



**“P.L.A.N.T.S.: Equipping Seminary and College Students for Church Planting”
By J. D. Payne**

Over the past nine years, I have had the privilege of serving as a professor, equipping students in the area of missions and evangelism. When it comes to teaching church multiplication, I have found that effective training programs should be designed around P.L.A.N.T.S.

P-Provide the Biblical and Theological Foundations

One of the dangers of teaching practical subject matter is that we focus on the “how-tos” and fail to establish the “whys”. We must not be so quick to teach students the methods of church planting, that we fail to begin with the biblical and theological foundations. I have found it to be of the utmost importance to establish a healthy understanding of the relationships of Christology, Ecclesiology, and Pneumatology to church planting.

Beginning with Christology, it is extremely important that you assist your students in looking to the Scriptures to answer questions such as: “What is the relation of the incarnation and atonement to mission?” “What is a disciple of Christ?” and “What does it mean to be a Kingdom Citizen?”

Ecclesiology is the most critical issue in church planting today. Because of the natural tendency to define the local church in terms that are more reflective of cultural preferences than the biblical prescriptions, I strongly encourage spending a significant amount of time establishing a healthy doctrine of the church. How your students answer the question, “What is the church?” will affect everything they do in church planting.



Their answers will significantly shape their strategies, methods, understandings of leadership development, and understandings of themselves as missionaries.

Assist your students in finding biblical answers to questions such as: “What is the church, both universal and local?” “What are the necessary New Testament components for a church to exist at any time, in any place, among any people?” In other words, “According to the Bible, what is the basic essence for the church to be the church?”

The role of the Holy Spirit in church planting is often neglected in many circles today. As educators, it is important for you to assist your students in understanding the doctrine of the Holy Spirit as related to missionary work. Questions such as: “What is the role of the Holy Spirit in church planting?” “What is His role in making disciples?” “What is His role in sanctifying the new churches?” and “What is His role in appointing elders over new churches?” are all important questions to address in the classroom before students begin their work.

L-Lay-out Missiological Principles

Embrace and teach missiological principles that support the multiplication of disciples, leaders, and churches. Lay-out principles such as those related to indigenous church planting, contextualization, receptivity, locating persons of peace, evangelizing oikos networks, and leadership development.

Biblical principles of mission require us to develop and to teach a multiplication-oriented philosophy of church planting. Keep it simple, and instruct your students to do likewise. It is easier to multiply the simple expressions of contextualized churches, than complex cultural preferences of the church. Remember that all institutions, including



churches, evolve in their structures and organization from the simple to the complex.

Lay-out missiological principles advocating the planting of the basic essence of the church among the peoples.

A-Allow for Hands-on Training

Church planting cannot be taught in the sterile classroom alone. Church planting does not occur in the laboratory. By its very nature, church planting is a hands-on activity. As educators, we must move beyond providing the foundations and laying out the principles to action. Provide opportunities for hands-on training. Wed the classroom to field-based experience. As much as your institutional policies allow, provide credit to your students for field-based ministry experiences. For example, give opportunities to your students to conduct survey work, prayer walk communities, engage in personal evangelism, work to begin Bible studies, and participate in church planting internships. Allowing for hands-on training, allows you as an educator to blend the theoretical and the practical in your equipping.

N-Involve Practitioners

(Ok, I know "involve" does not start with the letter "N", but I needed an "N-sounding" word to fit my acrostic.) By allowing missionaries to speak to your classes and to share their recent experiences, you will provide students the opportunity to hear a diverse range of perspectives and how the theory and principles are presently impacting various peoples. Involving practitioners puts "flesh" on the theory.



A second way to involve practitioners in equipping church planters is by providing mentors for your students. As you allow for hands-on training, connect your students with those practitioners who can coach them as they move out into the field to begin their ministries.

T-Teach Various Models and Methods

In light of the biblical and theological foundations and missiological principles you have been advocating, teach your students how to think critically about various church planting models and methods. For example, expose your students to methodologies that address house churches, cell churches, purpose-driven, and traditional paradigms. Teach your students how to sift through the sediment of various church planting methodologies to locate the golden nuggets of truth to apply to their contexts, rather than how to clone different expressions of the Body of Christ that are not necessarily biblical, culturally translatable, or easy to reproduce.

S-Support Strategy Development

Do not embrace strategies that are designed to plant a single church, but rather support strategy development that is focused on churching a region, people group, or population segment. Teach your students how to think strategically about the multiplication of disciples, leaders, and churches. Allow this component of your church planting training to be the most practical, assisting students in developing strategic plans.

A word of caution: Help your students to understand that though strategies are important, they must be held loosely because strategies must be flexible and subject to



the Holy Spirit. Even the Apostle Paul made adjustments in his strategy (Acts 16:6-13). Having taught your students a healthy doctrine of the Holy Spirit, they will be better prepared to apply their strategies in light of what God is doing throughout the world.

Whether you are just beginning to equip others in the area of church multiplication, or are looking for ways to improve your well-established programs, it is my hope that you will use P.L.A.N.T.S. as a guide in equipping your students to make disciples of all nations.

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This article was originally published in the *Lausanne World Pulse*. The original version is located at: <http://www.lausanneworldpulse.com/perspectives/783>