

A Brief Overview of the Acts 29 Network

by Scott Thomas, Acts 29 Network Director

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1. How and when did Acts 29 begin?

Acts 29 was founded in 2000 with Mark Driscoll, pastor of Mars Hill Church in Seattle when it was about 200 in attendance and David Nicholas, a Presbyterian pastor (now retired) of a large church in Boca Raton, Florida. They formed the network to plant qualified, entrepreneurial men who held to a reformed soteriology (salvation) and were willing to engage urban cities with the gospel.

2. Why does Acts 29 exist? What are its chief goals and key emphases?

Acts 29 exists to make gospel-transformed disciples by planting church planting churches.

Gospel Message: The major emphasis of Acts 29 is the gospel. The gospel is the power of God for salvation and sadly many churches are ashamed of proclaiming it (Rom. 1:16). As a result we may not be experiencing the fruit of transformation in our churches that is normally associated with the gospel (Col. 1:4-6; 2 Peter 1:3-9). God has given us His Word to proclaim to all nations in the power of the Spirit. Gospel transformation occurs with gospel proclamation.

The gospel can be (cautiously) summarized in the following manner: *Jesus Christ, God's promised rescuer and ruler lived our life, died our death and rose again in triumphant evidence as the first-fruits of the new creation to bring forgiven sinners together by the Holy Spirit to live under his gracious reign as His Kingdom people.* Our full doctrinal statement can be found at: <http://acts29network.org/about/doctrine/>.

Gospel Men: Our church planters are assessed on the basis of their qualification as elders, according to Scripture and their character as examined in an extensive review of their life and doctrine (1 Tim. 4:16). This includes a thorough examination of a man's leadership in his home. A man's family is his first congregation and his wife and children are his first disciples. We are looking for men who have been transformed by the gospel and are captured by the grace of Jesus and are following His mission to make disciples.

Gospel Mission: We believe church planting is the best way to take the gospel to the community it desires to serve. We believe new churches are the best means for Spirit-led followers of Jesus to make disciples of all people groups (Matthew 28:19-20). We believe church planting is the central process of evangelism in the Book of Acts, but also that doing so can spread the Gospel to every people or group, large or small, in every corner of the world. Throughout the Book of Acts we read narratives of the Gospel being planted in city after city. The book ends abruptly in Acts 28. Our mission with Acts 29 therefore is to carry on the discipleship making, church planting in the culture where God has sovereignly placed us (Acts 17:26-27).



3. Who are the key leaders within the ministry?

Mark Driscoll, President and Founder; Scott Thomas, Chairman and Director; Darrin Patrick, First Vice President; Jeff Vanderstelt, Second Vice President; Board members: Matt Chandler, Chan Kilgore, Eric Mason and church planting strategist, Tyler Powell. Other regional leaders are Brian Howard, David Fairchild, Russ McKendry, Daniel Montgomery, Tyler Jones and Ed Marcelle.

4. How is Acts 29 reaching out Internationally?

We are blessed with a team of church planters who focus their energies toward the International opportunities while leading their respective church plants. Steve Timmis is directing Acts 29 Western Europe as an established leader, author and innovator. He is seeking to establish regional leaders in every country as a church-planting center to identify, assess, and train, resource, coach and collaborate for multiplying disciples in Western Europe.

Our International team is seeking to identify national leaders who can lead a work of God in their respective nation. This team has trained thousands of church planters across the world and we have church planting centers in South Africa, India, Uganda, Thailand, Latin America and Brazil, among others. The goal is to equip the national leaders to begin a network of churches in each country. Each of these International church-planting networks will eventually operate autonomously with indigenous leadership and oversight.

5. What distinguishes Acts 29 from a denomination?

In some ways networks strive to have all of the good aspects of a denomination and limit the negative aspects (there might be a couple negatives, maybe). We align under a common doctrine and a common name but Acts 29 exercises no authority in our member churches and we require no funds directed to the organization.

Additionally, we have no central controlling office. We currently have 11 regional networks that cooperate together for the advancement of the gospel. The central office has a serving, resourcing and unifying aim. We exist to serve the 11 networks to assist their effective regional church planting. We have an IRS required board for our 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. The board serves the regions like elders serve a church: shepherding, encouraging, resourcing, teaching, coaching, training and equipping as well as the required legal covering.

Our motto is "Churches Planting Churches." It is not "Networks (or denominations or even individuals) Planting Churches." Every local church's eldership assumes responsibility for their multiplying of men and churches. They direct funds to whomever they determine best expresses this advancement of the gospel in their context. Some Acts 29 churches direct their



funds through their denominational affiliation and others choose their funding independently. We support whatever method they choose as long as they are multiplying churches. Our goal in requesting that ten percent of their income go to church planting is for their benefit of the local church and not for the network. We pray that each church has a church planting DNA established by setting aside \$10 for every \$100 beginning with the very first offering received.

6. Do all Acts 29 churches follow a prescribed method or style?

We are united in the gospel and not in methods. It is a central core value. Our mission is to make disciples of all nations (people groups). We see church planting as an effective means to making disciples. But for theological reasons, we choose not to dictate how a church planter does that in his unique context and with his unique skills and gifts. Our program, tactic, bottom line and method is the gospel.

7. How do you expect Acts 29 will be different in ten years?

I am assured that we are still called to make disciples until Jesus comes. I am assured that church planting is not a fad, although the methods are changing in how we multiply churches. I can envision a network of networks totaling 500,000 people in the next ten years. Currently we have 11 geographic networks that align under Acts 29. That number will expand rapidly. Any organization that tries to maintain or control what they have will become an institution and an institution soon becomes a museum where they talk about the good old days. A museum quickly becomes a crypt for the once living.

We cannot control a work of God anymore than we can control the wind. But we can fly our kites higher in the wind. We will continue to release more line into the wind through influence and we will subsequently have less control of the outcomes. But that's where faith and mission converge and we are willing to take that risk for the glory of God and the expansion of His Kingdom.

8. What are some of the ways Acts 29 has seen evidence of God's hand of blessing?

God has chosen to bless us in spite of ourselves. We have unmerited influence all across the world. It is very humbling. Opportunities are granted to us because people are watching what is happening through the great group of pastors and churches affiliated with Acts 29. We have over 450 men in the application phase currently who want to align with us. Our only subject is Jesus, our only mode is the gospel and our only focus is the mission of Jesus to make disciples. The fact that we have almost 300 strong, dominant, take charge pastors who work together as Acts 29 is a testament to the gospel's power to unite together for the glory of God. That's grace at work!

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