

Greater Orlando Baptist Association

Determining Your Readiness For A Church Planting Center

In our research on church planting centers, multiplying churches, and multiplication in general two dominate themes emerged regarding those churches and institutions we examined: First, there was an overwhelming commitment to developing church planting leaders. It drove their work. It caused them to sacrifice. It defined who they were as an institution. Second, there was an overwhelming confidence that they, as an institution, had something to offer those desiring to grow and develop as a leader for church planting. They were aware of what defined who they were as a church, had developed systems and leaders to help fulfill their mission, and were experiencing a healthy level of *success*.” And... they feel that if others imitate them they will experience the same level of success.

As we work with churches or networks that want to create their own systems for the development of church planting leaders it seems that one of the first questions we must answer is, “Are we ready for this new ministry?” Obviously determining your readiness may slow you down, but we believe it will save you some problems in the future.

So let’s go back to the two themes mentioned in the first paragraph. The development of church planting leaders is a daunting task that will consume a large volume of your resources. Not only do we suggest that you examine the driving force behind this quest, but determine if you and your congregation are willing to let the development of leaders shape who you are and what you do as an institution. Second, you need to take an honest look at the health and vitality of your church. If you were an outsider looking in, what do you see the hand of God upon your church? In what ways? Can you articulate the systems, values, and vision that define who you are? Are they in writing?

As we worked through our process we identified six areas to shape your journey to determine if your church is ready to move forward. Those areas are:

- Vision & Congregational Buy-in
- Church Health
- Evidence of Multiplication
- SBC Alignment
- Strategy Concept in Place
- Resource Allocation
- Partnership Development Capacity

Vision and Congregational Buy-in

As mentioned earlier the development of leaders for church planting will define who you are as an organization. The work load is tremendous so it is paramount that your congregation not only affirm the direction, but that they get involved! Here are a few questions to help you determine your readiness in this area:

- What is the current vision being communicated to your church? How is it communicated? In what ways is your current vision impacting your congregation? How do you reinforce the vision?
- How would your church members define success for your church?
- What do you celebrate in your church? How does your church express ownership in in this area?
- In what ways will your vision for church planting and leader development impact your church? What, if anything, will have to change in your current vision?
- In what ways have you taken risks or experimented with new ideas in the recent past? What has failed to work? What did you learn from those experiences?

Church Health

Determining the health of your church can be a humbling experience. Numerous books have been written on the subject and several instruments, like *Natural Church Development* and *Transformational Church* have been developed to aid in the process. Here are a few questions to accelerate your thinking in this area:

- How would you define a healthy church? Does it describe your church?
- What fruit in the life of your church gives evidence of health?
- In what ways does your church demonstrate dependence upon God?
- Think about your current paid staff. How long have they been with the church? Where did they come from? In what ways do you see God working in each of their lives?
- In what areas of ministry do you see God working? In what ways?
- In what ways does your church serve its community?
- Over the past few years, what, if any, areas of conflict have surfaced in the life of your church? How were they handled? How did they impact your church?

Evidence of Multiplication

At the heart of church planting is a quest to reduce lostness in a given area or among a specific group of people. Therefore, churches who take on the task of developing leaders must be effective in the making of disciples. They need to have a proven track record of making disciples, multiplying small groups, identifying and developing small group leaders, and in church planting. In other words, there should be evidence that the Spirit of God is moving in their midst and that as a result, lives, and prayerfully, entire communities are being transformed by the gospel. Again, here are a few questions to guide your thinking in this area:

- What percentage of your church's growth comes through baptism/conversion?
- Who are you reaching with the gospel? How are you reaching them?
- What evidence do you have of multiplication occurring in your church?
- What percent of your worship attendees are in small groups? Is the number of small groups in your church growing? Do you have an intentional process for identifying and developing new small group leaders? In what ways is it bearing fruit?

- Think about the last adult you baptized. How did they connect with your church? Who or what had the greatest influence upon them coming to Christ? How long did the journey take? How have they grown since then? Can you outline your disciple making strategy and process?
- In what ways does your church develop leaders? In what ways is your process intentional? What leaders have come out of your congregation and moved into fulltime vocational ministry?
- If you opened a center tomorrow, who would be the participants in your first group of leaders?
- What is your history and track record with church planting?

SBC Alignment

We understand that this can be a sensitive subject and that people may define what it means to be aligned with the Southern Baptist Convention differently but the topic is a vital one. The North American Mission Board is an organization of the SBC. Although it affirms kingdom endeavors, it partners with other SBC entities. As a matter of fact, at the heart of the SBC is cooperation.

- In what ways does your church support SBC mission causes financially? Do you support the *Cooperative Program* and our annual missions offerings financially?
- In what ways are you currently partnering with Southern Baptist churches and entities to advance the Kingdom of God?
- Have you affirmed the *Baptist Faith and Message* and integrated it into the life and structures of your church?
- Are you willing to require the churches you plant to support the *Cooperative Program*, support the annual missions offerings, support Greater Orlando Baptist Association and affirm the *Baptist Faith and Message*?

Strategy Concept in Place

Although it may be early in your quest to develop leaders for church planting it is important to determine where you are in the development of the concepts that will shape your work. Have you identified a set of values that will define not only who you are but the leaders you develop? In some cases God has placed a location or a people group upon your heart – in other cases their work is driven by a desire to develop leaders and help them serve where God has called them. In this section we're certainly not looking for a fully developed strategy but would want you to identify those absolutes that will shape your work.

- What is your current strategy for church planting? How is God redefining that vision?
- Has your church affirmed *Send North America*? If so, In what ways do you envision your church participating in *Send North America*? Has God laid a place or people group upon your heart?
- In what ways does your church review progress and alignment of your ministries with your vision? How will you measure success or progress in this new ministry area?

- What steps have you taken to create your church planting and leader development strategy? What are your next steps?
- Who have you identified that is currently developing leaders for church planting? What about them do you find appealing? What weaknesses do you see in their ministry?

Resource Allocation

Like you I have heard, and possibly used the phrase, “*Where God guides, God provides.*” I believe that it is true but I also believe that a wise man resists the urge to begin the journey without counting the cost! Not only will you need funds for your operating budget and to cover staff salaries, you will need space, man power, and other resources. Many of the more influential church planting centers have healthy budgets and therefore, the resources to meet their obligations.

- What will it cost to fulfill your vision for church planting and leader development?
- What financial resources will you commit to fulfilling your vision? Are you financially able to do this at this time? If not, when? If not, how will you meet your needs as you move towards self-sufficiency?
- Has your church’s budget increased, decreased or stayed the same over the past five years?
- In what areas have you increased your budget over the past five years? In what areas have you decreased financial support?
- In what ways do you see this new vision impacting the distribution of funds, manpower, and time for existing ministries in your church? What adjustments, if any, will you have to make in other ministry areas?
- Will you have the resources to assign at least one staff member to work full-time on this new ministry?

Partnership Development Capacity

Our research on this subject revealed the fact that healthy churches or organizations who focus on leader development and church planting have multiple partners who collaborate with them to fulfill their vision. Although you may not have the partners you need at this time, the bigger question is, “Do you have the relational capacity to enlist partners?” In other words, can you leverage your current relationships to meet the needs of your vision? Is your relational network large enough to enlist the partners that you will need?

- In what ways has your staff and church participated in partnerships with other churches? Is your relational network adequate to resource your vision? Would other leaders describe your church as being a “team player” or a lone ranger?
- In what ways do you engage your people in mission causes? How do you see those involved becoming a part of this new vision?
- In what ways does your staff currently connect (formerly or informally) with other ministerial leaders from outside your church?

- As you picture your vision becoming a reality, how do you picture leaders from outside your organization not only resourcing your vision, but assisting in the development of your strategy?