

Pentecostals Growing With Church Plants

Once the outcasts of religious society, Pentecostals now represent the fastest-growing form of Christianity in the entire world. And based on recent statistics, a renewed emphasis on church planting among many of the largest charismatic denominations may explain why.

According to the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Life, Pentecostals make up more than 25 percent of all Christians. This group also accounts for more than 8 percent of the world's total population. And the numbers continue to grow as charismatic church planters forge into new territory.

"The healing crusades with Oral Roberts and Reinhard Bonnke have been a major part of the growth of Pentecostalism," explains Vinson Synan, dean of the School of Divinity at Regent University. "And the Pentecostals have strong leadership, planting churches everywhere in the world."

The Assemblies of God (AG) is leading the church-planting charge among Pentecostal denominations. The AG recorded its second-highest ever number of new church openings in the United States in 2011, planting 368 new churches to bring its domestic count to 12,595. The AG's Church Multiplication Network (CMN) helps church planters wade through the challenges of opening a new church through training, mentoring and matching funds.



"We don't start churches to win a contest or for the sake of starting institutions," says CMN Director Steve Pike. "Peter Wagner once said the single most effective evangelistic methodology under heaven is planting new churches. Our research shows this is true. Every new church we started in

2009 added about 50 new converts that year.”

Meanwhile, Foursquare Church is seeing a surge in ethnic church growth. Widespread population shifts and immigration—Hispanics accounted for 56 percent of the U.S. population growth during the past decade, according to the 2010 U.S. Census Bureau—are introducing new realities to Foursquare.

“Our greatest church-planting opportunities are ethnic and generational,” says Bill Gross, a missional development coach for Foursquare.

Foursquare launched a new leadership network called the National Hispanic Council to reach out to this growing demographic. So far, there are about 250 Hispanic Foursquare churches in the U.S. But Foursquare isn’t stopping with Hispanics.

“One in six Foursquare churches is Hispanic, and 2012 is focused on this growth as well as Native American, Korean, Chinese and various other immigrant groups,” Foursquare General Supervisor Tammy Dunahoo says. “We have five targets we are focusing everything around regarding health and multiplication: leaders, churches, people groups, nations and resources.”

The need for church planting is great. A Barna Group survey shows that 43 percent of Americans claim to have attended a church service. That means 57 percent are unchurched, notes Pike. With those statistics in mind, the U.S. alone has a long way to go in order to make disciples of all nations.

“Satan does not want new churches to start, especially churches that are aggressively targeting the unchurched,” Pike says. “People who plant churches experience a level of warfare that they’ve probably not experienced before. It’s a real factor. But the good news is ... we’re seeing an acceleration of strong, healthy churches.”