

The Church Planter's Toolbox

Ideas and Helps for Great Commission Workers • January 2008

Crossing Cultural Barriers Part 1

“Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but to the Jews only” (Acts 11:19).

Before ascending to the Father, the Savior gave clear instructions to “make disciples of all the nations,” and to “be witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea, in Samaria, and to the uttermost part of the earth.” He had taken his disciples to Samaria, and urged them to “lift up (their eyes and look at the fields, (that were) white for harvest,” but somehow the message didn’t seem to get through. On the day of Pentecost the gospel was proclaimed to people from many nations, but most of those who believed and were integrated into the group of believers in Jerusalem were people from the same Jewish background as the original disciples. Philip did indeed take the gospel to Samaria, but in Acts 10 God had to use unusual means with Peter to get him to understand that “God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.” Now, in chapter 11, some were beginning to share the gospel with the Hellenists—Jews with a different culture. Still their natural inclination was to preach the Word to “the Jews only.”

We can understand; the people they were used to associating with were those most like themselves—they were the ones with whom they felt comfortable. But God’s plan was that they teach ALL people groups and preach the gospel to EVERY creature (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15). As the church grew, the Lord of the harvest did not let them rest until they were obedient to this area of his command.

Today, in North America—indeed in every place—our world is becoming more multi-cultural. People who immigrate to another place are more likely to maintain their own culture than to blend into that of their host country. We expect foreign missionaries to work hard at adapting to different cultures in order to reach people effectively. But too often, those who minister in North America assume they can remain in their comfort zone ministering primarily to those most like themselves.

The Scripture records, “When it was evening, his disciples came to him saying, This is a deserted place, and the hour is already late. Send the multitudes away, that they may go into the villages and buy themselves food. But Jesus said to them, They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat” (Matthew 14:15-16).

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Preview Services Promote a Stronger Launch

Birthing a church is a one-time event, so it is important you get it right the first time around. The more people you have present for your first service, the more likely the church is to grow. Preview services are one way of building enthusiasm, excitement, and attendance as you move toward your big day of going public.

A preview service is exactly that. It is a sneak look at what the services of the new church will look like. These are usually held once a month for each of the three months preceding the official grand opening of the church. They are full-scale services with special music, songs, and preaching, and look just like any other service on a normal Sunday.

The Advantages of Preview Services

- They allow you the time needed to build excellence into each service without the pressure of preparing weekly services.
- They allow you to test the wisdom of your decisions before fully starting. You can try out your advertising approach, location, and the service you are planning.
- They gain a hearing with the unchurched initially by asking them to “try out” a service to see what it is like.

- They provide you with significant numbers of contacts and allow time for intensive follow up before the grind of weekly services.
- They build interest in the new church and contribute to more people being present for your official public launch.

Principles behind Preview Services

1. **Mini-step Principle** - Unchurched people are more likely to try a one-time event than to start attending a service that meets every week.
2. **Work Load principle** - It is more realistic for a small core group to provide a quality service once a month than once a week.
3. **Anticipation Principle** - It is better to have people eager for more than to try getting them to do too much too fast.
4. **Novelty Principle** - Novel things create interest, arouse curiosity, and attract people.

Tips for Launching Preview Services:

- Plan your services carefully and seek to build quality and excellence into everything you do.

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Preview Services continued

- Try to promote each service so that it has a larger attendance than the last one.
- Do not allow yourself to be pressured into moving to weekly services too quickly. If people like what they see and hear, they will press you to launch before you are ready.
- Host a next-step connecting event between your preview services such as:
 - A Saturday marriage enrichment seminar
 - Attending a sporting event together
 - A community service project
 - A small group Bible study
 - A special interest seminar
 - A gym or bowling night
 - A fun event for kids
 - A cook out
 - A party

Promote and Follow up on your Preview Services:

Your first preview service should be preceded by several months of high visibility activities in the community such as acts of kindness, outreach events, evangelistic Bible studies, community surveys, etc.. Promote each service through media such as radio and television ads, newspaper announcements, even billboard signs. Distribute flyers, door hangers, and posters, Make several thousand phone calls inviting people to attend. Send a hand-written invitation to every person who attended one of the previous services.

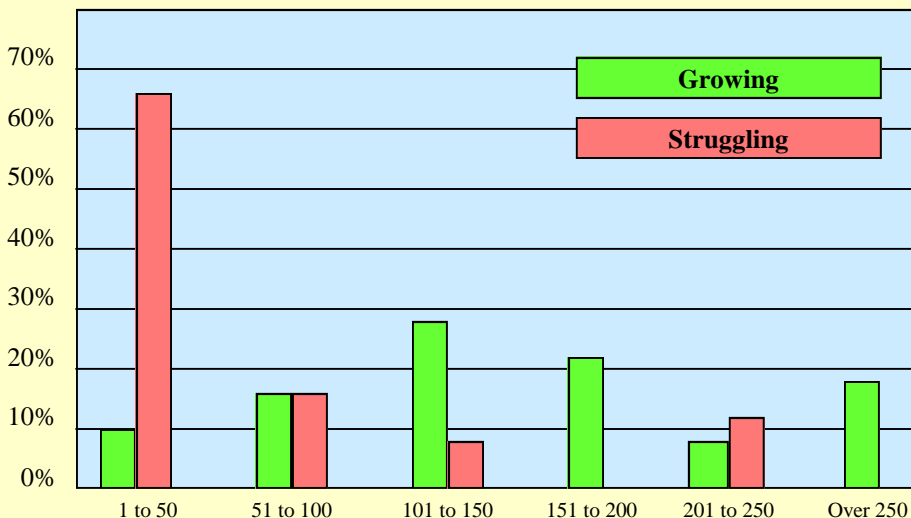
Contact everyone who attends a preview service within 36 hours with a phone call and a "thank you" letter sent first class. Let them know you appreciated their presence and invite them to the next service. Be sure to include the date, time, location, and theme of your message.

During the 8-10 weeks between your first preview service and your official launch of public services, focus on a "Phone's for You" approach - do 15,000 to 30,000 phone dial ups followed by successive weekly mailings to all who agree to receive information about the new church.

Preview Services Work:

Attendance is almost always higher at the opening service of new churches when they conduct two or three preview services first. You'll have more contacts, enthusiasm will be greater, and your services will be more effective because you will have already worked out many of the "bugs" that are common to any new event.

Number of People at First Service



Churches that grow rapidly tend to have more than 100 people present for their 1st service while churches that struggle tend to have less than 100 present at their public launch.

Cultural Barriers continued

We too, for a number of reasons, may be willing to send away people whom Christ would have us reach. Perhaps it is because:

- We are overworked and weary - *"This is a deserted place, and the hour is already late."*
- We think someone else can do it better - *"They may go into the villages."*
- We don't feel it is our responsibility - *"buy themselves food."*
- We fear we're inadequate for the task - *"We have here only five loaves and two fish."*

But the Savior says to us, *"They do not need to go away. YOU give them something to eat."*

God is bringing the mission fields of the world to us so that we can all be involved in world evangelism in our own neighborhoods. While there are plenty of people around just like us that need to be reached, there are many more within our reach that are different—someone needs to reach them. We cannot stop going to those abroad, but we certainly must take advantage of what our Master, in his sovereignty, is doing here at home.

We cannot neglect our Savior's command or miss the open doors he is putting before us. To take advantage of these opportunities, we must be willing to think differently, and learn to minister effectively in multi-cultural settings. In today's world, our effectiveness in planting churches will be limited if we continue to allow cultural differences to keep us from giving the gospel to all those around us. In the next issue we'll discuss ways to enhance our cultural attitudes and skills.

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