



How Do I Know I am Qualified To Be a Church Planter?

Communities across America and Canada need good church planters. But it takes a special leader to plant a healthy church, one that grows quantitatively and qualitatively. Effective church planters are special, not because they are better than other people, but because they are uniquely gifted.

Church planters also have an important ministry. They are concerned with building God's kingdom on earth, and we know that church planting is the most effective method of fulfilling the Great Commission. Like the leaders who have gone before us, we need unique people to plant churches in North American communities. Here are additional reasons why selecting the right people is critical to church planting.

The harvest is plentiful. North America can no longer be viewed as Christian. Many individuals are unchurched or have never committed themselves to Christ. And far too many pastors are failing to reap the harvest.

Church planting is a high calling. John Maxwell, a nationally and internationally known author and speaker, reminds us that effective ministry rises and falls on leadership. In private industry, competent management leads successful businesses. In athletics, competent coaches lead winning teams. In ministry, competent church planters lead successful new churches. Because it is a high calling, church planting should not be entered into lightly or unadvisedly.

NAGGING QUESTIONS

What you always wanted to know but couldn't find an answer.

As you consider the possibility of becoming a church planter, many questions begin to turn over in your mind. You want answers, the right answers. In this section, we will answer some nagging questions about who can become a church planter. These answers will help you to fill in the gaps where you lack information and overcome your preconceived ideas or misinformation. More important, these answers will begin to shed light on your potential as a church planter.

First, is there a certain personality type that is ideally suited for church planting?

Personality plays a role in everyone's job performance. For example, an obnoxious person will have difficulty as a salesperson. But personality is not everything when it comes to success on a job. Individuals with radically different personalities can be equally successful or unsuccessful in the same line of work. The best predictors of success are job-related skills. For every candidate, it must be determined the extent to which the person possesses these skills.

Second, are there special characteristics needed of church planters?

The model profile of the church planter is applicable in most settings. Certainly, a church planter must also *contextualize* ministry. Each geographical region and group of people have some predominant customs, traditions, and cultural values. Here is a good rule of thumb: meet the requirements of the church planter profile first and ability to contextualize the gospel second. Contextualizing without competency as a church planter will not result in success.

In some cases, you might believe that God is calling you to serve among the very people and very community that you know well. In this case, you would be what we call *indigenous*; in other words you come from that community and people. By knowing your context, you are in a good position to know what works and what does not work among your people. This should contribute greatly to your effectiveness as a church planter in your own setting.

Third, isn't the call to church planting enough to substantiate one as a church planter?

Numerous individuals have felt a call to plant churches. Many of these "called" pastors have planted churches without any objective confirmation. The usual logic is that the felt call is the obvious will of God. Tragically, many of these founding pastors have failed. It is not unusual to have more failures than successes. Throughout the history of the church, an authentic call to ministry has been confirmed by responsible leaders in the church. God often reveals Himself in decision-making through shared wisdom and discretion. Today, church leaders have a tool to enhance the decision-making process. Consequently, the personal call is considered necessary, but it is not the only consideration used for choosing church planters.

Fourth, can a person plant churches among people groups other than his own?

Cross-cultural ministry has a biblical precedent. The apostle Paul, a staunch Jew, planted the original churches among the Gentiles. To effectively minister cross-culturally, church planters must show humility, respect cultural differences, accept their limitations, and demonstrate a willingness to learn. The last thing they want to do is impose their culture on their constituents. The same expectations would hold in situations beyond the usual understanding of race and ethnicity, to other kinds of cross-cultural examples such as generational, regional, and socioeconomic.

Fifth, are church planters born or taught?

Church planters have specialized giftedness within the body of Christ. The apostle Paul could say just as easily in Ephesians 4:1, "And some he called to be church planters." Indeed, church planters have natural gifting. At the same time, most church planters can refine their skills and increase their effectiveness through training and mentoring. We should first look for potential church planters who have natural gifting in the key performance areas. We should then build on their giftedness.

Sixth, do church planters need a seminary degree?

Some church planters have seminary training. Others do not. The value of graduate theological education cannot be overstated. Neither can that value be misconstrued. Theological training helps a pastor bring a sharper and more in-depth message. However, it takes more than a theological education to plant churches. Some studies of church planters have found that seminary training did not necessarily relate to their success as church planters. In fact, a seminary degree does not guarantee the planting of a healthy church.

Seventh, do church planters need prior pastoral experience?

Pastoral experience is advisable but not a bottom-line requirement. Successful church planters have emerged out of a wide spectrum of professions. Individuals from business, teaching, athletics, law, military, sports, crafts, and industry are among the numerous types of professions held by those who have taken up the church planter mantle. What successful church planters have in common is their gifting.

Eighth, can single people plant churches?

The majority of church planters are married, and most of these are men. There are unmarried church planters, and a few of these are women. Marital status carries its advantages and disadvantages. The major advantage of singleness is that the church planter has more discretionary time to devote to ministry. The major disadvantages are the perceptions of other people and the increased vulnerability to sexual temptation. Each church planter must weigh the relative advantages and disadvantages of his or her marital status.

Ninth, does the church planter's spouse need to help plant the church?

Spousal cooperation is critical to the success of a married church planter. But spousal cooperation does not necessarily mean the spouse plays a direct role in planting. What is most important is that the couple defines for itself the roles expected of each partner? For some couples, both partners actively participate in planting. For other couples, the spouse is indirectly involved, providing emotional support and encouragement from the sidelines. Having an explicit agreement between partners is more important than having a predefined script for all couples.

CHURCH PLANTER PROFILE

What does it take to be an effective church planter?

Charles Ridley conducted a study of church planters in the United States and Canada. His subjects in the study represented 13 Protestant denominations. Based upon his research and subsequent field testing, he developed a list of 13 prominent performance dimensions. For over a decade, these dimensions have been used to select church planters. Here is his list of dimensions and their definitions.

1. ***Visionizing Capacity***: Ability to project a vision into the future, persuasively sell it to other people, and bring the vision into reality.
2. ***Intrinsically Motivated***: Approaches ministry as a self-starter and commits to excellence through long and hard work.
3. ***Creates Ownership of Ministry***: Instills in the people a sense of personal responsibility for the growth and success of ministry and trains leaders to reproduce leaders.
4. ***Reaches the Unchurched and Lost***: Ability to develop rapport, break through barriers, and encourage unchurched people to examine themselves and commit to a walk with God and lead people to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.
5. ***Spousal Cooperation***: Creating a workable partnership that agrees on ministry priorities, each partner's role and involvement in ministry, and the integration of ministry with family life.
6. ***Effectively Builds Relationships***: Takes the initiative in getting to know people and deepening relationships as a basis for more effective ministry.
7. ***Committed to Church Growth***: Values church growth as a method for building more and better disciples; strives to achieve numerical growth within the context of spiritual and relational growth.
8. ***Responsiveness to the Community***: Adapts the ministry to the culture and needs of the local residents.
9. ***Utilizes Giftedness of Others***: Equips and releases people to do ministry according to their spiritual gifts.
10. ***Flexible and Adaptable***: Ability to adjust to change and ambiguity, shift priorities when necessary, and handle multiple tasks at once.
11. ***Builds Group Cohesiveness***: Enables the group to work collaboratively toward a common goal and skillfully handles divisiveness and disunifying elements.
12. ***Demonstrates Resilience***: Ability to sustain oneself emotionally and physically through setbacks, losses, disappointments and failures.

13. **Exercises Faith:** Demonstrates how one's convictions are translated into personal and ministry decisions.

SIZING YOURSELF UP

How can you tell if you fit into church planter shoes?

Knowing what it takes to be a church planter is one thing. Determining whether or not you have what it takes is another. There is a popular saying that goes like this: "If the shoe fits, wear it." You now begin the process of answering the question: "Do I fit the shoes of a church planter?"

It is recommended that you participate in what is called a Church Planter Assessment. Contact the associational missionary or the state director of missions and inquire about participating in an assessment. Generally, this activity will require you to commit one day. This activity will help you determine "if the shoe fits."

This material was originally written by Charles Ridley for use in the Church Planting System, this material was modified by Jose A. Hernandez.