

PREPARING TO PLANT A CHURCH

Bruce McAllister

Ellen and I were in our mid-twenties when we were asked to consider planting a new church in North Carolina, about sixty miles from our home in Greenville, South Carolina. We were serving at Bob Jones University and enjoying the early years of marriage. God had just blessed us with our first child, a new baby boy. I had a growing desire to pastor a church in addition to my teaching and administrative responsibilities. The Lord opened an exciting door for church planting on the weekends, and we were soon doing visitation in preparation for our opening services. We took our baby boy with us along with loaves of homemade bread! God blessed us with fine people to help us, and the church began to grow. We met in an American Legion building for about three years, built our first church building, and then the church called its first full-time pastor. God has blessed the church over these forty years. In addition, our growing family helped to plant another church in a nearby county back in the 1990s. Since that time, each of our four now grown children have helped to plant churches as adults. Praise the Lord! You just never know what God will do through your investment in planting a new church!

Planting the church in North Carolina opened the door for me to begin teaching church planting to many ministerial students for approximately twenty-five years. It has been a thrill to see numerous men and their wives go out and plant churches and to watch those ministries mature over time. I have prayed for them, worked with them, and preached for them over the years, seeing firsthand what God has done through their venture of faith.

Through church planting, God can use you to reach people for Christ and see them come to spiritual maturity. I can say from personal experience and from watching others that the rewards of church planting far outweigh the risks. Perhaps you are curious about how God could use you and your family (and friends) to plant a sound biblical church in a needy community. Here are some basic pointers to help you prepare yourself and a team of helpers to plant a church.

Pray – Church planting is an *intensely spiritual* undertaking. You need God’s gracious help. Ask God to show you where and with whom He would have you to start a new church. Prayerfully dream dreams together with your family and friends. Ponder the plight of those without Christ who have never heard a clear presentation of the Gospel and where they will be in eternity without Christ. Consider the privilege of discipling new believers and establishing them in the faith. Pray that God will show you the need. Pray for target areas. Ask Him to provide the wisdom and means to plant a new ministry. He loves to answer prayers like that!

Prepare Your Life – If you are still in college then complete your formal education. Get some seminary training, especially if you will be handling the Word of God regularly as the lead pastor of the church plant. Every member of the church-planting team brings important gifts, talents, perspectives, and experiences. God’s work is teamwork and every member of the team is valuable. Develop and use your gifts to the fullest. Grow in flexibility and patience too. Things will not always go your way. The pastor almost always needs to be married and to a wife with a

heart for ministry. Their young marriage should be progressing and maturing, focused upon serving the Lord. The blessing of having a child or children will be an asset in pastoral ministry. Young families draw more young families to the new church. Singles also make significant contributions to a new church through dedicated, sacrificial service. Get your personal finances in great shape and pay off burdensome debt. Be totally devoted to the Lord and get ready to go. Get the expert advice of your pastor and other spiritual leaders, especially those with an understanding of church planting.

Learn to Love Ministry to People - Biblical ministry in church planting is full of evangelism and discipleship. Church planting is God-focused, gospel-centered, and people-oriented. Loving people genuinely is a big key to successful church planting. Be engaging with new people. Learn the art of tactful, compassionate conversation. Love every age group from the cute babies to the senior saints. If you will be preaching and teaching, learn to communicate the Word of God accurately and practically in a clear, simple, and understandable way. Be committed to your ministry of the Word by diligent weekly message preparation. Plan to invest a substantial amount of time in meeting new people. People naturally bring their problems with them to church. Some will be hurting and suffering. Some will be sick with the consequences of sinful choices. Be ready to offer Christ-like compassion and biblical counsel.

Learn Church Ministry and Church Planting - You should develop a biblical theology and philosophy of local church ministry. Know your doctrinal positions well and have them written out. Be ready to articulate and teach your core values. It is helpful to have a mission statement for your new ministry. Take a church-planting course and read church-planting literature. Understand the basic legal, financial, and budgetary issues and practices in church ministry. Investigate the true need and potential of communities you are interested in and determine if a sound, biblical church is truly needed. Know the practical timetable of things to accomplish progressively throughout the church planting process. Learn from seasoned pastors and especially from seasoned church planters. Learn to navigate conflict resolution. Learn to lead like a shepherd as well as to follow pastoral leadership. Pastors should listen to others and love receiving their input and ideas. Get ready for occasional interpersonal conflicts and be ready to apologize and forgive; there will be plenty of opportunities!

I recommend that you get familiar with the [Yes But How Handbook of Church Planting](#) by Ken Davis and Roger McNamara, Xulon Press (hyperlink to it on Amazon). It is a helpful, thorough book on the details of church planting.

Let me know if I can be of any help to you about church planting. I love helping others get started. I immensely enjoy building new ministry relationships and making ministry connections. I have written extensively about church planting and would be glad to share those writings with you. Feel free to email [hyperlink to bmcallister@gfamissions.org] me or contact me through the GFA office: 864.609.5500 Ext. 3227.

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