

Solving the greatest issues and challenges of the church planter

Ask any church planter what it's like to found a church, and you'll learn it's a lot like starting a business. From leases to launch teams, anyone who wants to grow a church from the ground up faces a daunting task. That's why church planters need a strong support system, especially to assist in areas where they may be less competent or knowledgeable, such as legal matters.

StartCHURCH is working to meet the needs of pastors, leaders and church boards who are establishing new churches and ministries to make a difference in their communities. Based in Duluth, Georgia, the company provides products and services that help churches and ministries establish a legal foundation, as well as other tools and services tailored to pastors and church leaders. To date, more than 17,000 churches have used StartCHURCH to help them get established for the work to which God has called them.

Rev. Raul Rivera founded StartCHURCH and created more than 80 effective, user-friendly manuals and compliance software and document packages, such as the StartRIGHT Service, to support new churches. A former technical writer, Rivera used his skills to research compliance issues that affect faith-based and nonprofit organizations.

From the beginning, it became clear that God was directing Rivera, who was himself a church planter.

"He began to study what it meant to have a strong foundation, what it meant, what bylaws were, what articles were, what are the rails that he could run on," says Nathan Camp, CEO of StartCHURCH. "And as he was beginning to study, he actually

felt the Lord speak to him and said, 'If you'll study this, I'll put you into all 50 states.' He didn't understand what that really meant at that time, but he just felt like he needed to move forward. So he launched his church and was established on a good strong foundation."

Fellow church planters—who know of each other's work—heard about Rivera's exceptional work.

"More church planters begin to ask him, 'How did you get set up so strong?' And he said, 'You know, I've really studied this and figured it out.' And they said, 'Can you show us?' And he actually wrote a book on how to plant a church, how to get legal, how to establish the foundation; he had previously been a tech writer, and he just wrote this manual on how to do it. People started using it, and you know how the story goes, it just began to blossom. And he began to get calls from all 50 states, and he began writing manuals for them to be able to launch their churches."

Thousands of contacts later, the phone is still ringing in StartCHURCH's Atlanta-area offices, where dozens are now employed.

"Every day our phone rings, and somebody on the other end is saying, 'God's called me to do something. I just don't know how to get started. I've read your documents. Can you help me?' It's just a wonderful place to be."

StartCHURCH leadership believes wholeheartedly in the work of the church planter and in their place of service in assisting that work.

"We're helping somebody do something significant," Camp says. "Our mission is to help churches and ministries really solve their administrative and financial challenges through creating services and products that help them grow to self-sustainability. So we don't just want to get them launched, but after they launch, we want to be able to help them get to

the place where they're self-sustaining. I know as a church planter, just because you've had your first service doesn't mean you're out of the woods."

StartCHURCH leaders and staff have one driving goal in mind as they go to work each day.

"Our goal is that they would get to a place where they say, 'Hey, we're self-sustaining, and this organization going to make it,' Camp says. "That's just a fun day for us."

Walking in Their Shoes

StartCHURCH's recently appointed CEO knows the church planter's life because, until recently, he was one.

"I know what it's like to be the guy who opened the door for the new visitor and helped them find a seat and then got up to play the guitar and switch the mics," Camp says. "And it is a wonderful time when the church gets to the place where the pastor's name isn't on everything."

He also used StartCHURCH products and services before the company hired him.

"I was a church planter who used StartCHURCH," Camp says. "I was very, very familiar with them. And when we launched, we went through all the StartCHURCH process and program. When I had the opportunity to come on staff with StartCHURCH, it just became a passion of mine to be able to help people protect what God was calling them to lead."

As Camp used the program in his church, he grew in confidence in areas where he felt weak.

"When StartCHURCH got involved, and I went through their program, I'd felt such a great sense of confidence that in an area where I was weak at the time, they were strengthening for me."

Camp had a software sales background, a skill he brought with him when he came on board as a church planting specialist at StartCHURCH.

“I just loved it, and honestly, I felt God gave me favor,” he says. “And I began to progress.”

As he grew in his profession, he was helping more and more churches along the way. After growing a team, he became the chief marketing officer.

“I was handling our branding, our sales team and overseeing that side of management,” Camp says. “And then this year—I’ve been here 10 years—I just took over the CEO role and get to take us forward into our next decade.”

Camp had worked in the for-profit sector and with secular companies.

“Through that process, I learned how to help people discover what their problems were, and then help find a solution,” he says. “You know, most people know they have a problem. They can’t articulate it, or they don’t know exactly which problem to tackle. And so I was working in CRM software, and began to be on these calls where it’s helping people say, ‘What’s your real problem? What’s the real challenge? And if I could help you solve that, what would that look like?’ And then connecting them to a solution. Well, a lot of times, that’s what happens here. People call and say, ‘I want to ordain somebody, but I don’t know how to do it.’ Well, that ordination really has some foundational documents that need to be in place before you can even give that ordination. So let me go ahead and start asking you questions and find out what your real problems are, what the real challenges are and connect them with [a solution]. So [I was] helping people find their problems and discover the solution.”

Camp has many skills, but perhaps the most valuable one comes from his own experience when he planted Discover Life Church

outside of Atlanta with the Association of Related churches.

“As a church planter, I’ve been through those challenges,” he says. “I know what it’s like to have to raise a team. I know what it’s like to lead your board meetings. And I feel like what I’ve been able to bring to the company is the voice of the planter. When I’m in meetings or talking with our software team, I’m able to say, ‘Hey, let’s make this in a way that makes sense to the planter. Let’s have the workflow that makes sense to the planter.’ We’ve got to make it a little easier. It can’t be so cumbersome because these guys and gals, they’ve got too much on their plate for us to make something complex. Let’s keep reducing it to the place where it’s easy to use and can give them the power quickly. So I think my background has been unique in both of those bringing in sort of business strategy from the past and being able to bring a knowledge of church and ministry.”

Even though Camp was busy in his church-planting ministry, the owners of StartCHURCH chose to hire him.

“The owners of StartCHURCH made opportunities for me to pursue the dreams God had put in my heart while still being able to add value,” he says. “So they created a whole opportunity for me to be able to work part time and be able to plant my church. About three years later, I installed a new pastor and went back full time at StartCHURCH without missing a beat. God really did something amazing, and that church is doing great today.”

Partnering in Noble Work

Church planters are visionaries, as CEO Camp well knows.

“We really want to help somebody who’s got a vision,” he says. “And if they don’t have anybody in their corner, they do know they can call StartCHURCH, and we’ll speak life over it. And when they tell us, ‘We’ve done it. We’re launching. Thank you for playing some small part,’ we are so excited. Our

testimonies are our success.”

StartCHURCH also understands the value of partnering with other organizations to assist the church planter.

“The church planter is doing something noble. What we’re trying to do is help somebody from the back side. We don’t make much of ourselves; we make much of the planter. And what we’ve done is, we’ve been able to partner with so many church-planting organizations. We work with Acts 29 or Association of Related Churches or North American Mission Board or Foursquare, a lot of organizations. What we do is support them. We’re not a church-planting organization. They are. But what they want to do is say, ‘Hey, can you help us in the middle of us assessing and training to make sure that [church planters] have the tools and resources to get their house in order so when we fund them or we send them out, we know that they’re building on a strong foundation?’ And that seems to add a lot of value to these church-planting organizations.”

Van and Regina Smith are among the pastors whom StartCHURCH has served well. They started Solid Rock of Atlanta in 1998. In 2009, StartCHURCH helped the Smiths obtain 501(c)(3) approval for the church. In 2014, StartCHURCH launched its bookkeeping service, and the Smiths were one of the first clients.

“It was like Christmas morning from the start!” Pastor Van told StartCHURCH. “And it has been such a blessing.”

Pastor Regina appreciated how the bookkeeping service they invested in freed them to do the work of the ministry and multiplied their ministry efforts exponentially.

“Bookkeeping is a necessity, but when it consumes all your time, then you’re not able to do the ministry that God’s called you to do,” Pastor Regina said in a video at .

Rev. Brian Vieira of Brooklyn, New York, found that

StartCHURCH delivered exceptional value compared to another company his ministry had used.

“We previously used a cheaper company to do some documents for us in the past, but the level of attention StartCHURCH gives, combined with your wealth of knowledge and excellence, makes the small price difference overwhelmingly worth it!” Vieira said. “In fact, StartCHURCH’s expertise and personal touch are truly priceless.”

StartCHURCH is reaching out in a greater way to the Spanish-speaking community. The organization has started a new Spanish division and expects 2020 to be a “big year,” Camp says. “They love God, and they’re church planters. They deserve to have resources in their first language. We have an entire Spanish department now, and that’s been really fun. Over the next couple of years, we’re releasing some new digital products. We’re increasing the breadth of our bookkeeping and really helping our Spanish department continue to grow. So people who watch StartCHURCH will see a lot of diversity in how we’re able to help people.”

Today’s churches and ministries face many challenges, not the least of which is a growing and hostile legislative culture. More than ever, pastors and ministry leaders need accurate advice from attorneys who are familiar with the needs of ministries. StartCHURCH Attorney Network gives pastors and ministry leaders access to attorneys who understand the legal needs of faith-based organizations. Through the network, these leaders can have private, one-on-one conversations with attorneys in their local area who are dedicated to helping churches and ministries.

Overall, StartCHURCH supports congregations on every part of their journey, helping them “reduce or remove” administrative burdens, Camp says. From setting up a church’s foundational documents to addressing tax issues, StartCHURCH has become the partner many planters don’t want to live without on their

mission to start and grow the church for God's glory.

Christine D. Johnson is editor of 2020 Vision. Share your thoughts on this issue with her at @.