

Ten Practical Steps For Planting New Churches

Written by Rev. Manuel Molina, who has served as a pastor, missionary and church planter in Mexico.

When the gospel came to our land, it traveled with itinerant preachers who planted the seed of the Word without waiting for it to bear fruit. The goal was for people to hear the Good News. They even sang, "I will plant the precious seed of the glorious gospel of love ...and I will leave the results to the Lord." With the passing of time, Christian denominations that came to our country placed an emphasis on forming churches to teach new believers. Today we know the best way to advance the Kingdom of Heaven is to plant new churches in communities. When a healthy church is established in a community, it impacts the entire neighborhood with the power of the gospel. Desperate people find hope, sick people are healed, sinners are forgiven, wicked people are transformed, and the power of evil must retreat in the face of the Word of God. There is nothing that impacts a community more than establishing a healthy, growing church. It was God's greatest invention to organize his disciples to accomplish the Great Commission in this way.

The *Ten Steps* are not magic or original keys to planting churches, but church planters actively working in the field have developed them. They can simplify the planning process and give church planters the tools to use so they can focus their energies and resources in the areas that produce the greatest results. If you follow the steps in order, the church will develop in accordance with the principles and goals the planter envisions. The order is important, but in some cases, it might be possible to change or adapt them.

Step One: Intentional Prayer

This is the first step in the series: "Ten Practical Steps for Planting New Churches," written by Rev. Manuel Molina Flores.

Prayer begins with the church planter or the mother church when they discover God is guiding them to plant a church in a particular place. Pray for:

- Local leaders who will participate in the project
- A strategy
- The people you hope to win to Christ
- The material resources you will need^o
- Community leaders
- Permits and approvals you will need

Prayer will become one of the disciplines of growth for the new disciples. It will become a daily part of their new lives.

We must persist in prayer with expectant hearts (Col. 4:2-4), expecting God to bring receptive individuals and to guide us in what we will say. In that way we will be sure it is NOT human strategies that guide our ministry, but rather the Holy Spirit. This approach

establishes a pattern of dependence on the Holy Spirit essential for success in following the steps in our strategy as founders of the new church (Zechariah 4:6).

Through prayer, the Holy Spirit will come to be our guide when we allow him to direct our methods and most effective tools. Sometimes we do not have access to sufficient funds to purchase materials, but the Holy Spirit's help will be fundamental in giving creative ideas to the church planter or cell group leader.

For example, we use a map to pray for the city. We put our hands on it and ask God to direct us to the place ready to receive the Word. Later, we pray while we walk the streets of some hidden place. Many times, the response of a family that will open their home to the church has come first in the streets where we begin to pray.

Principle:

Prayer must be modeled by the church planter, not only taught.

Step Two: Planning

Today we continue with Step 2 in the series: "Ten Practical Steps for Planting New Churches," written by Rev. Manuel Molina Flores.

Every project requires planning. Jesus taught us no one begins to build without first calculating the cost. This does not mean we must wait until we have all resources in hand before planting a church. We know it is a work of faith and that Jesus taught us we do not need to bring along a cloak or a bag for money, but rather that we should trust the One who has power over all of heaven and earth. The One with this authority is the one who sends us into the fields. Planning is better applied to strategy we should follow in our new church planting effort and in learning the characteristics of the community we hope to contact. For instance: Who are they? Where are they? What types of jobs are common? How do they live? What do they believe? What needs to they have? What services do they have? How do they govern themselves? Are they receptive or resistant to the gospel? Etc.

Plan for the church to grow beyond your abilities to lead it.

If the Ten Steps are faithfully implemented, the inevitable result will be the founder of the church will realize it is impossible to do all the work. The founder will be forced to transfer some ministry responsibilities to the new believers.

We must learn that this is one of the most important and positive moments in our ministry, and we must be willing to live with the frustrations, tensions and problems that forcibly produce these transitions. Our true identity will be reflected in the multiplication of our vision and convictions in the lives of the new leaders. It will not be reflected in rotating the people, programs and activities around us. Nor is the solution "importing"

leaders from other places to attend to the needs in the new church. It is more probable that these approaches will produce problems.

Principle:

Evangelism must be planned in the life of the church or it will NOT succeed.

Step Three: Finding/Making Contacts

We are continuing with step three in the series: "Ten Practical Steps for Planting New Churches," written by Rev. Manuel Molina Flores.

When we began the Church of the Nazarene in La Concordia (Mexico), our first action was to visit the families in the neighborhood and introduce ourselves as new neighbors. We told them we were Christians and that we wanted to serve them. Some people asked us a few questions about our faith, and others simply rejected us, but in the end, we knew our neighbors. And we had the list of contacts we wanted.

It is important to determine the most effective methods to identify receptive people. In this community, we used the Jesus Film, visited door-to-door with the Evangecube, visited people to pray for them, did Maximum Mission projects, and celebrated important days, like Mother's Day, Children's Day, etc.

It is important for the church planter to pray daily for the contacts on the list and organize a schedule with the goal of meeting with them again.

A contact is someone who, in following our plans, we will see again in order to cultivate a friendship and provide Biblical teaching.

Contact cards are our primary tool to continue in communication with a person we are trying to win to Christ. Along with personal information, it should contain information about their needs as well as notes about the results of our visits. One of the main values of these cards is that they help us to focus in daily, intercessory prayer for those individuals. We learn to pray for the people who demonstrate interest in the message we have shared.

To optimize this process, we must be disciplined in the use of an appointment book. At the beginning of each week, using the contact cards in prayer, organize your schedule around the people you want to visit. Then add your additional activities and responsibilities. Begin each day praying for the people on the contact cards and preparing yourself for the visits you have on your schedule.

Principle:

Sow lots of seeds in order to receive an abundant harvest.

Successfully planting a church requires sowing abundantly. Abundant sowing will bring to light those who are “good soil” and ready for eternal life. Through home visits, special events, film projection, etc., a church planter must establish as many personal relationships as possible, and then through those relationships win others to Christ. We must be persistent. There will be some people who only make a decision for Christ after many visits.

Emphasize relationships over activities

Our effectiveness in evangelism is directly related to the number of authentic relationships we are able to establish. We should avoid any activity that does not produce fruitful contacts. If we only interact with the households that began the work, always doing our work near them, we will never advance towards our established goals.

Have a follow-up plan for the contacts

Independent of the method we use, evangelism requires prayer, planning, time and effort. Church planters should avoid falling into either of two extremes: 1) Wasting time using impersonal methods that do not serve to win people to Christ, or 2) Limiting ourselves to only casual encounters without a plan.

Step Four: The Process of Evangelism

Today we continue with Step 4 in the series: “Ten Practical Steps for Planting New Churches,” written by Rev. Manuel Molina Flores.

In this step we will cover how to introduce someone to the Jesus of the Bible. The tool we choose to use to present Christ is not important. The critical thing is to remember that your goal is to bring people into a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ, our only Savior (Acts 4:12), and guide them to repentance and faith in him (Acts 20:21). The evangelist will guide the contact through a series of meetings, conversations and Bible studies that will allow them to learn who Jesus is and how to believe in him.

- **Evangelism is a process:**

Evangelism deals with guiding an unbelieving person to begin a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Many times, unbelievers lack correct information or have erroneous concepts of God and Christianity. They need to be influenced – perhaps for the first time – by Biblical revelation. Through frequent contact, the evangelist should guide them through a process of redefining their concepts regarding God, humanity, sin, grace, etc., in order that they may begin to align with the truth of the Bible. Never take for granted that another person shares your same understanding or definition of these terms!

- **Regeneration is an act—a new birth:**

While evangelism is a process, regeneration is an instantaneous act, and God is the one who makes the change (2 Cor. 5:17). We must be sensitive in the process of evangelism,

but we must not ignore that there is a moment of decision when each individual must repent and believe (Acts 2:37-41; 4:4; 16:30-35).

- **Baptism**

The external, visible testimony of a decision for Christ is water baptism. To be consistent with Biblical patterns, the process of evangelism should culminate in the decision to confess faith in Jesus and put faith in him (Rom. 10:8-13). The individual gives testimony to this decision with water baptism (Matt. 28:19-20), publicly identifying with the triune God and the Church as the Body of Christ.

The goal of evangelism is to guide men and women in the process of beginning a personal communion with God through Jesus Christ. It is not to simply to come to an agreement on theological truths. It is to come to know a Person: Jesus (John 4:10; Acts 4:12). Discipleship classes should begin immediately after conversion. These lessons will help the believer to know Jesus better. Discipleship as a constant relationship between God and every Christian should continue until we arrive in heaven.

Use the Bible in such a way that the new believers are willing to seek God in the Word. He will speak to them through it. Avoid simply answering a question they can find for themselves in Scripture. Pray with them in a simple, direct way, demonstrating that you know God will respond in a definite, visible way. Remember that you are guiding them in a personal relationship with God who longs to reveal himself to them. He wants to establish an intimate relationship and have fellowship with them for eternity.

Step Five: Discipleship

Today we continue with Step 5 in the series: "Ten Practical Steps for Planting New Churches," written by Rev. Manuel Molina Flores.

The lack of discipleship in the past has meant that new believers are lost or learn bad habits. To form habits or disciplines on which a new believer can build a fruitful Christian life is a worthy task. The evangelist will encourage the new believer to develop an intimate relationship with God through the Five Disciplines for Personal Growth: Prayer, Bible Study, Worship, Testimony, and a Life of Complete Love for Christ. They will form discipleship groups (companions in their spiritual walk) that will be assigned to a discipleship mentor (accountability) for the believers. The evangelist should take care to not create dependence on him or her.

Expected attitudes and reactions from the group:

Initial: From the beginning, the new contact is hungry for the Word of God (1 Peter 2:2) and begins to practice the disciplines that produce growth (1 Timothy 4:7-8), which will equip a new believer to face his or her daily struggles.

Long Term: The believer will commit to a mutually responsible relationship with other believers (companions on the way) that is centered around the disciplines for personal growth.

Principles:

Our first commandment is: “Go and make disciples.” We are not only to gain converts. It is crucial and important we understand this truth! Developing spiritually strong disciples will be evidenced only when they are obedient in all Christ has commanded (Matthew 28:16-20). Healthy disciples are the “living stones” that form healthy and growing churches. Both the book of Acts and the history of the church demonstrate that churches will be formed and communities transformed where there are true disciples of Jesus Christ.

As church planters, our first goal is to guide men and women to begin a relationship with the master and his disciples, that is, both with Christ and other believers. Center the discipleship process around the development of the disciplines. There is no other way to maintain long-term growth!

Use discipleship methods that prompt personal discovery of the truth of God, especially the materials the Church of the Nazarene produces. New believers should learn to “feed” themselves with the Word of God and not develop dependence on the church planter or evangelist. When they search for God in his word and focus on that as a goal, rejoice with them and congratulate each small and large discovery they make. When we base learning on personal motivation and discipline instead of our own ability to teach and motivate, we create a different type of disciple who learns directly from the Bible and is cemented in a personal relationship with God, rather than remaining dependent on our own abilities as teachers.

Establish patterns of mutual discipleship. One of the best ways to avoid dependency is to encourage disciples to personally discover Biblical truth and create an environment that feeds the concept of mutual responsibility. This style of discipleship gives each believer responsibility to develop the disciplines necessary for Christian growth. Mutual discipleship:

- Prevents the church planter from taking responsibility as the principle disciple, avoiding the creation of a “traditional dependency syndrome.”
- Promotes a sense among the believers of belonging and personal responsibility for the spiritual well-being of others.
- Reinforces the importance of the disciplines for Christian growth, like the means of grace mentioned by John Wesley (prayer, Bible study, and holy communion, among others). It helps believers learn to be mutually responsible for practicing the habits that produce growth.
- Prepares the way to introduce the concepts of responsibility, which are fundamental to healthy spiritual development and will prepare the way for developing local leaders.

Common Errors to Avoid

1. *Creating dependency.* We create dependency when we allow new disciples to survive sustained by external systems of life. When a newborn doesn't desire milk, we know that something is very wrong. When a believer doesn't demonstrate any desire to feed himself through study and prayer, his condition is critical. We must learn to treat it like it is. We do not help a new believer if we keep teaching him with the hope that someday he will decide to begin to feed himself. That only creates bad habits that are difficult to break.
2. *Communicating that, in some way, the Christian life is easier for a mature believer.* The only thing this idea does is discourage young Christians! We should be transparent with both our victories and our spiritual struggles. We must work from a foundation of mutual responsibility and establish patterns of humility and transparency that encourage young believers and create realistic patterns for future leadership.
3. *Measuring "success" in terms of attendance.* Since church planters frequently feel pressure to gain visible results, it is possible to fall in the trap of confusing participation in activities with the disciplines of personal growth and the level of commitment to Christ and the Church.

Step Six: The Spiritual Community

Today we continue with Step 6 in the series: "Ten Practical Steps for Planting New Churches," written by Rev. Manuel Molina Flores.

How to create home cell groups or Bible study groups.

Generally we begin a church with a family that offers itself to Christ. They offer their home to begin Bible studies, and then we invite other converts or contacts to attend one day a week. The church planter or pastor directs the study. In that way we can open several homes or cell groups led by new converts. These cell groups eventually join to give birth to the new church.

The goal is to create cell groups that promote a spiritual identity for each member and promote mutual ministries under the care of a spiritual leader or pastor. Discipleship focuses on developing the habits of a disciplined Christian life. The spiritual community promotes the formation of identity and family responsibility through the practice of mutual ministry.

Specific activities will vary based on the needs and interests of the group. They can include worship, Bible study, fellowship activities, etc. There should always be chances to share victories, defeats, challenges and tests, and then an opportunity to pray for each other. There should also be a challenge for the members of the group to serve one another. These meetings also serve as an opportunity to evaluate the spiritual health of the members.

From the beginning, insist on local leadership

Creating cell groups depends on discovering potential leaders (or the leaders of families). As church planters, we should avoid the trap of organizing these groups around ourselves. We must motivate and empower leaders from the group itself. Church planters should invest their time in preparing the leaders.

The main characteristics of a spiritual leader are:

- *An authentic spiritual life.* He or she is growing spiritually and has something that is worthy of being imitated and shared.
- *Deeply loves the people.* He or she is concerned with and involved in the needs and interests of the other believers.
- *Creates a sense of belonging.* He or she encourages others so they feel part of the group.
- *Mobilizes others for service.* He or she can motivate others to become actively involved in mutual ministry.

If our vision is that the new church grows through the Bible study or cell groups, we must send potential leaders to form those groups. (Keeping them “in their seats” without sending them out will mean the work will be centered only on the initial group.)

1. **Pray** that God will raise leaders from among those who are actively following the Christian disciplines of growth. Try to identify the potential spiritual leaders within those who show love and who actively encourage others to grow in their spiritual life.
2. **Begin to meet** with potential leaders; help them to develop and have a clear image of the concepts of identity, spiritual community and ministry responsibility. Practice the activities with them they will need to start a new church.
3. **Potential leaders should begin** actively seeking those who they want to include in the new cell group they are trying to form. Resist the temptation to intervene in this stage. The leader will have the responsibility to maintain the cell group, and he or she should be the one who forms the cell group.

Step Seven: Leadership Development: Model 222

In today's entry, we are continuing with Step 7 in the series: "Ten Practical Steps for Planting New Churches," written by Rev. Manuel Molina Flores.

How to recognize and train emerging leaders (2 Timothy 2:2)

Step Seven is about discovering and developing the men and women who are capable of implementing the different levels of leadership required by a properly functioning church.

When arriving at this step, the church planters will begin to step back away from intense, active involvement, such as in Step Five, in order to invest their time and efforts in the emergent leaders and focus on the new leaders' training.

Identify, through real ministry situations, those who demonstrate they are “reliable” and “qualified” (2 Timothy 2:2) in order to begin a systematic training program to continue

developing their character, Biblical knowledge and practical abilities. This entails sharing your experience and knowledge with the leaders.

Principles:

We identify men and women who are “reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others” (2 Timothy 2:2). Having seen their leadership, we begin a basic training program in which we invest in them and emphasize for each emerging leader areas of character, knowledge and practical skills that he or she needs to develop.

Training is what we offer the man or woman who demonstrates spiritual qualities and a divine call to leadership. The question is not “who could be a good leader,” but rather “who is already leading” and “who demonstrates patterns of adequate spiritual growth and true love for others?”

Training for leadership should include character elements as well as knowledge and practical elements.

Leadership training should be conducted in a way that assures simultaneous growth in three areas:

- BEING (character): Character is developed through the disciplines for Christian growth (1 Timothy 4:12, 15-16), service (Matthew 20:25-28), faithfulness (Matthew 25:14-20), etc.
- KNOWING (knowledge): This does not deal solely with knowledge of Biblical truths, but rather knowledge of how to study, interpret and apply the Bible to the needs of the people (Ezra 7:10, Acts 20:20).
- DOING (practical): Potential leaders should know well and have practical experience in evangelism, discipleship and beginning a mission before moving on toward more advanced leadership training.

Leaders should grow in character (being), information (knowing), and practical abilities (doing).

Step Eight: Corporate Worship

We continue with Step 8 from the series: “Ten Practical Steps for Planting New Churches,” written by Rev. Manuel Molina Flores.

How to celebrate the presence and the power of God together

Corporate worship allows believers, who are growing and enthusiastic about their faith, to recognize the presence and the power of God together.

When two or more cell groups are functioning, the evangelist will work with the cell group leaders in order to plan joined meetings in which the believers will celebrate their faith in Jesus Christ. If Bible study in the group is done well, the group will quickly be ready to celebrate a worship service and join in public teaching of the Word.

Principles: The value of corporate worship

When two or more cell groups are functioning, the church-planting effort has come to the point of uniting the groups periodically to worship God together. Corporate worship will:

- *Introduce the new believer to the idea they are part of the body of Christ, which is large.*
- *Give opportunities to use a variety of spiritual gifts, and allow them to develop specialized gifts that are difficult to maintain in a single cell group.*
- *Give cell group leaders better control in issues of doctrine and lifestyle.*
- *Protect from internal and external attack.*
- *Offer a special dynamic for worship that usually generates larger groups.*
- *Help individual believers learn their responsibilities as members of an organized church and prepare them for organization.*
- *Help maintain balance and generate energy as victories, challenges and even failures of believers and cell groups are shared within the setting of the larger group and God's work there.*
- *Give the chance for teachers to exercise their gifts for the benefit of the whole body since many cell groups are not led by believers who have the gift of teaching.*

Insist that the local leadership provide opportunities for new believers to participate. A true Celebration happens when we have reasons to celebrate. Believers who share their faith also tend to practice the disciplines of Christian growth and experience the family of God in action through mutual ministry.

We offer opportunities for corporate worship to celebrate how the presence and the power of God are visible in the lives of his children.

Is it necessary for each church to have a building?

When we return to the book of Acts, we see a model of church planting that allows for the development of healthy churches that will reproduce other churches, especially in homes. They can choose whether or not to find a building. When the church grows, it can make the decision to purchase land or rent or create a special place for their services.

Allow the emerging leadership to plan and lead the corporate worship and the most prepared leaders to preach publicly. Encourage the development of forms of worship that are culturally appropriate and biblically acceptable. Do not copy readily available material (like YouTube videos, for example) that will confuse new believers.

Some suggestion on steps for planning corporate worship:

1. When there are two or more cell groups, unite them periodically for corporate worship (public worship services).
2. Begin Celebrations weekly, bi-weekly or monthly.

3. Make sure the cell groups continue as the primary source of identity and mutual care in the church.
4. Work with the leaders of cell groups to plan Celebrations. Make sure they are simple enough that emerging leaders are capable of leading the service effectively.
5. Increase the frequency of the services when the emerging leadership is able to meet the demands created by additional activities. That will ensure that adding corporate worship will not result in a lack of care in other areas of ministry.

Steps Nine and Ten: Organization and Looking To the Harvest Fields

This is the final entry, Steps Nine and Ten, in the series: ““Ten Practical Steps for Planting New Churches,” written by Rev. Manuel Molina Flores.

Step Nine: Organization

From the beginning of the church-planting process, we must train with the goal of preparing the believers to take on the commitment to organize the church. We must apply the minimum structure necessary to ensure for the church's healthy functioning, which generally means only naming the official church board. We do not have to form all of the ministries immediately. It is only necessary to identify the leaders of each department. As the church grows we can continue to implement roles as they become necessary.

Organization will be only a guide, not a straight jacket for the new work.

How is a church born?

In the process of founding churches, the moment will come when we must determine who is willing to formally and publicly commit to the new church. We say a local church is born the moment the believers publicly commit to the Lord and to one another, as well as to Scripture (as it is expressed in the “Declaration of Faith” in the [Manual of the Church of the Nazarene](#)).

To plant a church is like beginning to build a house; the basic building blocks of the church are the converts. It is so obvious that frequently we pass over this concept. The primary focus of a church planter should be placed on the converts, and even though the structure and organization are not more important, they will help to conserve the results. The success or failure of a church planter will be directly related to the fruit of his or her work in the souls of the new converts. Missionary work should not be abandoned to dedicate ourselves to maintain the gains we've made. Both of these— missionary work and maintenance — should happen simultaneously.

Suggestions:

1. Train specific leaders to perform their assigned roles.
2. Meet with the new leaders and the new church board (in most cases, they will be the same cell group leaders or leaders from the home groups), to develop monthly plans and to move forward on district plans.

3. Submit yourself to leadership above you and teach the new leaders to work as a team with the different levels of leadership within the denomination. We are all on the same team working towards the same mission.
4. Make a plan that allows for local growth and growth in new communities. In this way the church will not close itself in to its own four walls.
5. Maintain a vision to raise up and train volunteer leaders. Paid leadership has a tendency to slow down the advances of the new church.

Step Ten: Look to the Harvest Fields

Keep the vision of new works as something natural in the life of the church. Take Antioch in Acts 13 as a model.

Form a plan that allows for local growth and growth in new communities. In that way the new church will not close itself in to its own four walls. The temptation will be to settle for what has already been achieved, and new believers will want to be together and not allow the pastor to leave to explore new fields. One time a good brother said, "Pastor, if you go to another place, I'll go back to the world." The pastor replied, "I thought you followed Christ, but it seems you've decided to exchange him for this useless servant." This happens when koinonia become "koinonitis," slowing the growth of the church.

Never stop doing the things that produce growth. It is an error when church planters dedicate themselves to consolidate the fruit of the work and stop evangelizing. (This has happened in some instances, such as in the case of the project Vision 93-2000. The goal was to organize a pioneer district in Chiapas, Mexico, and the progress stagnated.)

We have had to examine our focus to return to the original vision to plant churches in our chosen field.

****We hope that this series of practical steps for planting new churches has proven useful for you, the reader, in your ministry. We thank Rev. Manuel Molina for his work in developing this material, and for his effectiveness in putting it in practice.*