

The Church Planter's Toolbox

Ideas and Helps for Great Commission Workers • January 2009

LCD = D

Formulas help us visualize the key components of whatever we are attempting to do. Many of us learned the Periodic Table in chemistry class. Who doesn't remember that H stands for helium, Li stands for lithium, and Al stands for aluminum. Medicine, business, and government have their own set of acrostics and formulas.

The formula LCD = D is critical to those of us involved in church planting. It is a key component to developing healthy, growing churches. It is a foundational element without which churches cannot survive.

LCD stands for "lowest common denominator." When reduced to its simplest form, church planting is all about discipleship (D). Our primary responsibility as church planters is to "make disciples." That is the heart of our Lord's Great Commission command - to make disciples and to teach them to "observe (do) all things whatsoever I have commanded you."

A Change of Focus

A subtle change has occurred in church planting. The planter now goes to "plant churches" or to "build a new church." His focus is on gathering a core group and holding services where the gospel is preached. The focus is on putting together a program that looks and feels like a church. It's all about doing church. Unfortunately, little discipleship occurs in many of these settings.

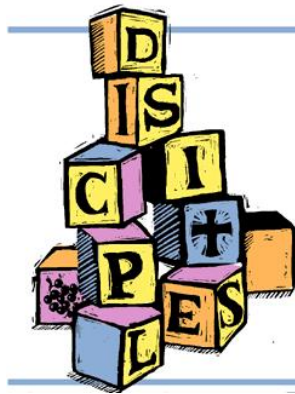
Jesus didn't send us to build his church. That is HIS job. He sent us to make disciples - to sift out the lowest common denominator (LCD), the basic building blocks (D) with which he builds his church. We must once again make disciple-making and discipleship central focuses of our church-planting ministries.

Life Transformation

Discipleship is about life transformation rather than information transfer. It is about doing rather than simply knowing. The goal is to produce followers of Christ that value, think, and act the way Jesus would if he were here. To do that, we must answer three questions: 1) What do we want a disciple to know? 2) What do we want him to change? 3) What do we want him to be able to do? The answer to those questions will govern our discipleship efforts.

Develop a Process

Discipleship, by its very nature, is intentional and progressive. It occurs because someone has a plan in place that encourages it to



Urgent Care Clinics

In an environment where doctors desire to have a more controlled work schedule and the sick are often sent to a hospital E.R., the urgent care clinic is filling a real need in many communities. In addition to diagnosis and treatment, they often offer early detection of health problems and instruction on preventing illness.

Church plants are something like these clinics. The church planter is willing to leave behind a well equipped office and a comfortable schedule to take God's Word directly to those who are hurting. He knows the Scripture is designed to make Christ known and help believers grow in Him (John. 20:31; 2 Timothy. 3:15-17), and he lives for the joy of watching the dead come to Christ, the lost rescued, and the helpless grow strong.

The church planter:

Cares about people. He works at getting to know his community and building relationships in order to win people to Christ. Matthew brought the Savior into contact with other tax collectors who desperately needed what he had found. When Jesus was criticized for this, he replied, "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick" (Matthew 9.9-13).

Is willing to sacrifice. The servant of God who longs for a comfortable life should seek some other occupation. The church planter knows that reaching the lost involves long hours and fervent effort, like Paul who spoke of "laboring night and day" to preach the gospel of God to the Thessalonians (1Thessalonians 2.9).

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happen. Having answered the above questions, wise planters know what they want to teach new believers. The lessons are prepared and ready to go so that when a person professes Christ as Savior he can be plugged into a series of studies (individually or with a group) so that he gains a basic understanding of what he has done in trusting Christ. Each series of studies is followed by another set of classes designed to move the believer from spiritual birth to maturity to ministry and into leadership. Failure to have a discipleship process in place undermines far too many of our church plants.

Entry-Level Ministry

Learning must be coupled with doing. The goal is not to cram people's head full of biblical knowledge, but to transform their lives through the implementation of those truths in service to others. Thus, we must let them do more and be more. Find entry-level ministries, things that won't destroy the church or its reputation if

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LCD = D continued

they mess up, and plug your disciples into those ministries. You want them to understand that life isn't about them. It is about serving God by serving others. Let them set up equipment, direct traffic in the parking lot, sweep floors, mow lawns, and participate in various ways. As people move through the discipleship paradigm, give them bigger and more important ministry assignments.

A Biblical Worldview

Help your disciples see life from God's perspective. Challenge their long-held dichotomy of secular and sacred. Teach them to see all of life as part of God's plan. They need to see their skills as God-given competencies to be used for his glory and their jobs as ministry opportunities. Help them understand that God has a purpose for their lives and wants to use them to further his work on earth. They need to see themselves as stewards, servants, and ministers of Christ rather than as casual observers.

Teach them to Love Jesus More

Discipleship is build around a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. New believers are enthused and excited about knowing God. They have an innate desire to know him better and more deeply. Teach your disciples how to love God and how to worship him personally through Bible study, prayer, giving, and service. Help them develop the habits that produce spiritual maturity. Teach them how to develop a growing and more intimate relationship with Christ.

Face Outwardly

We make a huge mistake when we seek to mold disciples around the church and its programs. This inward focus is contrary to Scripture. Our focus is supposed to be outward on a lost and dying world. We are to be lights in the darkness, salt in a tasteless society, and witnesses of God's grace to men and women who are without Christ. Teach your disciples how to share their new-found faith with those they encounter. Have them write out their testimony and then practice it so that they can give it naturally.

All or Nothing

Discipleship is costly. It means putting Jesus Christ first regardless of the price. Help people understand that being a follower of Christ requires the sacrifice of time, talents, plans, and finances. Jesus' disciples gave up everything to follow him. He asks no less of us, and we should ask no less of those we disciple.

Urgent Care Clinics continued

Makes himself available so that people who have a need know where to go for help. He follows the example of our Shepherd not only receiving sinners, but going out in the night in search of the lost (Luke 15:1-7). Compassionate care must be the hallmark of his ministry if he is to make a difference in people's lives.

Understands the needs of the lost around him, whose lives are a mess and who have given up hope. They know they need something but have no idea what it is. With the Word of God in his hand, the church planter helps them understand the spiritual issues behind their problems (Hebrews 4:12).

Knows how to apply the remedy. He sees the Scripture as a practical book of answers and knows how to apply them, having done so in his own life. He seeks to make the message plain, using the understanding gained from his own in-depth study to help him explain it simply to others (2 Timothy. 4:2).

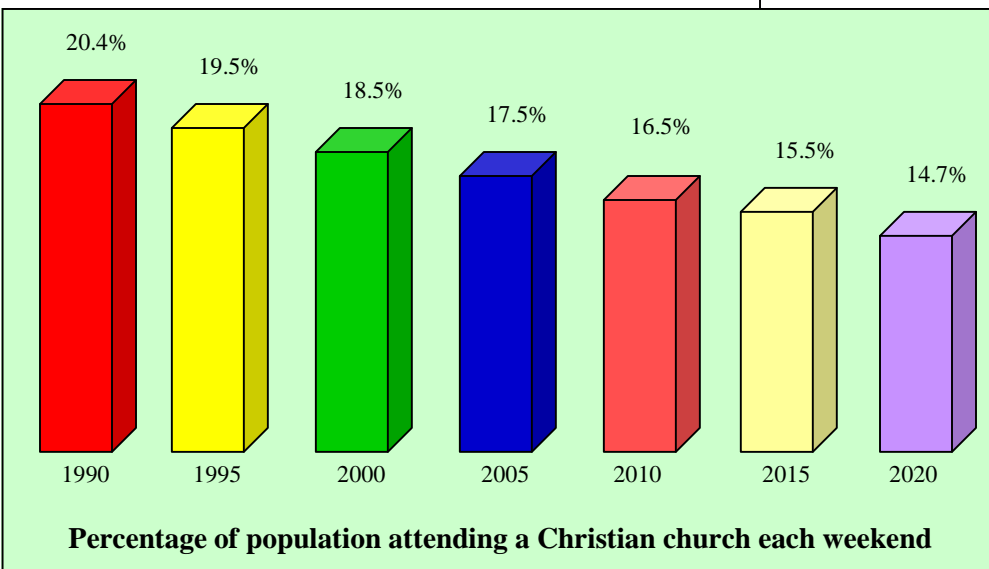
Models the truth he is teaching. Once the Scripture has worked in him, he opens his heart so that God's truth can flow unhindered to the hearts of his hearers (1 Timothy. 4:15; 2 Corinthians 6:11). He deals with people gently, being keenly aware his own weaknesses (Hebrews 5:2). His servant heart will gain the attention of those he seeks to win.

Is committed to follow-up care. The church-planting shepherd faithfully confronts the one who doesn't like the medicine, gently counsels the one who thinks he doesn't need treatment, lovingly prods the one who has lost the will to recover, and patiently feeds the one who is too weak to eat (I Thessalonians 5:14).

As church planters, we need to stop seeing the church as a clubhouse where the saints rejoice in their health, and begin to see it as a first-aid station where sinners find a remedy for their hurts. The focus must be outward rather than inward. Our places of ministry should not be regional research centers, but neighborhood urgent care clinics.

*Some wish to live within the sound of church or chapel bell;
I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell.*

(C. T. Studd



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