

WHY CHURCHES SHOULD PLANT IN THEIR OWN CITY

You've heard the story. Church "A" plants a new church down the street. They send out some of their best leaders and people to make it happen. Pretty soon the new church is thriving, while church "A" is struggling to recover... Some version of that story plays through the head of every pastor when they consider planting a church in their own city. And there are other important questions as well. For example, why not do multi-site? There are so many advantages. Doesn't it make more sense to plant a campus that has a higher chance for success than plant a church? We've wrestled with these questions. By no means do we have all the answers, but let me share with you why we've decided to plant churches (in addition to campuses) in our city...

1. Your City Needs More Churches Than You Think

We tend to assume we have our cities covered, *especially* if our church is growing. But in my experience, we overestimate our influence and underestimate the need. When I moved into my neighborhood, 9 out of 10 of my neighbors didn't know The Summit Church (and the one who did was a Christian). On one hand, that's a challenge for me to reach my neighbors (because they're not Christians; not because they don't know Summit). But it also revealed just how un-saturated our city is.

According to Tim Keller, studies indicate that if there is 1 church per 10,000 residents, about 1% of the population will attend church. If that number climbs to 1 per 1000, 15-20% will attend church. If it reaches 1 per 500, over 40% of the population will attend church.¹

To put that in perspective, the average American city only has 1 church for every 6,194 people.² Simply put, we need more churches. A lot more.

2. The Only Way to Reach a City is to Plant Churches

There's something else we can take away from that statistic: one church alone can't reach a city, no matter how big it is. Keller writes:

Churches societies have to maintain vigorous, extensive church planting just to stay Christian. One church, no matter how big, will never be able to serve the needs of such a diverse city. Only a movement of hundreds of churches, small and large, can penetrate literally every neighborhood and people group in the city.³

In other words, we don't simply need more churches, we also need different churches. This is why multi-site alone is not a sufficient strategy for reaching a city. New campuses extend the reach of an existing church into new communities, but a campus can only adapt itself so much to the needs of that community. That's not an argument against existing churches trying to become more diverse. But we have to recognize our limitations as well. If we want to see our whole city reached with the gospel, we have to plant churches.

3. New Churches Help (don't hurt) Existing Churches

The situation we described earlier is the exception, not the rule. In general, church plants help, don't hurt, existing churches. They help existing churches by developing new and more effective ways of reaching people. According to Keller, new churches are 6-8 times more effective at reaching new people than existing churches. The reason isn't simply because they're new. It's because they HAVE to reach new people to survive. This forces new churches to think outside the box. They're not restricted by the traditions that existing churches often have that limit their ability to change.

But the benefits aren't limited to the plant. The ideas developed by new church plants are passed on to the existing church. And the existing church doesn't have to convince people that these ideas can work, because they've already been proven. On top of that, existing churches often have the capital to implement ideas on a much larger scale than new churches do.

Here's what we're saying: planting churches in their city is one of the main ways that existing churches can stay connected to the changing culture of their city and how to reach it. This is the great irony. By embracing church planting within our cities, we actually extend the life of our own church. It's when we reject planting that we cut ourselves off from one of the main ways that God renews his church.

Mike McDaniel (@mikermcd) is the Director of Summit Network and the Pastor of North American Church Planting at *The Summit Church* in Raleigh-Durham, NC.

[1] Tim Keller, Center Church, 362.

[2] http://www.namb.net/Population_Church_Ratios/.

