

A GUIDE TO ANNUAL PLANNING IN THE NEW CHURCH

The **IMPORTANCE** of Planning

Someone has so aptly said, "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail." Unfortunately, however, many feel that planning in the church is "unspiritual." They say that we should simply be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's leading and follow Him. Certainly we should maintain an intimate walk with the Spirit and follow His direction at every turn.

This does not, however, negate the need for planning. In Luke 14 Jesus strongly communicated the demands of discipleship. He said that a disciple's love for his family should be seen as "hate" when compared to his or her love for Him. He also stated that if a person were not willing to bear his or her own cross (an instrument of death to self), and come after Him, he or she could not be his disciple.

In the context of this "spiritual" admonition, Jesus Christ then said, "For which of you, intending to build a tower (or we may say a 'new church'), does not ***sit down first and count the cost*** (italics mine), whether he has enough to finish it—lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' " (vv. 28-29) Our Lord then gives another example in which a king should evaluate his military strength before entering into battle. He uses the words, "What king . . . does not ***sit down first and consider*** (italics mine) whether he is able . . . " (v. 31) To "sit down first and count the cost or consider" is clearly a planning process.

Why does the new church exist? What is its purpose as a congregation? Ultimately it is to ***make disciples*** (Matt. 28:18-20). If the church planter and his leaders take seriously this biblical purpose, they will ***sit down first and count the cost or consider*** how to build the tower (the new church) and how to attack the enemy (Satan). This will involve a prayerful and careful planning process. It should be ***prayerful*** in that the leaders should spend quality and quantity time with God so that He can reveal to them where He is already at work. Once that is revealed, a planning process can be put in place to assist the church in joining God on mission. It should also be ***careful*** taking into consideration all of the proper components of good planning.

The **INTENTIONALITY** of Planning

God Himself does planning on behalf of His people! Jeremiah quoted God when he said, " 'For I know the plans I have for you', declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.' " (Jer. 29:11 NIV) The writer of Proverbs lifted this to the next level by affirming, "We should make our plans—counting on God to direct us." (Prov. 16:9 LB)

Dr. Jim Chavis, Director of the Church Development Division of the Florida Baptist Convention, says, "Planning includes all of the decision-making process that

helps you determine what God wants you to be, where you are now, where God wants you to go, and how God wants you to get there.”

Dr. Ken Westbrook, former Director of the Church Growth Department of the Florida Baptist Convention, in his “Florida Church Planning Guide . . . Planning an Expedition of Growth and Ministry,” page 1, echoes the intentionality of planning in the church.

God is always calling His people to move from where they are to where they ought to be. Our life on earth is a pilgrimage. An expedition, a journey of adventure, is a great analogy for annual church planning. There are at least four points of comparison: First, every journey should have a **purpose**. What exactly is God calling us to do—to be? Where does He want us to go from here?

Second, every journey should have a **destination**. In annual planning, the church looks down the road a short distance into the future and defines a destination. It is called goal setting. The church asks, “How far can we go this year on the journey?”

Third, every journey should have a **map**. Annual planning must be more intentional and deliberate than a mental notion. **MAP** stands for **M**nistry **A**ction **P**lans. Action Plans describe exactly how the destination (goals) will be achieved.

Fourth, every journey should have a **departure date**. After all the plans have been made, and the MAPs drawn, the church must launch out on the expedition. It is a journey of faith, courage, and excitement into a yet undiscovered world. As the church launches into the future, it must be reminded that it does not travel alone. As the Israelites traveled with a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, so God directs every step into the future.

Chavis, in his piece simply titled “Planning,” (a power point presentation used in a Florida conference), gives four (4) planning steps.

1. Develop a Purpose Statement—Why are we here?
2. Develop Priority Concerns—Where is our opportunity?
3. Develop Priority Goals—What will we accomplish?
4. Develop Priority Actions—How will we do it?

The intentionality of good planning for a new church cannot be overstated. The remainder of this worksheet gives specific suggestions for good planning to the church planter and his leadership team.

Practical suggestions for annual planning:

1. The church planter should get away with God to ask for His focus in the coming year. He should project a theme around which to build the annual planning. (I Tim. 3:12)
2. The church planter and his leadership team should take an annual planning retreat. The team should be composed of the church planter, any staff whether paid or unpaid and laity who represent the functions of the church (worship, evangelism, discipleship, ministry, fellowship and resource management).
 - a. The retreat should center on discovering God's plan for the coming year. The church planter should share the new theme and other insights gleaned from his personal time with God. This will help set a spiritual tone and ensure the productivity of the experience together.
 - b. The full team should begin by reviewing the new church's foundational statements (purpose, values, vision, beliefs). The church planter may choose to present the power point provided titled, "Purpose Driven Church Defined." This will remind the team members that the church's biblical purpose, values, vision, and beliefs should drive all of their plans.
 - c. After clarifying the new church's focus, the discipleship team leader should guide the full team in an intense season of prayer. This time should be specifically designed to keep the group on task in prayer. Both large and small groups should be arranged.
 - d. When the prayer time concludes, the church planter or his designee should facilitate a brainstorming session. Team members should be given opportunity to share what they personally sensed God saying to them during the season of prayer. A designated member should write all input on the board and it should be entered into a lap top computer by the appointed "scribe."
 - e. Care should be taken not to allow the group to become "sidetracked" on interesting but not intentional ideas. The focus must be trained on articulating the church's ministry plan for the coming year. It will likely be in outline form with rough images, but it can be refined after the retreat.
 - f. The appropriate phase of the Church Planting Blueprint should be consulted to help stay on track. Various

worksheets should be duplicated and placed in a retreat workbook for immediate reference. Some of the worksheets needed will be: Designing a Powerful Prayer Ministry in the New Church; Community Needs Assessment; Prayer Walking; Team Basics; Key Questions for Finding and Keeping Unchurched People; Influencing Intentional Growth in the New Church; and Special Events.

- g.** The resulting annual plan should address how the new church can best meet the church and community needs in the coming year. The church planter should bring the results of his earlier community needs assessment or if it is outdated another assessment should be done.

- h.** Attention should be given to goal setting. The leadership and the church will not be able to determine the effectiveness of the next year of ministry, unless they have set some specific expectations. The goals should be numerical, datable, verifiable, challenging, yet realistic. The following "Suggested Goal Areas" were adapted from Westbrook's Planning Guide on page 5 and may be customized to the specific plan of any new church.

SUGGESTED GOAL AREAS

All goals are to be achieved by

- Baptisms/evangelism: Total of _____ baptisms or _____ number of times sharing the gospel by all members
- New congregations: Start at least _____ new church type missions or multihousing ministries
- Worship: An average morning worship attendance of _____
- Bible study/small group: To achieve an enrollment of _____
- Discipleship: Steps to Spiritual Maturity involvement of _____ people Walking in the Word
- Mission Education: Combined missions programs of _____
- Stewardship: A total of _____ in annual undesignated church receipts
- Missions: Participate in _____ volunteer mission projects
- Ministry: Involve _____ people in needs-based community ministry projects
- Mission support: Increase mission giving by _____%
- Additional goals: Express goals unique to your new church that address identified needs

- i.** Each member of the leadership team should be given ample time alone to reflect on the areas of the annual

planning that relate to his or her area of responsibility. The church planter and staff members should “float” and be available to team members requesting assistance.

- j. A final session, facilitated by the church planter, should give each team member an opportunity to share preliminary plans for accomplishing their goals. These plans should be written out and given to the designated “scribe” for inclusion into the retreat recommendations. End the retreat with “popcorn” prayer.
3. After the retreat, the church planter and staff should compose a “creative team.” They will meet with the team, share ideas from the retreat and solicit their help in refining and promoting the plan. This may involve four to six (4-6) weeks of work.
 4. After the leadership team approves the plan, it should be presented to the church. Once adopted, implementation can begin without additional approvals.

The **IMPLEMENTATION** of Planning

Once the church has adopted the annual plan, the church planter and staff along with the leadership team should begin the process of implementation. Two worksheets are provided to assist in this effort. They are the “Strategic Planning Model for Church Planters” and the “Church Planter’s Game Plan.” This will enable the team to translate the annual plan into specific objectives, goals, and action plans (OGAPs).

The church planter along with the leader of the Resource Management Team will give instruction on how to work through the process of laying out the OGAPs. Two to four (2-4) weeks should be given to each team leader for this assignment. They will each call their teams together, interpret the assignment, and guide them through the work. An estimated cost should be tied to each action plan.

At an agreed upon date the Leadership Team will reconvene to report. The official church calendar (There can only be ONE official church calendar!) will be built for the coming year’s plan as dates are negotiated among the leaders. Their proposed action plans will be placed on the calendar and agreed upon by the full team. According to Westbrook on page 5, “You are not planning a calendar, you are calendaring a plan.”

This process can be expedited if the church planter or his designee will do some work with the calendar before the Leadership Team meeting. The following items can be listed with appropriate dates, if available: denominational events; local dates (school, community celebrations, sports activities, etc.); holidays; repetitive events (business conferences, baptism, Lord’s Supper, anniversaries). Care should be given to “plan around” many of these so as not to “compete” with them.

In attempting to decide the best time of the year to calendar events, the following suggestions from Westbrook (page 6) will be helpful:

1. Balance the calendar. Don't overload one or two months and leave the rest empty.
2. Plan major ministry actions at the natural growth periods of your church. (Every new church leadership will have to study this.)
3. Reserve the summer for planning and other administrative matters as well as youth activities. Use the summer for getting ready for the next year.
4. This plan must be presented to the budget planning committee. It is essential that the calendar and the budget be coordinated.

I am suggesting that the Resource Management Team leader be involved from the very beginning of the planning process. He or she can gather the agreed upon action plans, add the other fixed costs (personnel, insurances, facilities, maintenance, missions, etc.) and call his team together. This team along with the church planter and staff will come to a consensus on the budget for the next year based on the plan. The church will then be asked to approve the budget. Once approved, the leadership teams will be responsible for administering the budget under the guidance of the Resource Management Team.

Chavis reduces the process to the simplest form. He says that implementation is to "Do God's will!" It is "focusing resources to accomplish actions." Three areas to process are: 1. People—Who will do it? 2. Calendar—When will we do it? 3. Budget—How much will it cost?

The ongoing work of the Leadership Team should involve steps:

1. Meet monthly and commit the church's ministries to the Lord.
2. Review the previous month's activities and accomplishments.
3. Review the church goals and regularly report to the church.
4. Preview the next three months:
 - a. Ask for reports from all team leaders for coming events.
 - b. Offer help to those who need it. Some events and activities will be so massive that all will need to pitch in.
 - c. Reschedule, modify or cancel plans, if absolutely necessary.
 - d. Review goals and accomplishments.
 - e. Celebrate victories and give God all the glory in corporate worship.

Chavis offers a final word on *evaluation*. He asks a question, "Did we do it?" 1. Did we reach our goals? 2. What went right? 3. What went wrong? 4. What follow-up action is required?

Written by Dr. George A. Thomasson, Director of the Church Planting Department of the Florida Baptist Convention.