

top ten church planting mistakes

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mistake #1 - Neglecting the Great Commandment in Pursuit of the Great Commission

Most people who gravitate to church planting have a much higher interest in evangelism and reaching people who are “not yet convinced.” They love the challenge of seeing people enter into the grace of the gospel of Christ. Some are downright zealous to fulfill The Great Commission, (see Matthew 28: 18 – 20).

However, in their zeal to fulfill the Great Commission they neglect The Great Commandment, which is “to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength; and your neighbor as yourself.” The consequence of this can lead to a shriveled heart.

Mistake #2 - Failing to Take Opposition Seriously

Major opposition to new churches exists in three forms:

- Institutional: probably the most “discouraging” form of opposition experienced by 7 of 10 church planters. This has to do with other Christians---pastors, supervisors, and lay people--- who offer little or no support, be it emotional, financial, relational, or spiritual. Bottom line: planters are not prepared for this.
- Cultural: today’s civic leaders don’t necessarily celebrate the arrival of a new church in their area. It means more traffic and fewer taxes. Don’t be surprised at their tepid reception.
- Spiritual: Whether or not your theology holds to belief in a personal devil, after starting a new church, you will believe in the devil...and his demons! See Ephesians chapter six!!!

Mistake #3 - A Love Affair with One’s Fantasy Statement Blinds the Planter to the Mission Field

Planters who begin with an ideology or methodology before walking their mission field greatly reduce any possibility of success. Successful planters have always started with who they are trying to reach. Then they develop methods necessary to reach the people in it.

Mistake #4 - Premature Launch

Launching too soon with too few people is still the # 1 reason new churches fail.

New churches need a proper gestation period before birth. Birthed too soon places the new church in a “crisis mode” from Day One, and quickly drains money and morale.

While many people are anxious to start as soon as possible, somehow fearing they will miss the opportunity, I’ve rarely seen a church suffer from waiting until the appropriate time.

These days launching with just a few people, will only produce a “few more.”

Mistake #5 - Evangelism & Reaching New People Cease after the Grand Opening

Many new churches spend lots of activity recruiting new people and do a pretty good job of it...until, the Grand Opening. And then, as if someone flips a switch, everyone moves into a maintenance mode, seeking to care for those who came.

Pastoral care is essential to the development of new disciples, but without a plan to continue to reach new people, the church will quickly plateau and cease to celebrate “professions of faith.”

Mistake #6 - No Plan for the Other Six Days of the Week

New churches can so fixate on getting people to show up on Sunday morning that they neglect to consider what to do IF they actually come. Some plan must be given to how to connect people to each other and to God, apart from the celebration service. Typically this will happen in a smaller social setting. The pastor must develop a plan to “hand off” people who want the pastor’s attention.

Mistake # 7 Fear of Talking about Money Until it’s too Late

Many new churches suffer from the myth that “unchurched people shy away from church because it’s always talking about money.” This could not be further from the truth. Most non-Christian people know that it takes money to do just about anything in this world. They are turned off by the same thing that turns off Christians---manipulative, emotional, irrational appeals.

To leave the topic possessions and money out of the message of the gospel is to undermine the very teaching of Jesus himself.

Remember, it takes money to do ministry and if you want to do more ministry, it will take more money.

New churches must come up with clear plans as to how they will plan to sustain their ministry in the early years, when typically the offerings of the faithful are not enough to cover ministry costs.

Mistake # 8 - Failure of the Church to Act Its Age & Size

Because most church planters and members of their team have no experience with a new church and its structure, they all tend to want it to look and act older than it is. Even though it’s just months old, they want it to act like a “full service” church, reasoning that anyone who comes will be impressed with its size and maturity.

Quite the opposite happens. Such pretense raises expectations in those who visit, and when they find little substance behind the hype, they leave quite frustrated and disappointed. Con artists call this a “bait & switch.”

New churches are better served by being honest and offering only a few essential ministries, expanding as they grow.

Mistake #9 - Formalizing Leadership Too Soon

Some new churches want to look and feel more official, so they move to form “official” board members and status. This is a natural move, but must be resisted.

There is a difference in being organized and being official. Certainly the former is essential, but the latter should be deferred until at least three years after public launch.

The Bible says to identify leaders who have proven themselves in the fellowship. This does not happen early or quickly, as many of those who start with a new church may depart early in the church’s development. Time will let everyone know who needs to be serving in leadership positions.

For the time being, what the church plant needs are worker bees and a few coordinators to organize the essential ministries. The focus needs to remain on the mission, not on managing the fledgling community.

Mistake #10 - Using the “One Size Fits All” Paradigm for the New Church

In hearing about successful new churches, the temptation is to “cut & paste” what they have done. Warning: their situation is not your situation. Each church must do its own homework. Certainly successful churches methods may be compelling, but if they are not compatible with your mission field, who cares? You may end up alienating the very people you are trying to reach.

Take the time to develop an indigenous approach to your mission field.

