

DECEMBER 2013

# Ministry<sup>®</sup>

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR PASTORS

85  
YEARS



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**church  
planting**  
*in your territory*



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Regarding "Of Nails and Donkeys" by Kenley D. Hall in the October 2013 of *Ministry*, three citations were inadvertently left out. Please see the corrected article on our Web Site at [www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2013/10/of-nails-and-donkeys](http://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2013/10/of-nails-and-donkeys).

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International Journal for Pastors  
12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring,  
MD 20904-6600 U.S.A.  
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MINISTRY® has been published monthly since 1928 by the Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.® *Ministry* is a peer-reviewed journal.

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PRINTER Pacific Press® Pub. Assn., 1350 N. Kings Rd., Nampa, ID 83687

Standard mail postage paid at Nampa, Idaho. (ISSN 0026-5314)

Member of Associated Church Press.

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Vol. 85 Number 12 © 2013

PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

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# Cultivating church planting in your territory

**A**fter three years in ministry, I was called to be a district leader and evangelist in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea. The city had three churches and a small group at the leper facility on a harbor island. With the young pastors and members, we devised a plan of regular public evangelism around the city—in marketplaces, schools, squatter settlements, church buildings, and on university campuses. At the end of four years, the plan resulted in 14 new churches.

While such an approach is rarely effective in Western territories today, research shows that new churches reach new people, and only those conferences planting new churches grow.<sup>1</sup> Secular postmodern societies pose new challenges, but there is growing interest by district and regional pastors and conference and union leaders in cultivating and multiplying new churches in their territories or countries. Having assisted in developing a division-wide church-planting strategy as well as multiple conference and union plans, some questions need to be raised: What processes have been followed? What lessons have we learned? What are some of the traps and keys to a process?

## Beginning a process in postmodern societies

To illustrate the principles in this article, I draw on the experiences of

four fields, each with a highly secular postmodern society where the Seventh-day Adventist Church has experienced decline but church planting is opening new vistas: the Belgium-Luxembourg Conference (BLC), in the early stages; the Western Australian Conference (WA), seven to nine years along this path; the South England Conference (SEC), with over 60 new plants in eight years; and the Netherlands Union Conference (NUC), now ten to twelve years into planting churches.

## An environment of encouragement and innovative mission

Leaders play a key role in church planting, providing an environment of affirmation, encouragement, and movement thinking. WA president Glenn Townend, who has planted Adventist churches during his ministry, has positioned planting as mainstream Adventism in his conference. “Along with personal ministries, prayer ministry, our school system, age care, youth activities, etc., church planting is what we do to renew Adventism as a movement in Western Australia,” Townend says. The past and current NUC presidents participate in the annual evangelism festival, affirming church planting is “what we do,” and teaching seminars and workshops to encourage and equip new planting teams. They affirm diverse initiatives

by members and pastors to reach new people with the message of Adventism. “We have learned the value of consistent union leader support,” says Rudy Dingjan, NUC church planting coordinator for ten years. To address concerns about church planting, the NUC also published *Growing Pains*, a newsletter sent to all members with the Sabbath School quarterlies, in which Dingjan and the presidents responded to questions and criticisms. Leaders play an important role in reminding members and pastors that Adventism began as a church-planting movement.

## Be highly intentional, but low key

Church planting starts with prayer, revitalization, discipleship, and the affirmation of members and pastors who experiment with fresh approaches to sharing faith with friends and communities—not with high-profile strategic plans and numeric goal setting. While the process is intentional, a wide number of people need to be involved in conversations to shape the journey.

Pastors know their districts, are working to involve members in mission, and must be involved in the dialogue about a developing church-growth or church-planting process. In the BLC, Reinder Bruinsma, the interim president, and his fellow administrators involved all pastors in discussing

their concerns, fears, and hopes. Then the leaders, together with an experienced facilitator of church-planting teams, visited pastors with key local church leaders in their local areas. This involved hours of visitation, listening, and exploring mission initiatives and potential plants. Pastors who were found to be experimenting were invited to share their experiences with fellow pastors.

Elders and personal ministries leaders from the whole conference, together with their pastors, spent a full Sabbath with their BLC leaders and guest speakers from similar cultural regions, discussing the possibilities of church planting for mission. Case

and offices, and some who are frustrated and/or are in conflict with their churches whose passion for mission in their communities was reignited by the growing vision of church growth and planting across their countries. BLC leaders with district pastors visited each for two to three hours, answering questions and concerns, building bridges of reconciliation and trust, fanning each spark of mission interest, and developing a plan of further equipping and support for these potential plants.

### Some essentials in the process

Major objections need to be addressed. Dingjan identified three

- Involving lay members as planters. They know and are connected to their target communities and have a deep passion to share their faith with their friends. Young adults plant to reach their friends and are integral to most church plants.
- Pastors serve as coaches of the church-planting teams, not controlling, but resourcing, equipping, and encouraging. They are equipped and affirmed in their new role of fostering the ministry of their members, rather than doing the ministry solo. In the NUC, each plant has a district pastor as their coach, and pastors are involved in training. Some now care for two or three



*Church planting starts with prayer, revitalization, discipleship, and the affirmation of members and pastors who experiment with fresh approaches to sharing faith with friends and communities.*

studies provided inspiration and ideas; questions and concerns were aired and addressed. Meanwhile, all local churches received video and written materials on the developing vision.

Potential planters and plants began to surface through further visitation of pastors and churches. Pastors and members in the BLC, along with leaders, began identifying potential planting projects—families reaching their communities, ethnic and language groups, young adults, older people relating to the kids next door, business people initiating ministries from factories

objections to church planting when this was first introduced in the Netherlands: (1) it cannot be done in Europe, (2) it will cost too much, and (3) it will burn out already overburdened pastors. These were addressed by the following:

- Church-planting study tours to visit church plants in similar cultures, observing that it can be done, and that secular postmoderns are coming to the faith. Conference and union leaders, pastors, and laypeople (including many young people) participated.

established churches as well as coach two or three church plants. This new paradigm takes pressure off overburdened pastors.

*Mission is the reason for planting, not alternate worship services.* The variety of people planting together with the many communities and people groups being reached will result in a wide variety of styles of worship gatherings, but church planting is not a group of members starting a different worship service. Jesus commissioned disciples to make disciples, and this is where

church planting starts (Matt. 28:18–20). Potential teams need equipping in the discipleship process Jesus used and to learn how to lead people to Jesus in our postmodern context.

*Church planting is a spiritual journey.* Every potential planting team is encouraged to read the book of Acts systematically, praying through each chapter and identifying lessons for their plant. This book contains the primary manual for all church planters. In this context, the teams learn to pray in a variety of ways and depend upon the Holy Spirit's leading. Teams are also encouraged to become involved in missional activities immediately—not to wait until they have finished training, and begin working through a church-planting manual or conversation guide.<sup>2</sup>

*Keep it simple and low cost.* Most church planting in the Western world is now kept simple and low budget. Members are planting churches. Conferences and unions spend funds on equipping but to visit, develop friendships, or disciple people in their homes does not cost money. Aristotle Vontzalidis, SEC church growth and planting coordinator, says the SEC has shifted the focus from pastor-planted churches to lay members planting. In the SEC, they have fostered simple churches. Based upon teams of members, this is small and inexpensive but very effective. Because it is member based, they reduce the activities and complexity to what full-time professionals, workers, or business people can handle. As people become disciples, they gather in homes, low-cost community facilities, cafés, or school or university lecture rooms. If community programs are needed, the wider community is invited to fund the initiatives. A basic principle is that the harvesters and the funds for church plants are in the harvest!

### Variety is expected

Planting churches might be easier to manage if all church plants looked the same as existing churches. However, that will not be the case. Planters think

differently, their communities are diverse, and the Holy Spirit leads. Some plants develop strategically, while others are more spontaneous. Like most existing churches in the global north, some will reflect modernity while others will represent the multiculturalism and diversity of post-Christendom forms. Some may use classic models of outreach, such as public evangelism and seminars, while most will use more relational approaches to engage their communities. There will be a variety of types of church plants, all under the umbrella of Adventism: community, café, simple, satellite, traditional, kids churches, and house church plants. Some will be structured; others, not so structured. "This church plant is proving very effective in engaging families in its local community," says Aristotle Vontzalidis. "They have also started a very successful community Heart Café evening every couple of months."

### Support systems are needed

Church plants flourish with good support systems, such as the following:

*Annual exchange summits.* Those interested in learning about church planting are invited to attend a training summit, bringing at least four people for each potential team. Prayer times (usually one and a half hours daily), workshops, plenary sessions, and workshops and seminars are used to equip and inspire. Much of the teaching is done through case studies. All teams who have started planting are invited to share their stories as part of the equipping of other teams. This also provides an environment for assessing their journeys. Each team receives encouragement to equip and bring another team of church planters the next year.

*Conference or union planting coordinator.* This point person should recognize the importance of being involved in church planting, not simply a departmental person with the added responsibility of church planting. Passionate about evangelism and discipleship, and able and willing to foster

different approaches, this person works closely with conference and union leadership—planning summits, study tours, coordinating the role of coaches, providing resources, networking, and encouraging.

*Coaching and visits.* Regular coaching visits and an annual visit to each plant by the coordinator and a conference or union leader are extremely helpful. During these visits, questions are answered and planters are affirmed as team members in mission. Through such close contact, conference and union personnel can also address any independent or congregational tendencies usually arising through frustration or a lack of communication. Every couple of years, the SEC and NUC have also involved an experienced church planter and consultant to visit 15–20 plants a week with their coordinator and president, focusing the planting teams on their mission and addressing specific issues on which they seek help. This is an intense but appreciated process.

*Visits to existing churches.* During these visits, the president, church-planting coordinator, and guest consultant can also visit with the leadership or board of established churches. Together with their pastors, they can be encouraged to become hubs of church planting, fostering a network of plants in their district.

*News and resources.* The stories of plants are shared through blogs, regular email newsletters, and conference and union papers, providing outreach and ministry ideas for planters. But, watch the language. To say, "It is easier to give birth (to a new church) than to raise the dead (an established church)" is judgmental and offensive to faithful members in existing churches. Church planters can offend in their enthusiasm.

*Twinning.* Some church plants in the NUC and SEC have twinned by supporting each other, sharing weekend retreats, visiting, and sharing in mission. This voluntary arrangement has proven to be very supportive.

*Mini-exchanges or summits.* In addition to an annual church-planting

summit, the WA has initiated minisummits in some regional centers. Three to five teams are equipped in each region, and members of established churches benefit from discipleship training and a better understanding of new churches in their districts.

Without intentional equipping, support, and multiplying systems, significant church planting does not happen. Even once ten to twenty new churches have been planted, the energies in a conference or union may be easily diverted to maintenance. These support systems need to be fostered and refreshed year after year.

### Allow a conference and/or union church-planting process to develop

A conference and/or union vision document develops from dialogue. Begin with simple broad strokes, a commitment to prayer, and renewing Adventism as a movement. Foster an ongoing prayer focus that continues year after year, not just a day, week, month, or even a year of prayer. Affirm innovative approaches to mission, and encourage participation in mission in other fields.

To see church planting multiply across a territory, do the following:

- Do not present a completed strategic plan to pastors and churches to launch the process. Start low key,

conservative, and develop the plan together.

- Do not set numeric goals, such as the number of new churches, within ten years. Such do not motivate the pastors or planters in Western environments.
- Do not prescribe the methods that will be used. Allow the Holy Spirit to lead members and pastors to use what God has placed in their hands, and be surprised.
- Do not ask planters to present definitive plans before they can start. These plans will evolve. They cannot determine the direction of their mission before they start.

It is a process. This does not mean no plan exists. Each conference or union needs simple guidelines that are affirmed before a group is recognized as a church-planting project, including a clear mission focus, a cooperative spirit, a developing plan (developed by the team working through a church-planting manual or conversation guide), team leaders or a group affirmed by the planting coordinator and president, an assigned coach, a financial plan (including the return of tithe to the conference or union), and a safe-places plan for children and vulnerable people. Each conference or union needs a clear process of affirming projects and informing them when they are recognized as a group, a

plant, and what is expected for them to be accepted as a sister church.<sup>3</sup>

### Conclusion

Adventism began as a church-planting movement in the West.<sup>4</sup> We cannot extrapolate directly from the early years, but for each year in the 1870s, one new Adventist church was planted for every two ordained pastors; in the 1880s, one new church each year for every five or six ordained pastors; and in the 1890s, one church each year for every four ordained pastors. At the 1870s rate of planting, the BLC with 10 ordained pastors would be planting 5 churches each year; the NUC, 13; the WA with 35 ordained pastors in their territory, 17 or 18; and the SEC with 83 pastors, about 40 new churches each year. The leaders of the BLC, NUC, WA, and SEC are committed to seeing Adventism as a movement in their fields again. ✓

- 1 These Western territories are North America, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand.
- 2 Peter Roenfeldt, *Planting Churches That Multiply: Conversation Guide*, New Church Life, accessed October 15, 2013, <http://www.newchurchlife.com/wp-content/uploads/Planting-Churches-that-Multiply-20111.pdf> and Peter Roenfeldt, *Church Planting: New Churches for New People*, New Church Life, accessed October 15, 2013, <http://www.newchurchlife.com/wp-content/uploads/New-Churches-for-New-People-07.pdf>.
- 3 In most Western fields, the status of church company does not fit a church plant, for it is not an isolated group of believers and, very early, it has trained leaders.
- 4 See Russell Burrill, *Rekindling a Lost Passion: Recreating a Church Planting Movement* (Fallbrook, CA: Hart Research Center, 1999).

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## LETTERS

Continued from page 4



relocate to England where, "We want missionaries whom God can work with and bless."

Can we do anything other than follow this example of true Christian compassion?

† Ellen G. White, *Testimonies on Sexual Behavior, Adultery, and Divorce* (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1989), 203.

Steve Cinzio, Logan Village, Queensland, Australia

Thank you for the series "Does God Believe in Restoration?" I experienced a moral fall after serving as a pastor for 30 years. When I read the article, I felt like I was reading my own story, except for the conclusion. I lost everything four years ago and have not yet experienced restoration. I am so happy that the author got a second chance.

At times, I wonder if that is in God's will for me, but regardless, I was blessed with reconciliation and restoration of [my] relationship with Him. In my heart, I know His sovereign grace and will for me is very good. Truly, I miss being a pastor, but what I needed to learn was far more important.

Stuart S., Washington State, United States