

207 Church Planting Research

The EFCA recently participated in a major research project with 11 other denominations conducted by the Center for Missional Research headed up by Dr. Ed Stetzer. There were more than 500 plants involved in this study which created a good sample to draw some church planting lessons. The research looked at three major issues, survivability, health, and conversion growth.

1. Church Planting Survivability

How many church plants survive the first four years? The folklore legend is that church planting is risky, and 80 percent of church plants fail.

This research proved just the opposite. Sixty-eight percent of the 500 plants surveyed were actively reaching people for Christ and making disciples four years after they were started. When we drilled down deeper with EFCA plants that have been started since the year 2000, we discovered 87 percent of them have survived.

Some first pastorate studies indicate it is more risky for fresh seminary graduates to take their first pastorate in an existing church than it is to plant a new church.

This is not to say church planting isn't risky. I believe that this high success rate is the direct result of our districts working very hard to build an ACTS (assessment, coaching, training, supporting) system for their church planters. The districts that have developed their church planting systems have seen the vast majority of their planters start healthy, growing, reproducing churches.

2. Church Plant Health

Do these church plants grow? The research discovered that the average plant is growing at about a 14-20 percent growth rate each year. That is a much higher percentage than existing churches, but most church plants launch public worship smaller than we would like (62) and it takes them longer to break the 100 barrier than we would like. We are adjusting our BootCamp training to address some of these growth barriers.

One of the dramatic growth discoveries is the impact of team planting. The average solo planter church attendance after four years is 84. The average team plant attendance after four years is 198. Younger planters are more inclined to conduct team ministry than baby boomer planters, but this is a healthy dynamic we have to encourage in all of our new

plants. Again, we are strengthening the team building modules in our BootCamp training.

3. Conversion Growth

The most famous statement written about church planting was in the opening chapter of Peter Wagner's classic, *Church Planting for a Greater Harvest*. He stated that all the church growth studies were indicating, "Church planting is the most effective evangelistic methodology under heaven."

Is this still true in 2007? To put this study in perspective, the national conversion growth rate of all churches is 3 percent. The conversion growth rate of our EFCA churches is 7 percent. The conversion growth rate of our EFCA church plants is 13 percent. While this is almost twice as much as existing churches, the conversion growth rate benchmark we have established for our EFCA church plants is 20 percent.

Leadership and Evangelism

I have found it interesting in studying David Garrison's house church model of planting, Keith Phillip's urban model of church planting, or Dave Ferguson's Multi-Site model of church planting, they all emphasize the same two things: leadership and evangelism. We need to be intentional in developing leaders, both lay and staff, and we need to be intentional in developing effective evangelism strategies that produce fruit.

If you would like the complete report of this study, please visit the EFCA church planting web site and download the study: <http://www.efca.org/planting/news/index.html>

— George Klippenes,
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