

Planting and Growing Urban Churches
From Dream To Reality
Edited by Harvie M. Conn

Introduction

Four Basic Principles

1. In Christ alone is there salvation.
2. Believers in Christ should join communities of faith
3. Churches are God's missionary instruments.
4. Care of the environment is a Christian concern.

Part 1 – Research: Searching for the Right Questions

Chapter 1 learning from Urban church Research

Type 1 – Ethnic Churches

The most typical growing situation is the church where over 85 percent of the membership is composed of the racial or ethnic minority that is producing the transition.

Type 2 – Multiple Mission Churches

The mother church (usually Anglo) shares its facilities with one or more ethnic missions.

Type 3 – Multi-Ethnic Churches

They are made up of a relatively stable mix of groups which worship together, rather than separately.

Type 4 – Regional Church

They are usually located near the edge of the city proper, near freeways, and draw their members from suburbs and exurban territory.

Type 5 – Satellite Churches

They have started a satellite congregation in the suburbs.

Research is needed in many areas-

- How new churches are developed.
- Effective ministry techniques.
- Alternative structures for the urban church.
- Model developments.
- How to reach apartment dwellers.
- How to retain members.
- In the area of church growth, we need to know if the homogeneous unit principle actually works as a programmed growth technique.

- We need to know the role of the pastor in church growth.
- We need to know why churches in so-called good context manage to decline.
- We need to test all the growth strategies being promoted by various agencies of the Southern Baptist Convention.

These are just a few of the practical research topics relating to the urban church. Obviously, there are other areas of equal or greater significance.

Chapter 2 – Using Research Strategically in Urban Ministry

Strategic planning has three foundational pillars-

1. Intuition
2. Experience
3. Research

Researching Unreached People

Receptivity – The goal is to discover those who, for one reason or another, are seeking change.

Understanding of Biblical Truth – What do those in a target audience believe to be true about God?

Motivations and Felt Needs – Biblical truth takes on power once it is perceived in the context of motivations and needs.

Attitudes toward the Christian Message – What is the attitude about the act of becoming a Christian?

Decision-making Styles – Is there a felt need for additional information? If so, are they readers, listeners, etc.? Are decisions made as individuals or in a family or larger group?

Surveys

The challenge is a familiar one – adaptation and contextualization.

Reporting the Findings

1. Make maximum use of charts and graphs.
2. Do not use technical terms.
3. Present only the data which have major implications for strategy. Explain what these implications are. Suggest the strategic options that should be considered, stressing the most relevant considerations.
4. Trust the users to make good decisions as they interact and seek the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

Part 2 – Strategy Planning: Searching for the Right Answers

Introduction

God plans.

Strategy planning must be a call to exercise discrimination.

Wisdom in strategy planning must give “prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the young” (Prov. 1:4).

Prudence and discretion, in their deepest theological sense, are intimately related to the knowledge of God. But they also carry the meaning of tact, discrimination, shrewdness and good sense.

1. Strategy planning must be oriented to hope, not shame over past failures or guilt over missed opportunities.
2. Strategy planning must be an exercise of faith.
3. Strategy planning must become the first step in evangelism.
4. Strategy planning must point to the obligations of urban service. The mission of “urban poor service”.
5. Strategy planning must promote awe and reverence.

Chapter 4 – The Challenge of World Evangelization to Mission Strategy

Urban centers are more than large collections of people; cities structure reality and package peoples. In a rural area, most relationships are primary; in the city, most are secondary. In the country, our senses tend to open outward to the environment, but in the city, we close in to protect our space. To keep from hemorrhaging emotionally, urban dwellers overcompensate to noise, crowds, and visual pollution by turning inward or tuning off. The fact is that the more densely crowded we are, the less we communicate. Pluralistic interaction threatens those who lack identity or security, but to those who have confidence, life in a secondary relation matrix frees one up to specialize and create both personally and in ministry. What is urban bondage to some liberates others. Those dynamics are at work to some extent in any changing human environment.

The Lay Challenge

The only way we will evangelize the city is to recruit, equip, and encourage laymen, -women, and – youth to identify and penetrate their respective worlds with the gospel.

Chapter 5 – Address Felt Needs of Urban Dwellers

Evangelical Reluctant to Urban Churches...

1. Greek-mindedness- We have tended to treat the unsaved around us like disembodied spirits in our specialized emphasis on the spiritual. We have preferred to leave the rest of the person to other, usually secular, specialists.
2. Class captivity – Failure to recognize the influence of class context leads to an unintended arrogance. Our forms and focus of ministry are also shaped by the absolutizing of middle-class norms.
3. Professional priesthood – Until the laity are seen as an integral part of the priesthood and unleashed, churches are evangelistically anemic and crippled in their expression of compassion.
4. Self-defense – Those who have it made don't like to lose it.
5. Misunderstood mandate – Josh Wesley reached out primarily to the working class. He neglected no opportunity for practical social expression. Wesley's view of the biblical mandate was that "if good works do not follow our faith, even all inward and outward holiness, it is plain our faith in nothing worth..."

Felt Need Intervention

Felt needs may be addressed on individual and corporate levels.

Principles of Felt-Need Outreach

1. Ask, don't assume. As you assess the community, also assess your church. What are its current and potential resources in relation to the identified needs of the target community? What kind of people, time and financial resources will be needed to meet the needs?
2. Leadership for felt-needs ministry will be exhorted and reinforced by the pastor but supplied most naturally by the laity.
3. Felt-need ministries must be carefully designed and executed so as to avoid creating or prolonging patterns of dependency. The goal is to help people acquire the skills and resources necessary for independence.
4. Felt-needs ministry must be sensitive to the underlying legal, administrative and policy conditions which create and perpetuate needs among certain groups of people.

Chapter 6 – How to Create an Urban Strategy

1. Create a prayer base for your activity.
2. Secure data
 - 2.1 How many children live here?
 - 2.2 How many single-parent families are present?
 - 2.3 How many retired and elderly live here?
 - 2.4 Where are the poor?
 - 2.5 Where are the rich?
 - 2.6 What ethnic groups are there, and where?
 - 2.7 What are the educational levels and occupations?
 - 2.8 What will the population be in five years? Ten years?
 - 2.9 What urban redevelopment will take place?
3. Create a strategy map.
4. Delineate the neighborhoods.
5. Create a template for your report. I usually prepare a double-page spread for each neighborhood, showing a population pyramid, a small map showing boundaries of the neighborhood, housing information, immigration patterns, marital status patterns, income, employment, religious preferences, a brief description of the community, the neighborhood category and a recommended strategy for planting appropriate cell groups.
6. Make population pyramids,
7. Develop neighborhood analyses.
8. Cluster neighborhoods into categories.

The Young Developing Suburb

These suburbs are still in the process of subdivision and construction. Their populations are increasing rapidly as young parents buy the homes and establish their families.

The Maturing Suburb

This type of suburb has been in the process of development for the last twenty years. The population tends to be fairly stable.

The Aging Suburb

The aging suburb typically consists of predominantly single-family homes more than forty years old. The population of suburbs in this

category is invariably declining. Persons over sixty years of age always comprise more than 12 percent of the aging suburb.

The Rejuvenating Suburb

A decline in population has slowed or been reversed. At least one young adult age group showed a net increase between censuses. Reaching this area must be done by two branches of Christ's body: one which focuses on the young adult and another which concentrates on the aging person.

The Rural, Industrial or Special Purpose Suburb

These areas are rural or semi-rural. The primarily industrial area has virtually no resident population, and those in which dominant residential institutions distort the pattern of the population structure.

9. Take surveys of population awareness.

Members of population categories must be interviewed to determine responsive segments.

1. Discover which population segments are turning to Christ in existing churches and parachurch groups.
2. Discover which population segments are most vulnerable to the evangelism of the cults and what causes them to respond.
3. Interview people in different neighborhoods of the city. If it is discovered that there is responsiveness in a certain segment of people, then use the previous research to locate where pockets of such people are located.

10. Create your strategy document.

11. Select key areas for penetration.

With the strategy report available, it will now be possible to reach neighborhoods with similar characteristics.

12. Use a checkerboard planting pattern.

13. Create the actual strategy.

1. Who are the responsible segments we have discovered?
2. Should we seek to penetrate several groups as a test of receptivity before focusing on only one?
3. Which group, or groups, within the community should first be reached?
4. Where do these segments live or gather?

5. How should we seek to communicate with them? Should we use direct mail, word of mouth only, house-to-house survey, or other means?
6. What will be our reason for contacting them? Should we offer special small groups which focus of their problems or interest? (Examples: a “target group” for expectant mothers, or a group for lonely people).
7. Where will we meet with them? Can we use their own homes? If not, what facilities in the areas where they live might be available for us to use? Can we use our own homes for this purpose?
8. How many groups can we launch in the first six months, given our manpower and their available time?

Resources for Doing Strategy Planning

- Dayton, Edward R. and David A. Fraser. *Planning Strategies for World Evangelization*. Rev. ed., 1990. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. and Monrovia, CA: MAARC. Walks through these key stages of strategy planning. Oriented around the concept of unreached peoples, it is useful both inside and outside the North American context. No specific attention to urban setting.
- Faircloth, Samuel D. *Church Planting for Reproduction*. 1991. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House. Generic overview of steps involved in church planting. Makes strong use of PERT management techniques in modeling the process.
- Malphurs, Aubrey. *Planting Growing Churches for the Twenty-First Century*. 1992. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House. Similar in focus to Faircloth but less rigidly defined by management process overlay. More time spent on discussion of personnel and principles. Of wider use than merely urban.
- Marchak, Mark. *The Urban Church Planter's Book of Markers*. 1993. New York: Conservative Baptist Home Missions Society. In-progress, loose-leaf binder collection of tools, methods and "snapshot" case studies of urban church planting in New York. Good theological reflection on the nature of the city. Rambling in style but very comprehensive and extremely sensitive to the city context. Strong practitioner orientation.
- Ratliff, Joe S., and Michael J. Cox. *Church Planting in the African-American Community*. 1993. Nashville: Broadman Press. Strongly oriented to the practical in easy, readable style. Special attention to the relationship of organizing body to the sponsoring church and the role of the church planter. May need to be supplemented by reference to Faircloth or Malphurs for insight on concrete steps in church planting.
- Rusbult, Richard E., Richard K. Gladden, and Norman M. Green Jr. *Local Church Planning Manual*. 1977. Valley Forge: Judson Press. Designed to help local churches do self-evaluation. Step-by-step instructions are given for developing a philosophy of ministry, building goals, objectives and program plans. Over half the volume consists of tear-out sheet to be used in evaluation. Comprehensive in scope. Not specifically urban in focus.

Chapter 7 – From Homogeneity to Congruence

There is evidence to support the idea that churches grow best in settings where their values are shared.

The work of Hadaway and Walrath is important for urban missiologists. It assumes and demonstrates the validity of the homogeneous unit principle as a sociologically descriptive concept. Churches become “structured around the class character, values and actual residents” of their neighborhoods. This leads inevitably to a lack of “fit” between a church and neighborhood undergoing significant change. Hadaway objected to the homogeneous unit principle on ethical grounds. However, his anticipated norm of a stable church, based on his research, was the embodiment of a single cultural group and its values.

Which kinds of facts tend to form the basis for a church fellowship in urban America in the latter half of the 20th century? Education and income still provide two of the best handles for distinguishing one type of congregation from another.

Other values are ideological.

A third group of values is relational. ...they simply are no longer tied to geography and tradition as they might have been in a rural locale.

Another group has recently come under consideration. James F.

Hopewell wrote about the place of narrative and story in a congregation’s self-perception. It may be that the particular telling of a congregation’s story, with the unpredictable twists of plot that make every church unique, may be well worthy studying for its effect on church growth.

Chapter 8 – Sorry! The Frontier Moved

Two assumptions in mission seem self-evident.

1. The first is that Jesus is our model for mission. Did he not say, “As the Father has sent me, even so I send you” (John 20:21)? ...Did he not with these words model the gospel as primarily good news for the poor?
2. The second assumption is pragmatic missionary strategizing:
 - 2.1 Urban is the direction of history.
 - 2.2 The poor are the most responsive target group, according to Jesus’ teaching and to missions history, research, and sociological analysis.
 - 2.3 The migrant poor are the largest, most responsive group on earth today.

Chapter 9 – Networking – Hope for the Church in the City

Urban Christian networking builds and maintains contacts which will enable those in that network to more effectively carry out ministry to the exploited, the lost, and the unchurched. Superficially, networking is simply a strategy by which people get in touch and maintain contact with each other. In a way, forming urban networks creates an identifiable “community” in which to work.

Chapter 13 – Reproducing House Churches

...The Sunday evening meeting was dissolved; instead, each house church focused its energies on developing a written covenant and vision statement. A person could join a particular house church by signing its covenant and having hands laid on by the leaders. In addition, all the house churches in the Fellowship agreed to meet as a large group once monthly...

The Structure of House Church Fellowships

Each house church in a fellowship stands autonomous; it is responsible to discern the Lord’s purpose concerning itself. The vision statement describes, for a six-month period, the nuts-and-bolts of accomplishing the dual responsibilities of evangelism and edification.

The leaders of the house churches in a fellowship meet monthly for fellowship, training, and decision making.