

REPORT OF THE CHURCH PLANTING DIRECTOR



MID-ATLANTIC
DISTRICT

District Conference 2018

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"Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads. Go out to the country lanes. Make the people to come in. I want my house to be full.'" Luke 14:23 NIRV

"But how can they call on Him to save them unless they believe in Him? And how can they believe in Him if they have never heard about Him? And how can they hear about Him unless someone tells them? And how will anyone go and tell them without being sent?" Romans 10:14-15 NLT

A 4 Letter Word

Recently I was with some of our leaders and asked, "What is a 4-letter word that flows out of love"? Some may have thought I was thinking "kiss" or "hugs", but the word I was thinking of was "hell". I am not proposing we preach on hell or use the word more often. But I am intrigued how the reality of hell is in so many New Testament leaders' thoughts (Matthew Mt. 7:13, Mark Mk. 9:43 Luke Lk 12:5, John Rev. 20:14-15, Peter 2 Pt. 2:4, James Jas. 3:6, Paul Romans 8:38).

When we cease belief in hell two things happen that impede love. 1) Culture does what it shouldn't (lying, stealing, adultery, murder; as people no longer fear going to hell). And 2) The Church does not do what it should (outreach). C.S. Lewis said we have never met a mortal, everyone we meet is immortal. The question is, "Where will they spend eternity"?

Defining Reality

One of the roles of a leader is to define reality. Our reality is this - we want to do a better job at church planting. We live in the 5th fastest growing region of the US. 70% of the people in our National Capital Region have no religion. My Southern Baptist counterpart (North American Mission Board) told me even if every church in the area was full only 12% of the population would be in a church. This reality compels us to plant more healthy multiplying churches.

My Job

When I took this role last November the District Superintendent gave me a three-part job description. 1) Help church planters. 2) Help churches be Greenhouses (growing planters). 3) Cast vision for church planting (increase praying and giving by 5%).

We moved some churches off our church plant list (after years they were facing the dynamics of being a non-growing church, rather than those of a church plant). The number of district church plants became 5. Then we added a 6th church plant. And I'm in conversations to start 2 more. A Greenhouse church plant next summer will bring our number of church plants to 9.

Helping people buy into vision often involves telling them three things - the praise, the problem, and the possible solution. So here are our praises, problem, and possibility.

The Praise

We have grown from 5 to 6 church plants. In July #6 was added to my oversight (the Vietnamese Alliance Church in Silver Spring, who 1st Alliance Silver Spring helped begin). This new church is already planning to start a church in Virginia after 15-30 people approached the pastor! Every week our 6 church plants impact 400-500 people! Last Sunday, just before I got up to preach, I received a text from a planter saying 3 men had just given their lives to Christ!

In a region with 1.2 million deaf and hard of hearing people we have begun ministries among the deaf community in Frederick, MD and at the largest deaf university in the world, in DC. Our National Office has moved two Envision workers to DC to learn ASL. We have sent International Workers to Paris to learn French; now they are here to learn ASL so they can go to the deaf.

Being in the most ethnically diverse region in the US we have ethnically diverse church plants. While one targets the deaf (a 97% UPG) another targets Ethiopians (240+ Ethiopians fly here daily, only Ethiopia's capital city has more Ethiopians). Now in their 2nd year several hundred people are coming (mostly young adults and children)! We have a 2nd year church plant for Vietnamese (8k Vietnamese live around Silver Spring, 11K around Arlington where we seek to plant a church). We have a Spanish church plant (reaching often overlooked Spanish speaking transient immigrants). We have a 2nd year Haitian church plant in a Fredericksburg, Virginia school (they passionately worship in Creole, French, and English)! Our Baltimore plant is in the city of the 2015 riots (you could hit a golf ball to the riots location from our planters back yard). Weekdays they disciple, Sundays they minister to the homeless in a park (where many have found Christ as their Savior and Healer) and then walk to a hotel for worship twice a month.

The Problem

We live in the 5th fastest growing region of the US (projected to grow to 10.6 million within ten years). 70% have no religion (only 12% would be reached if every church building was full). Yet we have cut our church planting spending. Why? We did not have funds to do what we did before (despite 50% subsidy reductions to our church planters). We funded church plants by the sale of closed church properties. Those "funds" became depleted. And church planting finances became what churches gave to our Church Planting Budget, which was not enough.

People pray and give when they hear a need or a praise. We need *communication to pastors* - so I have begun monthly email updates about what is happening, and we will create more videos and Facebook posts. We need better *communication from church planters*, people pray or give when they hear planter's problems and praises - so I have simplified the planters monthly reporting process (online and in print) and may implement what my Church Planting Director called "No report, no check". And we need better *communication from pastors to their church*. Without communication we will not have adequate prayer or giving.

The Possibility

While there is no guarantee of success, there are red flags to avoid which make a huge difference. Half of church plants fail in their first four years. The churches that thrive, not just survive, grow from a process - ACTS (Assess, Coach, Train, Support).

Assessment - We are doing multiple assessments to ascertain if a candidate is a church planter. We use a free C&MA online assessment tool (looking for a certain score to move ahead). Then we hold multiple interviews with a potential planter (assessing call, maturity, giftedness, willingness to learn, spiritual life, spouse, vision). We then pay for a more extensive \$99 online assessment (looking for a certain score to move ahead). Why assess? Because church planting is costly. We have no desire to plant churches that do not grow or multiply in trying to reach a region of 9-10 million people. Living costs vary in each setting (we try to be fair, not consistent, in our support levels) but a typical plant costs \$100,000 over 3 years. And then there are the people costs (souls not saved, and half of failed planters leaving the ministry).

Coaching - I have begun meeting with our current and future church planters. I am amazed how many of the New Testament "pastoral" letters are "coaching" of church plants and planters. I want to get to the point where I have significant contact with each of our planters monthly, pray with them as a group quarterly, and retreat yearly. One unseen part of my coaching role is intercession (praying for each church plant/planter in light of their problems and possibilities).

Training - The training needed for a healthy pre-natal (conception/dreaming) and pioneering (faith) stage differs from training to grow a church from the planting (birth) to parenting stage (their birthing churches). Planters who have not seen a church move through these stages will be helped with vision, encouragement, challenge, and training. Future planters will go through Basic training (Boot Camp) before planting, creating a written plan. Why train? Those of us with church planting gifts can be risk takers, which is good. We also run the risk of pride, which is not good. We have begun quarterly meetings (half a day training, half a day praying). And I have created training on what it means to be, or how to become, a Greenhouse Church.

One training we will provide is in Fund Raising and Stewardship. I never had training in these in seminary; I had to learn the hard way. I strive to model this now by raising 30% of my salary. I have supporters who pray for my ministry and give funds to our District for my support. We plan to train, and require, future planters to do fund raising early on (helping people outside their church give to the vision) and stewardship (helping people inside their church give to the vision). I have created training for both. Since most of our planters do not live on our subsidies, but are bi-vocational, we need to offer training in bi-vocational pastoring.

We have begun to provide resources planters can access on their own. We purchased "Breaking The 200 Barrier" (online training planters can watch on their own with their leaders). I am working on an updated District Church Planting Manual for each planter. And as my role is to help each church plant become a healthy self-sustaining organized C&MA church we have begun to assist them in setting up finances, bank accounts, advisory committees, membership classes, and organizational meetings in light of our C&MA manual.

Support

Support is both emotional, spiritual, and financial. Emotional support means letting planters share their praises, problems, and possibilities while I listen and pray for them. It means linking planters with churches/pastors and helping them raise up a prayer team during fund raising.

Financial support means helping our churches/pastors give. Using numbers from our National Office (from your year-end reports, which are always accurate) we conservatively figured 4,500 regular church attenders in our District. Dividing our previous church planting spending (\$211k) by 4,500 (assuming people give 50 weeks a year, 2 weeks off for vacation) if each attender gave \$1.24 more a week we would be back at \$211k. However, I am not advocating that amount. Taking faith filled risks seems at odds with only trusting trust God for \$1.24 a week. Instead, I'm praying that giving amount doubles (so we can begin more churches). All this assumes new giving by individuals inside, and outside, our District. One church elder recently told me he wanted to give to Church Planting. I feared his gift was his local church tithe or global Great Commission Fund gift. But he and his spouse had been blessed above those and he wondered how to give to church planting. So we've made it easier to give electronically (since many do not use cash/checkbooks, doing purchases/bills online). Our website and Facebook pages now allow easy electronic giving, or people can download the tithe.ly app to give via phone or tablet.

Potential Solution

The problem is real. The praises are growing. The potential is we can be God's solution. When God sees a pastor or church that says, "If you bless me I will not hold onto it but give it all away" something supernatural happens. God opens the floodgates of heaven and pours out a blessing. We know God is willing none in our National Capital Region should perish. Even if 80% of churches plateau or decline nationally we can pray and give. God will enable us to support gifted planters who plant churches that reach people we can't.

Thanks

Luann and I are grateful to the Lord for this opportunity to serve Him in one of the most pivotal regions of the world. Years ago, when God called me to raise up leaders by teaching evangelism, I never imagined He would bring me to this. I never imagined a ministry that pulls together so many diverse things He has done for me in transitioning and starting new churches. This is a complex role of diverse ethnicities, planters, and needs. So, I appreciate your prayers.

I am grateful for our District Superintendent's and DEXCOM's vision to take a step of faith bringing me on staff. It has been a faith stretching year for all of us. I am grateful to First Alliance Silver Spring for giving me housing this year (without them this would not have been possible). I am grateful for working with Rev. Conley, Rev. Towns, Laura, Yenory, Gladys and Betty. And I am grateful for all of you who have prayed for me, Luann, and our church plants.

Respectfully submitted,
Rev. Tom Brunner
Church Planting Director