AFRICAN AMERICAN BEST PRACTICES

Things to Consider in New Church Planting in an African American Context

Leadership

Pastors of new black churches should be entrepreneurial and have great organizational, motivational and communication skills. Additionally, they…

• must possess a clear vision for what the impact of the new church will mean to the community
• must have a clear understanding of United Methodist requirements around new church planting
• must be able to network with other successful planters across denominational lines

Worship

Historically, worship is very important to the black church experience. A new church plant in an African American context may choose to consider first building a core team with a central focus on worship. Building small group ministries is vital to a new church start. However, in the African American context, small group ministries alone may not yield the numbers needed to launch effectively. Most effective African American new church projects launch their ministries with a high quality, culturally relevant, passionate worship experience designed for their target population.

Building a Critical Mass to Launch the New Church

Critical mass represents the number of people needed to launch and grow a new church. If a new black church plant chooses to build a critical mass through the worship experience and task teams, instead of small group ministries, consider having a season of “preview” worship services prior to weekly launch. Seek to reach the critical mass benchmark through these services before your official launch of the church and also develop work teams and small groups working toward the launch of the new church. To start worship officially without reaching your critical mass benchmark could result in slow numeric growth and the loss of momentum.
Location, Location, Location

When considering the “location” for a new church plant in a black community or one targeting African Americans, please don’t assume that just because a good existing United Methodist building is available in an older established, transitioning neighborhood, the building is automatically a “good location” to plant a new black church. New Churches need new people to grow. If the church plant agrees to launch in an existing, older, established neighborhood, make sure the planter and launch team have a “new vision” and new ministry ideas to bring to an established, transitioned community. If the planter decides to plant using the existing church building, the launch ministry plans also will need to include maintenance and upkeep of the existing facility. When planting a new church in an existing facility, continue to ask the question, “How will we attract new people to this place?”

Financial/Economic Context of Target Community

The potential financial strength of a new black church plant varies from conference to conference. Research the financial demographics of the target community to assess the potential of the area to support a new United Methodist church. This information should not deter the conference from planting in this community but rather offer a realistic perspective in setting benchmarks around the present and future financial viability of the new church. It might take a longer time period and more people for the church to become financially strong in some target communities. The new church also can explore opportunities to create self-sustaining ministries with the ability to fund and contribute funds to the budget of the new church. At the start of the church plant it is important to teach stewardship to cultivate generosity within the congregation.

Community Outreach/Development Opportunities

A community, the new church and its planter should be able to see the congregation as a partner in an existing network of community resources. In addition, the planter…

- must have the ability to build bridges, meet unmet needs, and bring resources to the communities that previously were not available
- must be willing to serve with and as a part of other community organizations to build trust and establish “street” credentials

To explore African American church planting, contact Rev. Candace M. Lewis (clewis@gbod.org) at (877) 899-2780, xt.7078.