches have made it a clear, written objective, one which is constantly kept before the congregation in various ways. Third, small churches that plant churches actively involve their members in church planting projects. Fourth, small churches cooperate with other churches to form partnerships or networks for the support of church planting.

When the assets of small churches are appreciated and the characteristics of a church planting small church are present, the means of church planting for the small church can be employed strategically and effectively. Prayer is a vital first step toward a small church's involvement in church planting, but small churches also budget for the support of church planting and provide the opportunity for members to designate gifts for church planting. Small churches can sponsor internships that help prepare men for the challenge of church planting, and the pastors of small churches with care-giving spiritual gifts can be excellent mentors of church planters. And small churches can commit Elders to the provisional Session, or give or loan members to mission churches that are being planted nearby. A small church may choose any or all of

these means of participation in church planting depending on its circumstances and the leading of the Lord. Small churches can and do plant churches when their assets are understood, church planting characteristics are developed, and the appropriate means are employed.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Summary

Small churches can plant churches. This thesis was developed out of my own experience as the founding pastor of Bucks Central Church in Newtown, Pennsylvania, and my need to find ways by which this small church could participate in church planting. Since small churches comprise approximately ninety-five percent of all churches in the United States (George 1992, 46), the notion that small churches can plant churches offers a challenge and an invitation to the vast majority of congregations in this country. The challenge is to rethink their calling, vision, and strategy for church planting and adapt it to the realities of their size. The invitation is to step off the sidelines and join the great partnership of churches, large and small, who are fulfilling the Great Commission by multiplying churches in the United States and around the

world. It may well be that the small church is the single greatest untapped resource for church planting in the United States.

I have shown that church planting has deep roots in biblical history and theology. Since the creation of mankind God has expressed His desire to fill the earth with people who will know Him, love Him, and serve Him forever. Even the fall of man into sin could not thwart the Lord's purpose. Adam, Abraham, and David were each given specific promises that indicated the international implications of redemption (Genesis 3:15; Genesis 12:2-3; Psalm 2:8). The Old Testament prophets increasingly focused their attention on the coming of the Messiah who would bring God's plan for the nations to fruition (Isaiah 42:1,3-4; Micah 4:2).

Through Jesus Christ and the Great Commission God's plan is fulfilled. Christ directed His followers to go into all the world, preach the Gospel, make disciples and incorporate these new believers into local churches where the process of life-long discipleship would occur (Matthew 29:18-20). The book of Acts shows how the Apostles of the Lord understood the Great Commission to require the establishment of churches. In particular, the missionary

work of the Apostle Paul demonstrates his determination to plant churches in every city and town where the Gospel had born fruit (Acts 14:21-23).

Small churches can be especially encouraged by the ways God has used the smallness of human agencies to do His great work. The victory of Gideon's small band over the Midianites and the triumph of young David over the giant Goliath revealed God's greatness through smallness (Judges 6-7; I Samuel 16:1-13). Christ Himself was born in a small and relatively insignificant town (Micah 5:2). Jesus' teachings about the widow's offering and faith the size of a mustard seed also emphasize the power of small things (Matthew 17:20; Mark 12:41-44). And the Lord promised the church of Philadelphia, though weak and small, a great opportunity for outreach as a reward for their perseverance (Revelation 3:8). The biblical and theological roots of church planting by small churches provide a firm foundation and great encouragement for pastors and leaders of small churches.

Church history provides additional incentives to small churches. In the 6th century A.D. Patrick reached Ireland by planting small churches among the diverse tribal

families of the island. In the 13th century Francis of Assisi was used by God to spread spiritual renewal across western Europe through the establishment of small houses of men and women who were dedicated to the Lord. And the Methodist Episcopal Church kept pace with the western expansion in the United States by multiplying small congregations across the frontier of America in the latter part of the 19th century. Each of these examples offers encouragement to the small church that wants to plant churches.

The small church must not only be inspired to plant churches by historical antecedents, but must also be informed by several contemporary influences. Small churches must discover their identity and significance within a cultural context in which success is usually defined as "bigness." At the same time, the small church can capitalize on the opportunities which arise from "a search for community," the longing for genuine relationships that is prevalent in our day. The small church must also respond to the need for more churches in the United States which is created by the sheer numbers of

Americans who live without a church home and without the influence of the Gospel in their lives.

As a means of inquiry into the present thesis I interviewed twelve pastors of small PCA churches in the Philadelphia area. On the basis of these in-depth personal interviews we can draw several conclusions about church planting by small churches. First, pastors of small churches generally believe that church planting should be a high priority in the ministry and mission of a local church. This positive attitude toward church planting, however, is not shared by the members of their congregations and is not reflected in their missionary commitments. Second, the greatest obstacle to church planting by small churches is not the size of their memberships or budgets, but, rather, the lack of a clear missionary purpose and vision for church planting. Small churches generally employ an approach to missions that is more haphazard than intentional. Church planting rarely gets the attention it deserves on their support lists or as a proportion of the missions budget. While these obstacles are formidable, they are not insurmountable.

As the models presented in this dissertation clearly demonstrate, small churches can and do plant churches ordinarily by forming or joining partnerships. In pooling resources with other churches, the potential of each participating church is multiplied. Personal caring, effective evangelism, the ability to focus, and tenacity are assets that many small churches have and should invest in church planting. Providing love, encouragement, prayer, and personal support to a church planter and his family is something that a small church might do better than a large church. Additionally, small churches that plant churches exhibit certain characteristics: a church planting vision, a clear missionary objective, involved church members, and cooperation with other churches. These small churches employ the means of church planting in an intentional and strategic way to fulfill the Great Commission of Jesus Christ through church planting.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are suggestions for how some of the general principles of this thesis can be applied to the ministry of a small church in such a way

that a small church might become more fully and effectively involved in church planting.

1. Study the biblical and theological foundations of church planting. The best place to start the implementation of a church planting emphasis in a small church is with the study of God's Word. Church planting is not merely a contemporary methodology for evangelism and discipleship which is based upon pragmatic consideration; it has deep roots in biblical history and theology, and it is the expression of God's desire to fill the earth with people who will know, love, and serve Him forever. I recommend that pastors and leaders conduct a study of some of the key biblical passages mentioned in Chapter 2, placing special emphasis on the Great Commission of Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:18-20). The most persistent and enduring motivation for the small church in church planting will come from the Word of God Himself.

2. Prepare a written statement of purpose for the missions ministry. It is recommended that the pastor, elders, and members of the missions committee of the church set aside time, perhaps in a retreat setting, in which to determine the overarching goal of the missions ministry.

They might begin by making a list of the things they deeply believe about missions, which would become core values. They might also develop a list of key words or short phrases that express the most essential components of a written missions statement. As a follow up to this gathering, a team of three people might be assigned the task of preparing a clear, concise missions statement as a proposal for a second meeting of the leadership. The final statement should express the place and priority of church planting within the missions ministry of the church.

3. Adopt a church planter or church planting project. Do not wait until you have more money. Even while making decisions about the purpose and budget for missions, a congregation might look to adopt a church planting project for prayer and encouragement. Nothing will develop a vision for church planting more than involvement. As the members of a small congregation get to know a church planter and begin to understand his mission, their love for his work will grow. They will gain first-hand experience in the strategic impact of church planting in the United States. Future discussion about philosophy

of ministry and money will be informed by personal experience.

4. Clarify the priority of church planting within the missions budget of the church. Address the question, "If church planting is a priority in our missions ministry, what percentage of our total missions budget should be given to support church planting projects?" The percentage which is chosen should not be based upon what is being spent at the time. Rather, the percentage should represent an ultimate goal and a guide for the future as changes and additions are made to the missions budget.

5. Develop a long-term plan for church planting and commit an increasing proportion of financial support for church planting projects. A small church should begin with the percentage of the missions budget which is currently given to church planting projects, increasing this percentage every year or every other year until the ultimate goal is reached (Appendix E). This can be done by increasing the amounts given each year to church planters that are currently supported by the budget and by adding church planting projects to the support list when possible.

6. Create a separate budget for church planting. Small churches will receive money that is not currently being given to the church by offering their members the opportunity to give directly to missions and church planting. A separate budget for missions can potentially double the amount of money which is available for church planting. There are people in every congregation who have a passion for missions and a great desire to see the lost reached through the Gospel. When they know that their total contribution will be used for this purpose, they will give it. When there is not a separate budget, that same money will stay in the contributor's pocket or it will be given to someone else.

7. Identify other assets and means by which the church can be involved in church planting. Small church leaders should carefully consider how they might lend their strengths to a church planting project. Even when there is no money to spare, small churches have other assets that have value in church planting.

8. Carry the priority of church planting with you as your congregation grows. Church multiplication is a characteristic of a healthy church and healthy churches

eventually grow numerically. As you move through the various stages of church size you will discover that you can take the principles and practices which enabled you to plant churches as a small congregation with you. Remember, large churches can plant churches too.

The list of means in Chapter 5 might be thought of as a menu from which a small church can choose. With its ability to focus, for example, a small church might decide to become the champions of prayer for church planters in their region. Their members might be mobilized to call, contact, and pray for church planters and their works unlike any other church in the area. They might be the sponsors of prayer events where other church leaders are invited to meet and pray for church planters. A small church can become the generator of the power of prayer for church planting, even while other larger churches contribute most of the money. I recommend that the leaders of small churches regularly review the means of church planting to remain aware of new ways by which God is calling the congregation to be involved.

Small churches can plant churches. Many small churches already have and are planting churches. Believing

in the potential of the small church, Schaller writes, ". . . the next fifteen years will find thousands of small congregations accomplishing what they always knew they could not do" (Schaller 1982, 185). As small churches study the Scriptures for infallible motivation, overcome obstacles by the power of God's Spirit, capitalize on opportunities, and employ the means that the Lord provides for them, many more small churches will plant churches. As they do, a great untapped resource for the fulfillment of the Great Commission will be unleashed. Once again, God's greatness will be revealed through weakness and smallness, and the Name of Jesus Christ will be glorified.

APPENDIX A

Small Church Pastors Survey

1. Biographical Information

Name					
Church					
Position				Term	
Address	Home		Church		
Phone	H		C		H

2. Questions

- Tell me about your church.

When started? How started? Membership? Budget? Staff? Demographics?
Your term of service here? Strengths? Weaknesses? History? Present atmosphere?

- Tell me about how your church expresses its commitment to the great commission?

Missions budget? How would you summarize your church's missions vision or purpose statement?
What do you see as the strengths or weaknesses of a small church in missions?
How would you evaluate your missions ministry? What do you like? What would you change?
What is the congregation's commitment to missions? Examples?

- **How does your congregation feel about church planting?**
- **What about you?**

Past? Present? Future plans?

Priority of church planting for congregation? For you? (on a scale from 1 to 10)

Some small churches feel more on the sidelines in church planting. Is that true of your church?

Some pastors of small churches feel left out of church planting? Is that true for you?

- **How has being the pastor of a small church changed you, if at all?**

I have really struggled with being the pastor of a small church. What about you?

3. Church Statistics

Adult Membership	
Adult Attendance	
Operations Budget	
Missions Budget	
% US Church Planting	

4. Involvement in Church Planting

Involvement in US Church Planting			
	Past	Present	Future
Specific Prayer			
\$ Contributions			
Loaned Members			
Gave Members			
Loaned Elders			
CP Interns			
CP Committee			
Mentored OP			
Loaned Facility			

5. Materials Needed

• Purpose or Mission Statement
• Copy of General Fund Budget
• Philosophy of Missions Statement
• Copy of Missions Budget

APPENDIX B

Attitudes about Church Planting in Small Churches
PASTORS VERSUS CONGREGATIONS

	Pastor	Congregation	Difference
Prospect 1	10	7	3
Prospect 2	3	3	0
Prospect 3	8	8	0
Prospect 4	10	6	4
Prospect 5	9	2	7
Prospect 6	8	5	3
Prospect 7	6	4	2
Prospect 8	6	1	5
Prospect 9	8	7	1
Prospect 10	8	5	3
Prospect 11	10	5	5
Prospect 12	8	4	4
Total of Scores	94	57	37
Average of Scores	7.83	4.75	3.08

APPENDIX C

Contributions to US Church Planting

	Total Missions	Church Planting	Percent to Church Planting
Prospect 1	\$10,000	\$4,000	40%
Prospect 2	\$10,000	\$2,500	25%
Prospect 3	\$12,000	\$0	0%
Prospect 4	\$17,700	\$0	0%
Prospect 5	\$25,000	\$600	2.4%
Prospect 6	\$30,000	\$1,290	4.3%
Prospect 7	\$36,000	\$3,960	11%
Prospect 8	\$8,000	\$0	0%
Prospect 9	\$0	\$0	0%
Prospect 10	\$6,000	\$0	0%
Prospect 11	\$0	\$0	0%
Prospect 12	\$6,000	\$3,000	50%
Totals	\$160,700	\$15,350	
Averages	\$13,392	\$1,279	9.55%

APPENDIX D

Church Size and Budget

	Adult Members	Adult Attendees	Annual Budget
Prospect 1	75	80	\$112,500
Prospect 2	42	25	\$96,000
Prospect 3	60	60	\$86,000
Prospect 4	60	80	\$153,000
Prospect 5	95	120	\$100,000
Prospect 6	90	115	\$132,000
Prospect 7	135	80	\$135,000
Prospect 8	50	35	\$150,000
Prospect 9	60	60	\$82,500
Prospect 10	40	30	\$40,000
Prospect 11	40	35	\$91,000
Prospect 12	70	70	\$120,000
Totals	817	790	\$1,298,000
Averages	68.08	65.83	\$108,167

APPENDIX E

A Global Impact Vision for Bucks Central Church

Our Purpose for Global Impact

To impact the nation and world with the Gospel by participating in an international church-multiplication movement through intercessory prayer, personal involvement, and financial provision.

Our Motto for Global Impact

“Partners in Proclaiming Christ and Planting Churches”

Core Values about Global Impact

1. The need for evangelism and church planting is urgent in our day.
2. The best way to fulfill the Great Commission of Jesus Christ is by planting new Churches.
3. Church planting in the United States is good stewardship because it broadens the base of resources needed for global outreach.
4. We must maintain a proactive strategy for global outreach which will guide us in support decisions and evaluation of effectiveness.
5. Where possible we will work through national or culturally similar international pastors to plant churches in other countries.
6. God will provide the funding necessary to support the right people and projects.
7. Because we desire to plant Reformed and Presbyterian churches, we will seek first to support projects sponsored by the PCA.
8. We believe in supporting “our own.” Therefore, we will give priority consideration to members of Bucks Central going to the mission field, new churches starting in our Presbytery and Northeast Region, and our Presbytery members going to the field.

Our Vision for Global Impact

We believe that it would please the Father and glorify the Lord Jesus Christ if, by the year 2005, Bucks Central Church would:

- 1] Have an effective intercessory prayer ministry for Global Impact.
- 2] Increase the proportion of Current Fund contributions to Global Impact by 1 % each year until it reaches 10%.
- 3] Increase the proportion of Designated Contributions to Global Impact by 1 % each year until it equals an additional 10% of the Current Fund.
- 4] Send at least 5 of “our own” to visit the international field.
- 5] Send at least 1 of “our own” on to the field, short/long term.
- 6] Support at least 5 churches beginning in the United States.
- 7] Support at least 5 international church-planting missionaries.
- 8] Start a daughter church of Bucks Central Church in the area.
- 9] Contribute at least \$250,000 dollars to Global Impact through church planting.

Financial Priorities/Proportions

Per \$ 1000

80% - Direct support to church-planting missionaries

\$ 800

[Personal support of individuals who have direct responsibility for planting churches personally, as a part of a team, or in partnership with nationals)

- 40% international or \$400

-40% national or \$400

20% - Indirect support to church-planting missionaries

\$ 200

[MNA/MTW administration, CP coordinators, Bible translators, radio/literature ministries, seminaries, etc.]

A Model for Increasing Global Impact Funding

Year	Attend Average	Operating Income	Operating Impact	Designated Impact	Total Impact
1994(<i>Actual</i>)	80	80,000	0 (0%)	1,359 (1.7%)	1,359
1995	88	88,000	880 (1%)	1,769 (2%)	2,649
1996	97	97,000	1,940 (2%)	2,910 (3%)	4,850
1997	106	106,000	3,180 (3%)	4,240 (4%)	7,420
1998	117	117,000	4,680(4%)	5,850(5%)	10,530
1999	129	129,000	6,450 (5%)	7,740 (6%)	14,190
2000	142	142,000	8,520 (6%)	9,940 (7%)	18,460
2001	156	156,000	10,920 (7%)	12,480 (8%)	23,480
2002	189	189,000	15,120 (8%)	17,010 (9%)	32,130
2003	207	207,000	18,630 (9%)	20,700 (10%)	39,330
2004	228	228,000	22,800 (10%)	22,800 (10%)	45,600
2005	251	251,000	25,100 (10%)	25,100 (10%)	50,200

Grand Total Impact = \$250,198!

APPENDIX F

NEW LIFE MINISTRY NETWORK, INC

Our Calling

God is calling the New Life Ministry Network to bless Greater Philadelphia with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Vision Statement

Our vision is to saturate greater Philadelphia with gospel-centered churches so that many people come to Christ and together our communities are transformed.

Core Values

1. The gospel moves and shapes us.
2. Kingdom centered prevailing prayer is central to all we do.
3. The gospel compels us beyond ourselves to the world around us in word and deed.
4. Ministry in the city of Philadelphia is a missional priority.
5. We need to partner together in the network and in other alliances to fulfill our calling.
6. We will plant churches to saturate Greater Philadelphia with the gospel.
7. We will equip and mobilize every member for ministry.
8. We believe that all of life belongs to God.
9. The heart of God compels us to ministries of love, mercy, justice, and truth.
10. To fulfill our calling we must develop and empower leadership at every level.

Ministry Strategy

- Church planting among all cultures and people groups with the city as a missional priority - Staffing, funding coordination, strategic planning and oversight.
- Urban and Mercy Ministry - word and deed delivered close at hand and to communities of need.
- Cooperative Ministries - resource development, ministry projects and events - coordinated equipping and training; joint ministry ventures; worship, outreach and other events.

Action Steps

- Develop an organization to implement this ministry:
 1. Leadership - form facilitative board of church officers and lay leaders for oversight.
 2. Incorporate as a non-profit 501 (C)(3) organization
 3. Choose a name
 4. Write by-laws
- Hire staff to implement the plan.
 1. During the first year staff from existing churches will be utilized part time to get things started.
 2. In the next year hire a full time Executive Director.
- Develop a plan for developing the network of subscribing/participating churches
- Resource sharing. Participating churches will seek to donate 5% of their general and missions operating budgets for the ministry.

APPENDIX G

Bucks Central Church exists to glorify the Father by prayerfully establishing a loving family of believers who are growing in their worship of God, their knowledge and application of Scripture, their ability to serve one another with their spiritual gifts and their commitment to impact the community, nation, and world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

It is our hope, desire, and prayer to become a permanently established congregation of 250-450 people at the center of Buck's County whose members are committed to:

- *A warm pathway of welcome to new people*
- *Inspirational and joy-filled worship*
- *Personal care-giving through small groups*
- *Effectiveness in children's and youth ministries*
- *National and international church planting*

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VITA

Bruce Raymond Finn, son of the late Georganna Bonsall Finn and Joseph Raymond Finn, was born on June 30, 1952, in Upper Darby, Pennsylvania. He attended the public schools in Delaware County, Pennsylvania, and holds a Bachelor of Science degree from West Chester University with a major in Social Science. He received the Master of Divinity degree from Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia.

He was ordained by the Mid-Atlantic Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in America in 1980. He served as an Associate Pastor at Chapelgate Presbyterian Church, Marriotsville, Maryland, for four years and as Associate Pastor at Hilton Head Presbyterian Church, Hilton Head, South Carolina, for two years.

In 1986 he moved to Newtown, Pennsylvania, to plant Bucks Central Church, where he currently serves as the founding pastor. He also has served as the chairman of the Church Planting Committee of the Philadelphia Presbytery since 1996.

