

9 Reasons Why Many Church Plants Fail

I have spent the last four decades establishing/planting local churches as well as overseeing them. As a result, I have learned several lessons as it relates to the success and failure of churches. In this article, I will pinpoint several salient issues related to church plants that can make or break them. My frame of reference will be New York City, the city in which I live and work.

In reading Scripture, I am convinced that the devil cannot close a local church or denomination. Jesus said in Matthew 16 that the gates of hell cannot prevail against the church. Jesus also said in Revelation 2:5 that He would remove the lampstand if there was no repentance. This lampstand was the church (Rev. 1:20).

I have given my life in the service of Christ's body. I firmly believe that God's plan for the local church is that it will be the means in which His divine purpose for the earth is fulfilled.

The following are some of the main reasons why I believe many church plants fail:

- 1. The lead pastor never heard from God that he was to launch a church.**

I am old-fashioned and believe that the first and foremost question a prospective pioneering pastor should ask is, "Did God give me the assignment to start a church?" Asking this question follows the biblical model. Jesus personally called His 12 disciples to be fishers of men (Mark 1:17, Mark 3:13-15). I have found that leading a local church is so tricky that you will not be able to endure the significant challenges you will face unless you are convinced God has

called you to serve as a pastor. If someone launches a church merely because they think it is a good thing to do, or because they need a way of making a living, they will quit once the fiery trials come their way.

2. The lead pastor and family are not acclimated to the culture of the city.

Many gifted church planters have walked away from their church because they could not adjust to the challenges of living in a complex metro area like New York. Before one launches a church in a new city, my advice would be to live in it for several years. I would suggest that one serves as a secondary leader in a local congregation in that new city before becoming a lead pastor.

3. The high cost of living becomes burdensome.

Most church plants will have a difficult time sustaining themselves for more than a few years if they do not have an adequate financial pipeline from a mother church or a denomination. The cost of living is high in a city like New York compared to most other places in the world. As a result, it is essential to have adequate planning as the cost must be counted before the church is launched. My wife and I began a church in New York in the 1980s without neither money nor a church-planting team. To make matters even more challenging, we planted the church in a very rough community that was replete with drug-related violent crime and witchcraft. Despite such seemingly insurmountable handicaps, we have lasted. This is because we were sent by the word of the Lord which was confirmed by our pastor and our mother church.

4. The leaders are not rooted in the gospel.

Some church plants have a lead pastor and core team with grave theological differences that often hinder their ability to walk together in unity (Amos 3:3). In the process and rigors of church planting, as the pastoral team works together, they

are forced to confront their character flaws, doctrinal differences and leadership styles. If those are not appropriately addressed, then the team will fall apart.

5. Churches do not own a facility.

Most new congregations will not have the money to purchase a facility and may often resort to renting a public school. While the price of renting may be cost-effective, the church is often put in a situation in which they are at the mercy of the mayor. These churches end up being adversely affected when such government officials decide to change policies in an attempt to evict these churches. Some pastors in Manhattan think they have to toe the line very carefully when it comes to preaching controversial social issues because they may risk getting evicted. Congregations that do not rent from a public school usually have to pay exorbitant rents for a different location. Not owning a facility puts the church at the mercy of a landlord who can decide to raise the rent. They often have to move frequently from facility to facility, which makes it harder to grow a church with stability and consistency.

6. Churches build upon talent, not committed disciples.

Often new churches are so desperate for ministry volunteers that they will place people in leadership (like the worship team), who are not committed and mature disciples. This eventually causes frustration to the lead pastor because these immature people often act out of their egos, become unreliable when the thrill of the new plant is gone or when they do not get their way.

7. The core team of the church doesn't have a common DNA.

Another issue I see is when church planting teams do not share the same vision. It's important that the team has a history together before it plants. This ensures that they all have a common DNA as it relates to their values, methodologies, style of leadership and mission. Teams that are put together too

fast or without prior relational capital have a higher risk of failure due to division and lack of unity.

8. Churches were never adequately prepared and sent from a mother church or denomination.

Many lead pastors start without being sent from a mother church, an association of churches or a denomination. I have known of many independent churches led by a pastor who split off from another congregation. Churches that start in an unbiblical manner tend to have a short shelf life. The biblical model is found in the way the leaders of Antioch heard from God and sent Barnabas and Saul to plant local churches (Acts 13:1-2). Every lead pastor was either “sent” or just “went.”

9. The lead pastor is not functioning in one of the fivefold ministry gifts.

In Ephesians 4:11-12, we learn that God calls individual leaders to operate in one of five ministry gifts, which are for the edifying of Christ’s church. If a person is not functioning in one of these five gifts (apostle, prophet, pastor, teacher, evangelist), they have no business attempting to serve as a lead pastor and will not be graced to equip His church as an overseer. In my estimation, many lead pastors are not functioning fivefold ministers; rather, they are people with a good heart who want to love and serve the flock of God. In many of these cases these pastors are better suited to be deacons, elders, administrators or staff pastors/counselors. They do not have the anointing, grace and leadership capacity to pioneer or lead an assembly.