

Planters Problems

**Addressing the Challenges of Planting
New Churches**

Bob Hopkins

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INTRODUCTION

Over a number of years of working closely with many church plants, I have isolated a number of the most common reasons that cause church plants to fail. In this booklet we will address these common problems. We will look for ways they can be averted in new plants and how to transition from weakness for those plants already established.

Before we explore these issues closer, though, let us just consider some of the broader issues that I have encountered over the years that tend to lead to these problems arising in the first place.

Our inherited view of church is too building and Sunday centred. We think that just by opening a new worship service, unchurched folk will somehow automatically be drawn in. This is a bit like wanting to have a baby and then expecting it to be born straight away.

The new church needs time to grow, especially before it goes public. Leaders need to be chosen and then the numbers expanded to involve a team. This nucleus of the emerging church needs a genetic pattern to follow, it needs to know what God's vision for the new church is.

If we can address these core issues as we look deeper into the more specific areas through this booklet, then we will be more equipped in our foundations to move from positions of weakness in our planting strategy to strength.

Church Plant Weaknesses

We will look at each of the following weaknesses in more detail through the booklet, but for now here is a brief overview of each in turn:

Fixed Mindsets

- Starting with the church
- Congregation becomes “concrete”

Poor Planning

- Building / Sunday Focus
- Incomplete process / no life cycle framework
- Lack of time tabling, scheduling / flow chart

Leadership Issues

- Lack of missional leader(s)
- First leader leaves / pulled out too soon
- Change of leader at the Planting Church (mother)
- Moral failures

Inward Focus / Poor Outreach

- Evangelist(s) in team not identified and training the rest
- Energies all taken inwards
- Church v mission mindset

Cultural Blindness

- Lack of mission audit
- Insensitivity to social / cultural differences
- Lack of bridge people / cross-cultural missionaries

Lack of Team Dynamic

- No team recognition / affirmation
- No team gift identification and development
- Relational issues and team building overlooked

Part-Time

- Fail to adjust to part-time (spare time) leader(s) / team
- Team not fully released by planting church (mother)
- Weekly rhythm delayed too long (ie only monthly)

Lack of Prayer

- For vision and understanding mission context
- In forming and developing team
- For and in response to our outreach

National Church Planting Conference Discussions

This issue of learning from mistakes made and weaknesses recognised has been raised more over the years, but perhaps the most helpful time I have been involved in was at the National Church Planting Conference in 1997.

We took this issue to you the planters and had a workshop on Weak and Vulnerable plants. It was most stimulating and we learnt a great deal from one another since most of the 40 participants were from existing plants and shared very honestly.

The group built up a wide range of factors that they identified from their experience. They reinforce and extend the seven principal weaknesses we will explore here.

This long list of weaknesses did not leave us all discouraged and wanting to give up. On the contrary, many felt a new understanding of the problems they were facing. A cross fertilisation of ideas happened in the

groups and it was so good to pray together with real understanding of one another's struggles.

The factors that we identified in that workshop time were as follows:

- Failure to understand the target area / population and a misfit of "style".
- Lack of a clear shared vision leading to disunity and a lack of clear identity in the plant.
- Inappropriate motives for planting or being swept along on a bandwagon.
- Insufficient preparation and planning. A lack of analysis and reflection was also common.
- Unrealistic goals for the resources available leading to disappointment or a sense of failure.
- Ineffective leadership of the plant or a lack of definition of roles leading to a confusion of authority structure. The loss of the leader too soon can really destabilise things! A leadership change at the planting church was also seen as one of the most vulnerable times for a plant. They can be the easiest thing to shut down to fit with a new leaders vision.
- Lack of prayer was not only admitted by several but they emphasised how sharply the prayer need is focussed when birthing something new.
- Several identified problems in the planting church.

- Difficulty in supporting weekday outreach activities with no building.
- Others suffered poor venues for their worship meetings - too large, too cold, no children's facilities, or most drastic - an uncooperative caretaker! (A case for prayer and faith for conversion!?)
- A lack of resident Christians or those ready to relocate. This being especially critical in cross-cultural plants.
- Stretched lay resources linked with being swamped with needs or having a lack of mature Christians. Others spoke of a failure to reach "critical mass".
- A last point was the difficulty of the timing of meeting for folk with very different lifestyles.

My aim is not to overwhelm you with this list but to draw our attention to some of the key points that have been highlighted by other church planters in the past, and that I believe can still have a vital bearing on planting fresh expressions of church today.

I hope that this awareness of what so many other planters have experienced in the past, combined with the more detailed thoughts on each we will look at in this booklet, will be an encouragement and a help to you in your missionary church context today.

FIXED MINDSETS

We are used to the term “mindset” to indicate a pattern of thinking that combines certain ideas in a fixed relationship and which then has considerable resistance to change. A given mindset is closed to adapt and resists new insights that would challenge or rearrange the pattern of ideas.

We are extremely prone to mindsets in the church and these are one of the most serious hidden causes of weakness in church planting, even when principles of good practice are understood.

Biblical Examples

This is nothing new. We see exactly this phenomenon in the disciples who couldn't get hold of Jesus' information about his calling or about his radically different teaching on the Kingdom of God despite hearing it over and over again. Their previous ideas acted as a fixed mindset that blocked it out. This was a serious hindrance to their playing their full part in the development of Jesus' new Kingdom community and mission.

Example 1: The disciples' closed mindset about the calling and destiny of the Messiah, despite repeated explanations:

'Again he [Jesus] took the twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him. "We are going up to Jerusalem," he said, "and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise." Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask." "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked. They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory."

Mark 10:32-37

Example 2: The disciples' closed mindset about the nature of the Kingdom of God despite 3 years teaching plus 40 days resurrection explanations:

'After his [Jesus'] suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the Kingdom of God. On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptised with water, but in a few days you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit." So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"'

Acts 1:3-6

Jesus introduced his message of the Kingdom with the challenge to "Repent." This basically means to change

your mind. Bruce Mounsey has applied this to the fact that we in the church need “a change of mind about mindsets.” Bruce often illustrates the nature of fixed mindsets with a large lump of concrete.

This concrete is like rock – hard, fixed and heavy. It is so set that it can form enormous structures, which except for a determined explosion, will never be moved. And yet this concrete is no more solid and fixed than many of our own mindsets.

Typical of any mindset, our fixed ideas about church take on the weight of imperatives. *“This is how church should be...” “It’s how it must always be in any context.”* Robert Warren and others have termed this “morphological fundamentalism.” We ascribe absolutes to the form and shape that church has to take based on our past experience and this kills any mission-shaped responsiveness.

“Congregation is the concrete in which our cultural concept of church is set.”

I coined this catchphrase to highlight how we have unrecognised fixed mindsets about the church that are set... hard and fast like concrete! The mindset is identified around the word **congregation** not just to keep the alliteration. Congregation is used here in the sense that in our minds this word carries so many of the assumptions about church as a religious event, in a special building, on one day of the week, with a pre-determined pattern of activities, leadership and involvement (or lack of it).

This concept of church, like any mindset, is subconsciously held through a deep process of socialisation and teaching. Just as were the mindsets of the disciples that we have identified. And we shouldn't deceive ourselves by thinking that our mindsets about the nature of church and how it should and shouldn't work and involve our lives, are any less blindly held than those mindsets of the first disciples.

It took real Holy Spirit revelation for them to see things in a completely new way and so it must be for us. In other fields of human study the same power of fixed ideas that require a critical change, is referred to as a "paradigm shift."

The truths of a mission-shaped church involve just such a breaking of long established mindsets and a dramatic paradigm shift for us. Fixed mindsets mean that even when we try to explore new ways of being church, we subconsciously carry with us so many assumptions that hinder us from re-imagining church through a process of first principles interacting with the context.

What are the elements of these mindsets that need to change?

As we plant new churches they will only avoid inherited weaknesses in mission and inflexibility to the chosen context, if we let go of these mindsets and fixed assumptions about church. Rigid mindsets about how church has been expressed in our limited experience is one of the most serious causes of failure to adapt and this is why Mission-shaped Church spoke of the process

of “dying to live.” Mindsets resist this biblical mission principle of incarnation and inculturation. So we can sum up with our next catch phrase.

Stop starting with the church

George Lings has said that we have to move away from traditional planting processes that tended to start with **Worship Service** and instead start with **Loving Service**.

The tendency to move too quickly to a worship service was one of the principal causes of weakness identified in church plants through the 80's and 90's. Teams planting fresh expressions of church have to leave behind their experience and preferences of church and allow mission engagement and gospel principles to shape the emergence of something new.

The following list is of aspects that may characterise the inherited mindset about church that weakens efforts at mission-shaped engagement:

1. From church as Building to Community in Mission.
2. From One-Man-Band to a team of women and men
Associated with a shift from ministry as stipendary to an army of non-stipendary and self-supporting missionaries (lay and ordained).
3. From church as Sunday event, to 24/7 following Jesus together
Associated with a shift from church as 'spare-time hobby' to whole life involvement.

4. From attendance to discipleship.
No longer about doing the vicar a good turn by turning up, but growing in Christ-likeness and service.
5. From anything new being seen as “just a stepping stone to proper church” to thoroughgoing acceptance of fresh expressions of church.
6. From imposing a single uniform church culture, to encouraging emergence of all sorts of contextual church cultures.
7. From church as the offering of the professionally trained and highly gifted, to the participation of the whole body.

PART TIME PLANTING

Of each of the issues I have briefly raised in the Introduction, "Part-Time Planting" is the one that's not immediately self explanatory, so I thought we'd expand on this one next. In fact this description fits at least three sorts of potential problems.

1. Minimising Loss

The first problem is that some planting churches don't face the cost of giving away some of their best people. They try to reduce the loss to "mother" and only partly release leaders and/or team members - expecting them to continue some activity or ministry role back at the planting church. The worst case of this problem was one or two plants that were resourced by a rota of leaders from the mother congregation. This gives no leaders who own the vision and are owned by the emerging church.

This is a "worship centre" model and not a church plant at all! Releasing people in a part-time way like this can be also prompted by a desire to minimise the bereavement effect on close relationships - but in fact it only drags it out. Planting is a pioneer activity, bringing something from nothing and it needs a "big push". The process of planning the plant and preparing mother should include facing the cost of really giving away the team and recognising the unavoidable loss of friendships.

2. Part-time People

Secondly, quite legitimately, church plants are led by people on a part time or even spare time basis as they continue secular employment or have "tent-making" jobs to support themselves. Many plants work perfectly well on this biblical model, but it does require a radical shift of responsibilities and expectations for people used to full time, professional clergy. This is all about making teams work and sharing ministry widely, something many plants find difficult, especially in hard mission fields.

3. Part-time Plants

Thirdly there is the tendency for some plants to launch on a "part-time" basis - "Let's go once a month or fortnightly and ease the burden." This can be okay as a short term measure on the way to a fuller launch. It's probably reasonable to meet on a part-time basis for three to six months, however some plants stick at this for one or even two years. They then wonder why response in the target area is poor and growth slow. On the one hand the team aren't making a real push through and on the other they aren't offering a model of regular worship / discipleship for new folk.

Planters need to be bold, open to take risks and be wholehearted.

LEADERSHIP ISSUES

Whether Anglican, Baptist, Ichthus, Vineyard or Methodist, etc - there seems agreement across the denominations that when it comes to church planting, leadership is the crucial issue.

Surveys of weak and failed plants repeatedly reveal that it's the most common cause of problems. This maybe shouldn't surprise us since leadership has a key role in every aspect of the church's life and so will be especially important when it comes to bringing something new to birth.

Any change presents a special challenge to leadership. Church planting is about creating something out of nothing, going where no one has gone before and as such the leadership of the venture can be pivotal to its success or failure.

A breakthrough person

We live in a age where strong leadership is suspect. Consultation and committee are the accepted forms of leadership, and indeed these do act to counterbalance extremes. However in the process of breaking up fallow ground you need a sharp point to your plough. Many have described this particular role in church planting as a "breakthrough" person. This is probably an apostolic evangelist in terms of New Testament leadership gifts (Eph. 4 v11). This is especially true for cross-cultural

plants and where the team is small. The quality is usually found in one individual but can also be the combined qualities of two or three. More than this and the church is in danger of having a confusion of leadership.

Where there is no clear leadership, then struggles inevitably emerge. Factions develop as those with strong ideas about the direction of the church rise up and gain support (cf. The church plant in Corinth 1Cor. 3 1-11). In one church plant the split loyalties were so serious that the plant had to be closed and re-launched with clear recognised leaders and a single vision focus.

It is important not just to have strong, clear leadership but also that those in the role have the gift of leadership. The ability to see further than those you're leading and to enable and empower them to get there is essential. This involves sharing vision and creating ownership of vision, recognising the gifts of others and building team (Eph. 4 v 16)

Different contexts

In certain social contexts different styles of leadership will be appropriate. In a middle class area an executive/management style is likely to be appropriate to the culture. On the other hand, in an area where management is a dirty word, that may be the last thing that's needed. In such neighbourhoods decision making is more collective and the "shop floor meeting" is more the style. In one U.P.A. plant on a large council estate the leader just announced "planning meeting every other Tuesday evening" and it was open to anyone. A regular

core emerged with a few floaters, but ownership of the vision by the people for the people emerged.

Leaders beware

Over the last few years we have seen an increasing incidence of two worrying leadership problems. First is strain and burnout due to a church culture accustomed to full-time professional leaders that fails to adjust to part time or spare time tent making leaders in the plant. Second, is the incidence of marriage breakdown, even with cases of a leader leaving their partner for another team member. The blessing of really strong relationships in the team reinforced by exciting experiences of ministry together, can backfire ...beware! A big part of the battle to avoid this is being alert to the potential for such problems. Taking wise precautions to prevent yourself getting into unhealthy relationships is something we strongly recommend in our training.

A change of leader

Lastly the example of Corinth also shows us that church plants are vulnerable at the hand over of leadership - in their case the “pioneer” (Paul who planted) to the “settler” (Apollos who watered). There will come a time when the first leader of the plant changes, or indeed when the incumbent of the mother church changes. Both of these can be very unsettling times for a young church. Thinking ahead to the loss of a leader and training a replacement in advance can do much to ease the loss. Working through a new incumbent’s attitude to the church plant before they take up post can prevent a clash of vision when they arrive. However, sadly, experience has shown

that this needs to be in writing and guaranteed with the diocese as far as possible. Church plants can be very vulnerable entities, often with no legal standing they are a lot easier to close than to bring to birth!

As we've seen, leadership is a crucial area for church plants with many pitfalls to be avoided. One of our greatest needs is to ensure that there is a strong base of prayer and support for our leaders. This is one way we can assist them in leading healthy, missionary church plants which will break up the fallow ground of our nation.

TEAM DYNAMICS

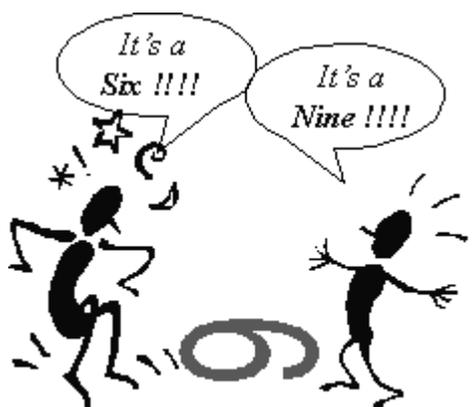
My wife, Mary, and I have been involved with church planting for over 20 years now. Part of the original call, which resulted in our move from the leafy suburbs of the south to urban priority Merseyside, was to rediscover the power of teams.

We had seen in our Bible that Jesus gathered a group around him, and that the apostle Paul never went anywhere alone but was nearly always accompanied by a group of people. However what we saw in much of the Church of England at that time was a model of one man ministry with little emphasis on teams. We longed to see missionary teams developed and equipped to resource and initiate church plants.

The church has come a long way in the past 16 years. The whole idea of Lay ministry is much more accepted and increasingly practised these days. There is now a greater expectation on the part of the average church member to be involved in the life of the church to which they belong. There are exciting pioneer initiatives in certain dioceses to train and authorise lay workers as evangelists and pastoral assistants.

But how much do we still understand about the nature and power of team work? Simply because we are used to more people being involved in the life of the church doesn't mean that they are working together effectively.

When it comes to planting a new church the need for effective, powerful team work is all the more real. Using the plough analogy from my article on leadership in our last edition when I likened the sharp point of the plough to a breakthrough leader, the weight behind the plough is the effective team. Both a sharp point and a powerful pulling power are needed for a plough to do it's work of breaking up the fallow ground.



Team Differences -
Are they working for you, or against you?

Team Differences

Teams are made up of people, which inevitably means that you will end up with differences of opinion, personality, gifts, working style, theology, priority and so on. This fact of life can either be the breaking point of the team - or it's making. Learning not just to be flexible with each other's differences but to harness them as a positive aspect of the team is not always easy, but it is the secret to the synergy of teams and good

relationships.

There are many tools available these days to help us look at ourselves and how we relate to others. The Myers Briggs Typology Indicator, Gift identification questionnaires and The Belbin Team Types indicator are just a few of the exercises we've used with church planting teams around the country (and with our own team in ACPI). They help us to understand why others in the team do things the way they do, and more than that, to see that actually it's very necessary to have a variety of approaches within a team.

You will be hearing in all of this very strong echoes from Paul's words to the Corinthians when he spoke of the fact that we are all varied parts of one body and that we need each other's contributions.

We would recommend that any church planting team gives several sessions to working through some of these exercises and discussing the results. Having done it early in the life of the plant, don't forget it - and repeat it again as the team changes. You may want to consider having an outside facilitator to come and help you.

Are You a "Team" at all?

Dynamic teams which recognise each other's strengths and weaknesses and which operate as a whole unit can be a scary group for a leader to work with! Some leaders, especially those trained to take charge of everything, find it much easier when everything is related back though them. They can end up leading a team which operates like a football side where all the players have to pass the ball to the captain for him to pass on. Trusting team

members with the freedom to interact together and do things which the leader may not actively be a part of needs a secure leader but releases all sorts of creative possibilities.

Different Team Sizes

A question we often get asked is about the best size of team for a church plant. In our experience the optimum size of team is quite closely related to the type of mission challenge that the plant is facing. If the plant is into an area or network where the church is already strong and is building on the existing relationships of church members, then a large team of 25 plus can work well. In this kind of situation the more people you have the stronger you are and the more points of contact you have with the folk you're trying to reach. The fact that you have strength in the area or network probably means that the culture of the people you're trying to reach is not very different from your own.

If however the mission challenge is to an area where the church is weak, this may be due to some cultural or social gulf between the church and the target group. In this situation it can be counter-productive to have a large team suddenly appear in the community. The danger is of a rejection syndrome where the local community resists the new initiative as something 'foreign'. A small team of 6 to 12 can more easily begin working in the area, developing relationships and drawing in a number of local contacts which will give a vital incarnational process to the plant. As the small team works with local converts a style of church and worship can emerge which is authentic to the context.

The small team reaching such a new area will however be very vulnerable. It will need realistic expectations of a slow build up and good support and prayer from the mother church to see them through the hard times that will almost certainly come.

CULTURAL BLINDNESS

When we go on holiday to Spain or Greece we expect a different language, different food, different temperaments and much more extrovert communication. Similarly, if we are planting a church to reach an ethnic group such as Asians or Afro-Caribbeans our first thought is the need to be appropriate to the culture. Furthermore we probably realise we don't understand these ethnic cultures very well and so the best people to interpret them and decide what sort of church is contextual, are Asians and Afro-Caribbeans themselves!

This principle of planting churches that are appropriate to the culture is based on the mission model of Jesus, which is incarnation. Each new church needs as far as possible, to be born out of the culture in which it is set to be authentic. This means that cross-cultural mission church planters have to learn Paul's lesson "become a Jew to reach Jews and a Greek to reach Greeks.. all things to all men...in order to win some. It's not just a matter of planting a church to reach them, so much as a church arising among them.

However, a problem for many white British Christians is that we expect cultural differences abroad or among other ethnic groups here, but we are blind to them within our own ethnic grouping. This is very serious for our church planting since in fact the cultural differences between professional, middle class and the urban poor maybe more challenging than moving from a professional

English culture to a professional Spanish one. This blindness may be a primary reason why the church has so often been weak and ineffective amongst the urban poor. The only church we offer is of an alien culture and there is rarely a church of the poor for the poor.

In church planting, culture affects a whole range of things. It's not just the style of worship and type of music, important though it is for these to be contextual. There are also things like the patterns and places of social community life (at a superficial level "wine & cheese" or "pie & peas!"); the values and priorities we hold, for instance between people/relationships relative to tasks/performance; the size of group within which people sustain relationships and most important, the models and styles of leadership practised in the community (middle class managerial leadership, is almost universal in our churches but not in all our cultures!)

Not only are we white Anglo Christians often blind to culture in our own ethnic group, we even resent the talk of differences, "us & them", thinking it "snobbish". We then tend to seal the matter by adding a theological argument that different sorts of congregation are divisive and contradict the unity of the Gospel. With such arguments we go on justifying imposing our culture and preferences on others in our mission and church planting. I say imposing because as sociology and anthropology prove, when two cultures meet, you don't so much get a hybrid mixture, rather one will dominate the other. The culture which ends up dominant is not necessarily that of the larger group, but rather the one with higher educational and financial power - certainly not gospel values!

Certainly the issue of planting new churches and keeping unity raises many deep questions. For example, is it logical to claim that appropriate unity is equally expressed by a congregation with attendance of say 100 in both a village parish of 700 people and an urban parish of 15,000 population? Or why may some suggest that it is promoting disunity to plant a church for a different social or generational group, whereas they have seen no problem with many 8am, 1662 Communion congregations that have for decades, never mixed with family service congregations meeting in the same building?

Jesus' parables of the Kingdom are all about multiplication. They face us with the question of how to multiply the life of the church to fill all sorts of neighbourhoods, social and cultural settings at the same time as seeking oneness in Christ across every divide. This challenge to culturally indigenous communities of faith may involve exploring opportunities for multi-cultural gatherings such as wider networks, social events or celebrations.

1) So, in summary, in such a short article on such a complex and vital subject, what are some keys to avoid cultural blindness? Here are a few to start with:

2) Always be alert and look out for the subtlest of cultural differences, helped by thorough mission audit of the context.

3) In a cross-cultural plant never have a large team or you won't be able to adapt to the host culture, you will carry yours with you.

Include in the team those with cross-cultural gifts and experience and if possible one or two “bridge people” who are from the local or similar context.

4) Build relationships in the culture and “sit and listen” before ever you “stand and tell”.

5) Learn the local “language” and address appropriate aspects of the Gospel to peoples’ needs in their story and traditions.

6) Build converts from the mission culture into the planting team before developing patterns of community and worship and ensure they are decisive in forming these central aspects of the new church.

INWARD FOCUS / POOR OUTREACH

Peter Wagner has claimed that "Church planting is the most effective means of evangelism under God's heaven". However, experience in the UK shows this is by no means automatic. Most churches in Europe are locked up within themselves, with their own subculture and all their energies consumed with internal programs.

So it should not surprise us that church plants which they birth, struggle to connect with their chosen social context. Even though the vision that brings a church plant into being is usually mission centred, the team members often find it hard to break out of inappropriate concepts of evangelism, to embrace new ways of being church which arise out of new contexts with community engagement as their way of life. So let's highlight four major problem areas.

Starting with the church

One of the most common causes is that church plants very often start with a Sunday event and a building in mind as their goal. We need to stop starting with the church. Church plants that launch a Sunday worship service far too quickly find that all the resources are tied up setting up and running a service every week with precious little left for reaching out to the neighbourhood or network that the plant was created for in the first place. While such models may have worked fifty years ago for the "daughter church" movement, in today's post-

Christendom and pre-Christian cultures, just starting a worship service in a new area is unlikely to draw in anyone. It is essential to engage in outreach as the life blood of planting a new church long before launching public worship services. I would almost say only start worship services when you have to! Graham Cray argues in our lead article that to have in mind what the plant will look like from the start probably won't work. Instead, seek to build new converts from the mission culture into the planting team before developing patterns of community and worship.

Not doing your homework

One of the most effective ways early outreach can happen is through the team doing a thorough Mission Audit as part of the process of planting. This has the potential not only to unearth extremely valuable information, but also to create opportunities for positive engagement between the planting team and the local community. Choose methods that won't just yield statistical data, but that will involve lots of face to face contact. Done with prayer, this will lead to key local contacts and also increases the team's vision for seeing the community changed by the love of Christ.

Understanding & Expectations

The planting team needs to have a clear understanding and expectations of the evangelism process. Many churches we have worked with give very good answers when asked "What is evangelism?". Beneath the surface though, they are often still operating under emotional convictions about evangelism and its results that are fifty

years out of date (and not very biblical). Perhaps the most common of these mistakes is to be too focussed on reaping. We must realise how much sowing is needed in today's culture and how long is the human "harvest season" - the time it will take most unchurched people to build up trust of the church and then gain enough basic understanding of who God is and what he has done to be able to make any sort of commitment to Christ. Could you encourage, sustain and be proud of a church plant into an unreached people group (such as 'yuppies' or low income families) that for the first three years sees few converts and doesn't meet as a "church"?

Identity Crisis

Know what sort of church plant you are. Many plants over the past decades have been what we call "progression plants". The church reaches into a group where they are already successful. As a result there is a fair sized planting team who themselves come from the culture / area and have lots of long-standing contacts. If we take up Graham Cray's challenge to make reaching the non-churched our priority, then many more churches need to take on "pioneer plants", reaching into those areas or networks where they are weak. This will mean that relationships are less likely to exist naturally so that usually the team needs to create new "pools" of contacts. This may be through starting a project such a drop-in centre or through the team immersing themselves in existing activities in that community.

Evangelism Principles for any Context Church Planting teams or established church plants need a framework of understanding evangelism that will develop a lifestyle of

engagement, wherever they are called. It can flow from the following key concepts.

Process not event: This principle has been well established from the "Engel scale", to John Finney's "Journey of Faith" and to Laurence Singlehurst's progression of "Sowing, Reaping and Keeping". Evangelism is therefore not just about commitments to Christ but about all of us doing anything that helps another towards Christ.

People based not programs: Again Finney's work confirmed the overwhelming reality that the Gospel touches lives most through genuine relationships. His findings showed the potential for both individual relationships and especially groups. We can then see different sorts of relationships all playing a part. Passing & Permanent people represent very different relationships. What is appropriate and possible is different, with words or actions touching the person at the bus stop and lifestyle speaking to family, friends and workmates.

People of Peace: Jesus promised will welcome us as we reach out and they are the doorway to their networks. Again Ann Morisy has highlighted the importance of Partnerships in the community with others of goodwill which releases the Gospel to work multi- directionally. Lastly we should expect God to be sovereignly at work with Power Encounters of all kinds helping people discover and respond to Him.

POOR PLANNING

We're often invited to consultancies by weak or struggling church plants. Some of the most common serious weaknesses exposed are failures in planning and preparation.

At our training courses, plants that have already begun frequently start to look glum as they comment: "We just never thought of that...", "Oh Dear! All we're hearing are things we've failed to do...", "I wish we'd heard this before we started!"

In a Baptist survey of church plants some years ago, less than half had even read a book on church planting in their preparation. Add to such poor preparation all our ingrained church thinking that's Sunday centred and building centred and no wonder the caricature church plant is about seeing a mission opportunity, looking for a building, picking a Sunday and starting!

Preparing to Plant

On a more positive note, you don't need to be a professional project manager to plan well. The secret is to know where you want to arrive and work backwards. The result is that most key planning happens in the earliest stages, well before any public launch. That's when things are set on the right course. An article on the planning needed in these first phases can be found in issue no3, Autumn 1997 (now on our website).

Tools that help

Church planting is complex and planning must allow for flexibility. Since many processes and jobs have to be remembered, a tool such as a flowchart helps them be remembered and done in the right order. Its better if different members of the team are responsible for different aspects. This encourages every member ownership and ministry from the start. This can all be shown on the chart with spaces to mark when you're sure each part is completed.

The Parable of the Farmer

An excellent team bible study on planning and the whole planting process is the parable of the farmer in Isaiah 28:23-29. Our workbook, *Enabling Church Planting* gives questions to use as part of its much fuller explanation of the phases in the planting process. It has photocopyable tools and charts.

Don't forget the children

Rather than plan children's and youth work as you approach the public launch - why not include them from the outset. Give them training in church planting and enthuse them to reach and draw in their friends. Its their church plant too!

LACK OF PRAYER

Each new threshold in moving our church plant forward has been won in prayer.” this was the repeated observation of the leader of a recent church plant in a UK inner city area.

This should be no surprise of course. Whether it be the explosive growth of the church in China and South East Asia, revival in Argentina, the fastest growing cell church in Columbia or spontaneous church planting in Tanzania, the common ingredient consistently emerges as prayer. Someone wisely observed that ‘the army of God moves forward on its knees.’

Its easy to be caught up with the wonderful principles emerging through church planting, ‘cell church’, ‘purpose driven church’, ‘natural church development’, alpha, etc. But the best principles, enthusiastically applied, will achieve far less than their potential, if prayer is not seen as an integral and essential part of the whole process.

In the case of church planting, the vision is often conceived as the facts of the present situation are brought to prayer. This is a powerful combination and leads to faith that God himself has vision for what is to become reality.

Such vision is a tremendous motivator releasing energy, enthusiasm and creativity to work with God in seeing his will come into being. The danger is that such vision can

very quickly lead to lots of planning, talking and doing while neglecting the essential place of prayer.

In trying to overcome this common pitfall, we advise teams to clearly plan a 'prayer track' into the planting process. Here are some ideas of ways that teams have included prayer in the process.

Vision and Initial Research

- Right at the start, as the vision is forming, plan an extended time of prayer: a day, half day or evening. Consider a time away to really focus.
- Identify those in the parent church who are intercessors. They may not necessarily all be part of the new church plant, but they can play a vital role in supporting with their prayers. Recognise how valuable they are and encourage them by giving specific prayer requests *and* faithfully reporting specific answers to prayer. How about a monthly planters prayer update.
- Arrange a regular prayer time to intercede for the project, or make it the focus of existing church prayer groups and home group/cell prayers.

Forming & Developing a Team

As a planting team forms, it is so important for prayer to be at the heart of the team's life and leaders' priorities.

- Often the best teams are made up of surprising combinations of people. Its obviously important that the 'mother' congregation pray for God to call those he wants to be part of the new church plant - and are

open to then hearing that call themselves! We need prayer times that allow creative space to hear God's call.

- Perhaps the most effective thing any leader can do in empowering their team is to pray for them. Its all too easy in the busyness of a pioneer project to allow the important to be pushed out by the seemingly urgent.
- Work as a leader to help any in the team who struggle to pray out loud. A team planting into a local authority estate found it incredibly helpful to use very simple exercises such as listing together things to be grateful for and pray for, then turning them into very short one sentence prayers.

Outreach

'And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ...' Colossians 4:3

Evangelism without prayer has been described as an explosive without a detonator.

- As a team, share your fears and past disappointments in evangelism. Pray for each other, especially for the ability to be an effective witness among non-Christian friends.
- Mobilise prayer support for specific outreach plans as they are decided and implemented.
- Pray in the area or around gathering points for a social network. Sensitive prayer walking prepares the team and the mission field.
- Pray for non-Christian contacts made during community survey and outreach events.

- In your prayer, be open to God giving impressions which will shape or direct your outreach. A team planting in Manchester were led through their prayers to visit a particular household. It turned out that the woman who lived there had tried to find a church the previous week and failed. She came to faith as did a number of her family and friends who became the key people into the community that the team were targeting.

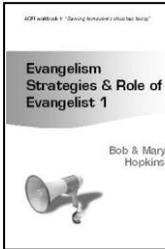
Going Public

The public launch of the new church is an incredibly exciting, busy and stressful time. There may seem to be no time to pray, but you'll need it more than ever, so plan ahead.

- Enlist as many people from the mother church as possible to support you in prayer as you launch.
- Consider special prayer events as part of the build up, maybe a prayer vigil.
- Some plants have launched with a 'prayer carnival' around their area, finishing up at the new venue for their first service. At least two had their Bishop with them.

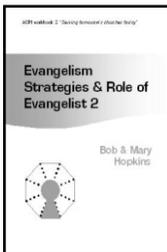
Finally, don't neglect the wonderful gift of children praying for the plant.

OTHER RESOURCES FROM ACPI



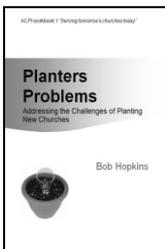
Workbook 1: Evangelism Strategies & Role of Evangelist 1 *(Written by Bob & Mary Hopkins)*

The first in a two-part series exploring strategies that will open up evangelism for all, this work book considers the biblical bases for evangelism, especially Jesus' principles and how they can apply to the many opportunities for evangelism open to the church today.



Workbook 2: Evangelism Strategies & Role of Evangelist 2 *(Written by Bob & Mary Hopkins)*

Part two of the Strategies for Evangelism workbook series. This booklet particularly focuses on exploring an eight-sided shape to help us understand and implement evangelism in our lives.



Workbook 4: Planning Frameworks & Analogies *(Written by Bob & Mary Hopkins)*

This workbook highlights the importance for a continued priority for planning and strategic frameworks in the engaged and emerging church. It also looks at six planning frameworks and analogies that have been used over the years and continue to be used today, giving details on how they work, drawing comparisons between them and offering a critique from experience of using them.



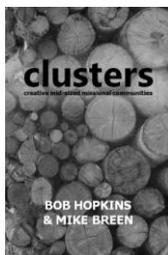
Listening for Mission *(Written by Steven Croft, Freddy Hedley & Bob Hopkins)*

This Fresh Expressions booklet encourages churches to develop the tools to 'listen for mission' so that you can find out what God is doing and know how best to join in. This short and accessible guide can be used with church councils, deanery synods, circuit meetings and house groups.



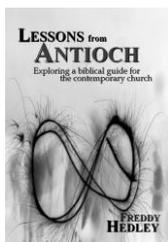
Starting a Fresh Expression *(written by Steve Croft, Claire Dalpra & George Lings)*

This Fresh Expressions booklet outlines the nature and process of starting healthy fresh expressions of church. This short and accessible guide can be used with church councils, deanery synods, circuit meetings and house groups.



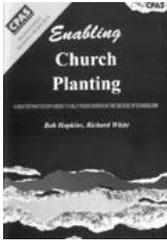
Clusters *(written by Bob Hopkins & Mike Breen)*

This new book explores the principles, history and methodology of clusters – missionary communities that have transformed the mission and fellowship of many churches across the UK and Europe. Using a mixture of biblical teaching, lessons from experience and stories from those involved, this book gives a clear and accessible way in to this exciting movement in the church.



Lessons from Antioch *(written by Freddy Hedley)*

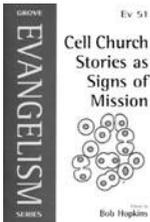
This new book draws comparisons between today's western society and 1st Century Antioch, and explores what lessons we can learn from this extraordinarily dynamic and fruitful church as recorded in the book of Acts. Particular focuses are on the need to pioneer church form, grow leadership and develop a natural rhythm of mission.



Enabling Church Planting

Written by Bob Hopkins & Richard White

A training and resource book to aid those thinking of or embarking on planting a new church. The work book can be photocopied for use with your team and includes many exercises. Each of the five sections is split up and includes some of the following elements: Introduction page, briefing paper, discussion paper, collection of ideas and illustrations. This book is not a source of ready-made answers. Instead it offers practical, experience-based guidance for the whole of the church planting process.



Cell Stories as Signs of Mission (*Edited by Bob Hopkins*)

4 fascinating and very different stories of Cell life in Anglican churches sandwiched between pithy comments from Bob.

These resources, plus more related books, articles and stories are available from www.acpi.org.uk

