

The Church Planter's Toolbox

Ideas and Helps for Great Commission Workers • July 2009

Raise Your Standards

One of the keys to developing healthy, growing churches is to raise the membership standards. Rather than making it easy to get in and hard to get out (as is often done in churches), we need to raise our standards and expectations for membership. Numerous churches have lowered their standards to the point that membership is all but meaningless. Many civic and sports organizations require more of their members than the average church. People do not value that which requires little of them.

In Matthew 9:29 Jesus told the blind man, "according to your faith be it unto you." He would receive what he expected to receive. The same is true of church membership. People live up to or down to whatever is expected of them. If the standards and expectations for membership are increased, people will value them more and rise to meet them. Quality attracts quantity. By setting low membership requirements we unwittingly devalue the very thing we want people to value. Raising the standards increases the importance of membership and provides for greater attraction. This is clearly illustrated in Thom Rainer's book, *High Expectations*.

Higher standards often bring growth. Research indicates growing churches tend to have significantly higher membership standards than non-growing churches. Rather than repulsing people (the fear of many planters and pastors), the higher expectations actually attract more people because they equate value with cost. If something is costly in terms of money, time or effort, it has value to them. Here are some areas in which standards need to be raised:

- **Profession of faith and baptism by immersion** - Nearly half the churches in America do not require members to be born again or to be identified with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection. Every prospective member should be required to give a clear, concise public testimony of his or her salvation experience and subsequent baptism by means of immersion. Help people write out their testimonies and then require them to read it to the congregation before receiving them into membership.
- **Membership classes** - Nearly three-quarters of growing churches require or expect people to complete a membership course prior to joining the church. Not only does this enhance the value of membership, but it gives the planter/pastor the opportunity to explain the church's philosophy of ministry, doctrinal beliefs, goals, mission, vision, and expectations. Rather than driving people away, such classes help build unity and commitment in the church.
- **A Signed Covenant** - Raise the standards by asking people to sign a membership covenant in which they commit themselves to protect the unity of the church, share in the responsibility of the church, serve in the ministry of the church, and support the work of the church. Signing such a document significantly increases the importance of membership and enhances the value people place on it.
- **Commit to being Discipled** - Many believers have never been taught how to grow spiritually. Potential members should be required to enroll in an ongoing discipleship



Membership Class

Continued on the next page

Shepherding the Young Church

Starting and building a church requires that the servant of God be proficient in a variety of ministries. In a church that is well established, the pastor can perhaps enjoy the luxury of specializing in some areas of ministry while letting others care for the rest. The church planter, however, has to be able to do it all in the early stages, and must know how to train others to replace him as the work develops.

A church planter must be a visionary, evangelist, motivator, teacher, administrator, and a mentor. But in addition, since the church is composed of people, he must also know how to feed, protect, and lead God's flock.

It has been said that the ministries of the pastor and the church planter are different and require different skills. But the fact is, every church planter must know how to shepherd the flock entrusted to him. (The converse is also true, that every pastor would benefit from thinking more like a church planter.)

In the beginning of a new work, of necessity the church planter will focus much of his efforts on making contacts, building relationships, and sharing the gospel. At what point does he shift from being just an evangelist to also being a pastor? As soon as the first person accepts Christ! At that point he must know how to care for the new believer, whose spiritual life and health are at stake.

One can be a pastor without building the church, but he cannot build a church without being a pastor. The development, growth and strength of the church will depend on the shepherding skills of the church planter.

Where can we go to learn how to better
Continued on the next page

Raise Your Standards continued

course designed to help them move through the successive levels of discipleship. If you do not have such a course, you should make it a priority to acquire one before implementing any other ministries.

• **Doctrinal / Philosophical Agreement** -

Only people who agree with the church's doctrinal positions, distinctives, and philosophy of ministry should be received into membership. These items should be reviewed as part of the membership course.

• **Ministry Placement** - God has gifted every believer for service. Teach people that membership involves ministry. Let them know they will be expected to participate in a regular ministry assignment if they join the church. Then assign them a job and provide them with the training they need.

• **Attendance and Tithing** - Membership expectations should include personal and financial support of the church's ministry. Anyone who is employed or is a member of a sports team is expected to be present for work and/or team activities. Likewise, members need to understand that they too are expected to tithe and be present for most of the church's services.

"But won't such strict standards keep people from joining?" Yes, it will keep some away, especially those who are uncooperative and non-supportive. Higher standards attract far more people than are turned off by them. Moreover, you will attract people with servant hearts who will be more committed, more supportive, and more willing to be involved in ministry.

Shepherding the Young Church continued

shepherd God's flock? Let us look in the Scriptures to see what God would teach us.

In Acts 20:28-30 God talks to the "elders." This is one of the terms used in the New Testament to describe the pastoral office (the others are "bishop," "pastor" and "minister"). As in this text, these terms and concepts are generally linked (see also Titus 1:5-7 and 1 Peter 5:2), and together they teach us that the pastor must be an example to, take responsibility for, serve, and care for the flock of God.

God commands His servants to "feed" the flock (supervise, tend or watch over) which He has purchased at great price. As a church planter, you have a key role to play. This is not just an enterprise or a church-planting project of which you are in charge. You may be planting the church, but the church is not yours to do with as you please. You must be aware that each person to whom you minister is valuable to the Savior. These are the Master's sheep for which He will hold you accountable.

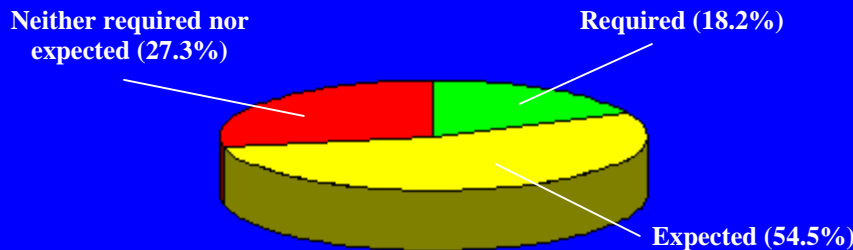
This passage also tells us that the flock is in danger. In every local church setting the pastor is charged with protecting the flock from dangers both outside as well as from within the flock. There will be those who want to tear up the flock, teach false doctrine or seek to draw disciples after themselves.

In a church plant, the role of the shepherd is not less important than in an established church – it is even more significant. Remember that in church planting your goal is not to find mature sheep who may be looking for greener pastures with another flock, but to seek out the "other sheep" which the Savior would bring into the fold (John 10:16). God may indeed send in some mature believers along the way, but your goal should always be to win the lost and make disciples. Because the young church is likely to have a higher percentage of new-born, baby Christians, there will be more tender lambs who are easy prey for wolves. And because the collective body has less maturity and experience, it faces even greater danger from those who would "draw away disciples after themselves."

The care of the flock is not something to be taken lightly. God sovereignly gives this responsibility to the pastor (overseer, bishop). As a church planter setting out to serve Christ and establish churches, by the very nature of what you are doing, you are accepting the responsibility of a shepherd. So Acts 20:28 applies directly to you. You must give careful attention to the needs of the flock, to your own heart and spiritual condition, and to the way you care for the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

About 4,009 churches of all types are started annually in the United States, but an additional 2,900 new churches are needed each year just to keep up with the population growth.

Does Your Church Require or Expect Persons to go through a New Member Class for Membership?



Nearly 3/4 of growing churches require or expect persons to complete a membership class

The *Church Planter's Toolbox* is published six times a year. © 2009 Baptist Mid-Missions. All rights reserved. For reprint requests, contact one of the editors.

Editors

Roger McNamara
Church Planting Training Specialist
E-mail: RNMcNamara@juno.com

Dan Whitcher
Church Planting Coordinator
E-mail: dan4bmm@aol.com

Baptist Mid-Missions
P.O. Box 308011
Cleveland, Ohio 44130-8011
www.bmm.org

187 McLaughlin Drive
Moncton, NB E1A 4P4
Canada

Previous editions of *The Church Planters Toolbox* and other valuable resources are available at:
<http://www.churchplantingna.org>

