

## What is Replanting?

By Scott Thomas  
Acts 29 Director

Christ established the church, is the head of the church, appoints elders to lead it and personally died for its members. Yet, an alarming number of churches all over America are closing their doors for good. Empty, neglected church buildings stand with their peeling paint as morbid headstones for these former houses of hope. George Barna said that 3,500 churches every year are closing. George Sweet: said that 74% of all churches in America are in decline.

Alongside many of these decayed bodies are bouncy baby churches toddling along with limited resources, stability and identities. Most of the newly planted churches are led by young, energetic, talented (though not always experienced) men who have a vision for a living body—one without the stench of death emanating in every worship gathering.

### Church Decay

Decaying churches are *somewhat* interested to find a solution—but only if it's a quick fix. Like a couch potato who hopes to get healthy by watching Richard Simmons' workouts (short shorts and all), the flabby church likes to *see* faith in action but are much too comfortable in their spiritually lethargic Lazy Boy to get up and press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called them in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:14).

We try every idea and program to incite growth. We do things programmatically for 40 days or we hire a consulting firm to tell us how to market our church for growth without intruding God or our own lives. We try to hold on to our antiquated programs, traditions, buildings, money, and tithing units.

Instead of signing "Do Not Resuscitate" orders or trying one more fad-laden religious program, the sickly body could instead become alive by replanting itself. Churches are attempting life-saving measures by transitioning their bodies or by turning them around. They are trying to bring about change in the church without killing it.<sup>1</sup>

### Replanting

Dictionary.com defines replanting: "To plant (something) again or in a new place..." In a church replant, a church avoids permanent death by recognizing it will no longer flourish unless conditions are drastically changed to facilitate growth. A "transition church" on the other hand, starts with a healthy organism and applies biblical principles to foster new growth.

What I am proposing is that we *intentionally* bring death to a comatose body so that it could become the seed planted in nutrient-rich soil that gives life to a *new* body—not a stuffed carcass. Jesus said that unless a seed dies, it cannot give life (John 12:23-25). Jesus Himself was the first

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<sup>1</sup> With apologies to the authors of these fine books that are effective in a different context.



fruits sacrificially planted in the ground (tomb) as an offering to His Father and by doing so, made life possible for others.

“Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel” (2 Timothy 2:8).

Instead of holding on with inordinate pride to the past, a replanted church dies to its former glory, its methods, its structure, and its practices and strategically plants its resources (body, budget, board and buildings) into the spiritual ground. The result is a virile replanted church with a God-renewed mission to give life to the spiritually dead community in which it ministers.

I believe God is glorified significantly when this happens. It can be a corporate example of the spiritual renewal many individuals need. Is your church ready to live by dying?

### **A Biblical Solution**

Jesus said that we live by dying (John 12:23-26). This is true in the natural, agronomic world, in the spiritual world, for our own spiritual lives and is true for churches.

If we are to glorify God (John 12:23), we have to die daily to see a bountiful harvest (John 12:24). Christ tells us that a grain of wheat can fall on the ground and still be alone or the Greek word *monos*—single. It infers that it is non-reproductive. Many people who come to church and look like Christians can actually just be *monos*—non-reproductive. Many people who claim they are spiritual may only be a *monos* seed on the ground.

It is only when we die that we release life. A kernel of corn has a hard shell that is protecting the life-giving germ inside of it. When it is put into the ground, the outer shell decomposes in the earth and releases the germ to draw its nutrients from the ground where it is buried. As the embryo grows, it eventually produces a plant that will reproduce that one seed thousands of times. Christ said we would produce much grain; Gr., *polus*; abundant fruit.

Christ had to die to give life. He couldn't just be beaten (fall to the ground). He had to die so that He could live and produce much fruit. We are the fruit of that firstfruit in Christ if we have accepted the call of God.

If we try to hold on to what we have, we will lose everything. If we hand it over to God to use, we reap an eternal multiplicity of rewards for God's glory (John 12:25). If we have affection for our lives here—our temporal life—we bring destruction to our life. We don't just lose it as we do something valuable. We destroy it. John Calvin said if we love our own life we actually *devote it to destruction*. This passage has a strange play on words, meanings and nuances. It is basically saying that if we try to live our life here, we will destroy our lives. But if we destroy our lives, we will live.

We either serve ourselves by following our own dreams, dollars and desires or we serve God by following His plan to save the lost world—no matter what it costs, including our own lives (John 12:26). We serve Christ by His words and by His works. We learn diligently about Him and we fulfill His work to seek and to save that which is lost (Luke 19:10).



Here's the plan from Christ: die to self, hate your lives here, follow me to Calvary where you will experience death and become My servant. Is there anybody signing up?

But wait, there's more. In exchange for all of this, He offers to bear much fruit through our lives, to give us an eternal life, to join Christ in glory and to be honored by God. Now, is there anyone signing up?

### **A Personal Decision**

Every church and every believer needs to decide what they are going to do with the seed of life God has given them: keep it for their own purposes or allow it to die in the hands of God, trusting that He will produce much fruit.

### **The Dream...**

I felt the strong tug of God to become more effective in reaching the unchurched and in structuring the mission of the church more in line with the historical model of the Apostles mainly found in the Book of Acts. As a reformed Baptist, I have read extensively about the Reformation of the church and of the Puritans. Their goal for the church was to renew it back to the pattern of the Bible and away from the traditions of their culture. I dreamed of a body that loved the Lord, loved His word, loved the church, and loved the calling from God to be instruments of righteousness in their community. I dreamed of a people who practiced spiritual holiness, not judged others for their lack of adherence to man-made rules. I dreamed of marriages that visibly demonstrated the relationship of Christ and the church. I dreamed of homes that were led by the Holy Spirit, by godly heads of households and by the Scriptures. I dreamed of a church that had influence in its community: spiritually, morally, evangelistically and socially. I dreamed of a church that served willingly and enthusiastically according to their spiritual gifts, passions and God-given abilities. I dreamed of a church body that had a burning passion to share the gospel in their city, their state, their nation and in their world and to be a vital link for the establishment of churches all across the world. I dreamed of a body that had an insatiable thirst to encounter God in a real, personal and intimate way.

### **Mediocre, I Guess**

But was it all a dream? Could it be realized, I asked myself. Was I stuck in an endless continuum of leading one self-centered, apathetic, prideful, spiritually-arrogant, biblically-ignorant church member after another with no real lasting change? I have always abhorred contented mediocrity and yet I found myself again in an average church with an above average indebtedness and a below average love for one another. That was not exactly what I had hoped for. My own spiritual enthusiasm had grown average itself—and that was on a good day. Had my dream become instead a recurring nightmare of mundane Christianity? I was discouraged and disappointed with myself.

My discouragement did not lead to hopelessness. I fought through the overwhelming struggles to make financial ends meet with the clear call of God to be more spiritually effective. My top priority was to meet with God but that meeting was often overshadowed by meetings with re-financing organizations, with bankers, with creditors, with private loan resources. I felt as a church we had become more responsive to the call of finances than we were to the call of God. I



had never made decisions based on finances...until this time. The financial demands were high and the resources were weak.

### **A Whole New Church**

I felt the only way to be effective and remain faithful to this church (having served for less than a year at that time) was to start a new church in our youth center with a whole new approach to church ministry. I presented the idea to my pastoral staff and their response was mixed but they believed in me and hung on to that even though they couldn't fully catch the vision I had received from God. They questioned more of the semantics and details of how to practically see this accomplished. They were enthusiastic, however, about the possibility of doing ministry like the New Testament instead of in accordance to the much too common phrase heard around the church, "This is the way we've always done it." No one really knew why we did it that way; it was just familiar and comfortable to the staff and congregation.

As a staff, we worked on details and vision for the new church. It was a regular part of our weekly staff meetings. In fact, it was the most fervent part of our meetings. I passionately worked on ideas for our new church plant and shared them with staff at our subsequent meetings.

### **A Missional Church on Purpose**

Many churches had indeed started out as a Missional church. To be missional means that the individual members and the body as a whole understand and follow their calling from God to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ fervently to as many people as the Holy Spirit would lead. It means that we are engaged in personal relationships with the lost *on purpose* in order to show them the love of Christ and how He sacrificed His Son to die for our sins so that we could escape the condemnation already placed upon us as a sinner by birth. It is not unusual for a church to lose their vision—our church was no exception.

In general, the congregation where we served did not spend time with unbelievers. In fact, every effort was done to ensure that we come out from among them and remain separate.<sup>2</sup> Our accompanying Christian School sometimes fed that separatist philosophy. Our church had become a church that had been trained to rapidly identify the lost (by outward appearances) and run from them fearing their personal holiness would be stained by some contagious strain of sin—the kind that someone might see! This church had become an institutional church and I had no interest in running an institution. That would be crazy! It had become a church business staying busy under the roof of the church and had forgotten that our business is to share Christ with those who have never been under the roof of the church. Our mission is to share Christ with others who when redeemed themselves, will be affected in such a profound way that they will in turn share Christ with their lost acquaintances, relatives and friends and so forth. It was imperative that we become personally missional and not leave the evangelism up to the paid staff and the foreign missions program, of which the church found inordinate pride.

### **A Whole New Church Again**

God called us to become a whole new church. We did not try to turn the Winnebago around in a tight cul-de-sac, but we rather traded it in for a whole new vehicle of transportation. Jesus said

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<sup>2</sup> 2 Corinthians 6:17



we can't put a new patch on an old garment. Instead, we start again brand new so that Christ's message will be as fresh now as it was in 33 A.D. (Matthew 9:16-17 below). We had to decide if we had the faith to follow God's leading. What we did know was that we did not ever want to be the same again!

**Matthew 9:16-17: "And who would patch an old garment with unshrunk cloth? For the patch shrinks and pulls away from the old cloth, leaving an even bigger hole than before. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. The old skins would burst from the pressure, spilling the wine and ruining the skins. New wine must be stored in new wineskins. That way both the wine and the wineskins are preserved." (NLT)**

# Twelve Marks of a Missional Church

MISSIONAL	CONTEMPORARY	TRADITIONAL
<b>Intentional Evangelism &amp; Natural Means</b>	<b>Intentional Evangelism &amp; Unnatural Means</b>	<b>Unintentional Evangelism &amp; Unnatural Means</b>
<b>Illustrated by Churches of Smyrna (persecuted) and Philadelphia (faithful)</b>	<b>Illustrated by Churches of Ephesus (habitual) and Laodicea (lukewarm)</b>	<b>Illustrated by Churches of Pergamum (heretical) and Thyatira (liberal)</b>
1. Sent by God as missionaries in their own culture (Mt. 4:19; John 20:21; Acts 16:20).	1. Has a program of missions alongside numerous activities of the church.	1. Sends money to missionaries in foreign countries if it is convenient.
2. Exists to take Christ to the lost: <i>Go to the world</i> (Mt. 28:18-20).	2. Exists as a place for the lost to find Christ: <i>Come to the Church</i> .	2. Exists for the members of the church: <i>Join the Church</i> .
3. Members are personally engaged in their communities (Acts 16:20; 17:6).	3. Members are supportive of mission efforts.	3. Members expect pastors to bring in the lost and unchurched.
4. Submerged into its culture as an ambassador for Christ (Luke 7:34).	4. Separated from its culture as a holy quest.	4. Has become a sub-culture of Christians living in a parallel universe.
5. Main focus is training and equipping others to be missionaries in culture (Eph. 4:11-16).	5. Main focus is supporting mission works—mainly overseas.	5. Main focus is supporting church activities to attract new families.
6. Dependent upon Holy Spirit to use individuals as agents for evangelizing (Acts 1:8).	6. Dependent upon altar call and big events as its main tool for evangelization.	6. Dependent upon pastors and staff to evangelize the lost.
7. Develops relationships with the lost on purpose (Matt. 5:13-16).	7. Knows a few lost people and prays for their salvation.	7. Stays away from the lost; has very few dealings with those outside the church.
8. Relationships are the means to influence others in their journey toward Christ (John 15:12-17; 1 John 4:19-21).	8. Depends on marketing techniques & business principles to draw people to a corporate gathering.	8. Uses tradition, denomination and family ties to attract and keep members.
9. The goal is to help others find Jesus in their own way and timing (1 Cor. 9:20-23).	9. The goal is to produce salvation results.	9. The goal is to increase attendance.
10. Participants are affected in every way through a calling by God to be an agent for the gospel (Acts 4:13, 31-35).	10. Participants conform to man-made standards through guilt and pressure. Change is through self-will, not Spirit.	10. Participants compartmentalize their religion and their lives—generally facades of religious adherence.
11. Faith is practiced in community—groups of people together (Acts 2:42-45; Phil. 1:27).	11. Faith is practiced at the church building during prescribed gathering times.	11. Faith is a routine activity that is private and personal.
12. Worship is unpredictable, spontaneous, Spirit-directed and messy (John 4:23-24).	12. Worship is structured, predictable and orderly.	12. Worship is ritualistic.

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## Identifying Your Church

Determine the kind of church where you worship. Examine the listing of the three kinds of churches: missional, contemporary and traditional. Read the descriptions of the first row across the three churches. As objectively as possible, assign a score for each row in the following manner: Give a value of 5 if a missional church best describes where your church operates in that descriptor; a value of 4 if it is in between missional and contemporary; a value of 3 if it is best described as contemporary; 2 if it is in between contemporary and traditional; and a value of 1 if the category description is most like a traditional church. Repeat this for the 12 rows of statements and place the valuation for each below:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_
9. \_\_\_\_\_
10. \_\_\_\_\_
11. \_\_\_\_\_
12. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Total (add all values)

If your value is in between **48 and 60**, your church is making a spiritual impact, is growing rapidly and people are being ministered to in effective ways. Take leaps of faith regularly to stretch the body to its full potential.

If your value is in between **36 and 47**, your church has potential to make a significant spiritual impact in your community. Identify those weak areas and take steps of faith toward the calling of God for your body.

If your value is in between **24 and 35**, your church is average with little spiritual passion and minimal spiritual impact in the community. This church is facing a descent of influence unless it makes significant changes soon.

If your value is in between **12 and 23**, your church is going to either close its doors or fight for survival. A Spirit-led vision to compassionately reach the lost for Christ needs to explode within the leadership and contagiously spread throughout the whole body.



**ACTS 29**  
NETWORK

## Identify the Top Three Areas for Growth

### Areas of Concern:

1. -

2. -

3. -

### Corrective Action

1. -

2. -

3. -