

SM11

Creating Exponential Growth

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How can we Create Exponential Growth?

Planting Pregnant is a new strategic paradigm for the successful Parent/Partner model. The concept is starting to be utilized and gain traction in some growing nondenominational churches. In the Parent/Partner model, an existing church serves as the sponsoring entity for a new church. The new church plant pastor may briefly serve as associate pastor of the parent or sponsoring church. The parent church may also provide funding and a launch team for the new church plant. The hope from there is that the new church plant will then start a new church within its first ten years.

The strategy of Planting Pregnant utilizes the same premise of the Parent/Partner model while infusing it with much more momentum for replication. By doing so, the genetic code for growth and reproduction is altered so that each generation of new churches will reproduce every season of two to three years. The results from this strategy may lead to the effect of doubling of new church plant each season.

Key Players in Planting Pregnant

Parent Church and Pastor - Two of the key players in this model are the Parent Church and the Pastor of the Parent Church. As the ones who will sponsor the new church plant or 2nd Generation Church, both the pastor and the parent church will need to be assessed and trained and equipped to become parents to the new church. Their roles and responsibilities will need to be well established and understood prior to the arrival of the new church planters. They may choose to bring the 2nd Generation Planter on staff as an associate and somehow employee the 3rd Generation Planter. This will provide the best experience for their offspring planters to learn how the process works. Additionally, to further provide the best modeling experience for their offspring, the parent church should develop a plan to replicate each season.

2nd Generation Planters - The 2nd Generation Planters should be those persons (clergy and lay) who have been assessed and trained in the current methodology of planting new churches. As mentioned above, the 2nd Generation pastor may be appointed as an associate to the Parent Church where he/she will primarily work to plant the new church in the defined geographical area. In addition to this responsibility, the 2nd Generation Planter will also assist the 3rd Generation Planter who may already be or is beginning the process of being assessed, trained and is working to build connections in the next defined geographical area for planting. This loaded structure builds and maintains the momentum of growth and replication of the church as the expectation is immediately set to reproduce in two-three years, thus planting pregnant.

3rd and Successive Generation Planters - As referred to above, the 3rd Generation Planter may be one who has already been assessed, trained or is currently in the process of being so. The 3rd Generation Planter will immediately begin making his/her presence known in the defined area in which he/she will be planting. This is not the same area in which the 2nd Generation Church will be, but a different defined area for a new church plant. The 3rd Generation Planter position may be an excellent non-appointed position, to help reduce the cost of the strategy or it may be one that can be filled by one who is still in school or seminary. The greatest benefit that the 3rd Generation Planter will receive is the real and practical experience of working with a team who is planting pregnant at two generational levels. As soon as the 2nd Generation Church is launched, the 3rd Generation Planter then moves up as its associate and a 4th Generation Planter is brought on board. The process repeats with each season and generation.

Aunt/Uncle Churches and Pastors - Some often overlooked, but valuable resources for any church plant are what can be called the Aunt/Uncle Churches and Pastors. Aunt/Uncle Churches are those churches, which may already have a presence in the area defined as where a new church will be planted. Often, these churches feel that they are being neglected by the Conference and/or District and may actively oppose the new church plant. Great care and diligence will be necessary. Intentional training of the churches and pastors in the area defined for a new church plant should be directed to convert feeling of competition to familial responsibility and pride for all parties. The Aunt/Uncle Churches and Pastors will gain the appreciation of connectionalism and that the new church plant is "the child of our sister church, therefore we have the responsibility to help raise this child too." The New Church Plant will also need to be very cognizant to help foster healthy relationships with its aunt/uncle churches and seek to be in ministry/mission with them. Of course, just as not all aunts and uncles are inclined to be helpful or nurturing to their nieces and nephews, not all area churches will develop the sense of familial responsibility. Aversion by some churches must not negate or diminish the Parent and New Plant churches responsibility in cultivating relationships with those churches that will be receptive.

Cabinet/Conference/District - the Cabinet of the Annual Conference will require a new level of intentional and proactive appointment making. The Cabinet will need to work in conjunction with the Conference and District Vitality Teams to discern the areas defined for new church plants, the potential Parent Churches, New Church Plant pastors, pastors of Parent Churches, and pastors of potential Aunt/Uncle Churches. All of this will also require planning for and working three to six years ahead of the new church plants.

The Conference and District Vitality Teams, who are charged with the duty of defining areas for new church plants and the assessment and training of church planters and launch teams will also need to increase the proactivity to plan and work at least six years ahead. As the process begins, constant evaluation and reevaluation of all parties, plans, and areas will become necessary.

The Process of Planting Pregnant

The process of Planting Pregnant appears to be complex. But while there are many layers to it, it is simplistic in its method: One church plants another church, which immediately begins to plant another church, which immediately begins to plant another church... The best way to describe the process of Planting Pregnant may be by this hypothetical example:

The Wesley Annual Conference discerns the need for a new church to reach the residents in a rapidly growing area of Metro City. Asbury United Methodist Church has expressed interest and has been assessed as a potential Parent Church as has its pastor, Paul. Asbury is located about ten miles from the defined area for a new church plant. The Bishop appoints Timothy, who has been assessed and undergone the training for starting a new church, as the associate at Asbury. Paul and Timothy meet with the Conference and District Vitality Team and the various Strategists and also learn that another area for a new church plant is developing about ten miles beyond their area to plant in nearby Suburbiaville. Asbury UMC agrees to bring on board Sophie, who will not be appointed by the Bishop to Asbury, but will be on its staff as an intern. Sophie is currently in the pool as a potential church planter, but is finishing her last year in college. Paul helps Timothy establish a presence in the defined area for his new church plant and to coalesce his launch team and implement the plan for launching their new church, which will be called Gen X UMC. They make plans that will launch Gen X in two years. Sophie will also be working with Timothy, learning the ways and means of planting pregnant, while beginning to gather her own launch team and make their presence known in Suburbiaville.

After two years, Gen X has launched with Timothy as the pastor and the Bishop appoints another assessed planter, Philip, to Gen X as assistant pastor, since he is still in school. Philip, who begins his process of gathering a launch team to make a presence known in another area defined by the Conference and District for a potential church plant. Gen X also brings on staff Mary, as an intern, who will begin her journey to planting pregnant. Sophie is appointed as the associate at Asbury, with the intention she will plant a church in two years. Since Sophie has already been working with Paul and Timothy, she has acquired much experience in planting pregnant and she is able to continue the process of making a plan to launch in two years. Asbury brings on board Thomas, who will begin to coalesce a launch team to plant in a new area. The process replicates each season of every two to three years. Each time, each church repeats the process and reproduces.

The Potential Results

As can be seen by the illustrations about, the potential replication rate doubles every season. To give an idea of the true potential of growth, consider the replication rate of this strategy with that of the replication rate of the current standard of replicating every ten years. For this comparison, the rate over eleven years will be given so to give each instance one year more to show its progress:

Rate of Replication under Current Standard of Planting Every Ten Years

At Year 11 = 3 Churches (1st Gen + 2nd Gen + 3rd Gen)

Rate of Replication by Planting Pregnant Every Three Years

At Year 11 = 8 Existing/Pregnant Churches (+ 8 Churches to be born in 2 years)

Rate of Replication by Planting Pregnant Every Two Years

At Year 11 = 32 Existing/Pregnant Churches (+ 32 Churches to be born in 2 years)

As can be seen, the current standard yields only two new churches by the eleventh year, the original church plus its child and grandchild church. Conversely, Planting Pregnant every three years has the potential to yield seven new churches with eight more that are waiting to be born. Planting Pregnant every two years could have the potential for even greater number of new churches, thirty-one new churches with an additional thirty-two waiting to be born.