THE ROLE OF LEAD PASTOR IN CREATING A CHURCH PLANTING CULTURE IN AN EXISTING CONGREGATION

So, there’s a lot of talk out there about church planting. You hear it at Presbytery and again at General Assembly. Meanwhile, you might feel a bit annoyed by all the CP buzz because it sounds like another thing you need to add to your already overloaded schedule. “I’m already exhausted just trying to keep up with everything that’s already on my plate, why would I add something else?” Or you might think, “That’s for the larger churches to figure out and lead because my congregation is small and at best will play an insignificant role in the greater cause of church planting.” Or “I know where this is headed, in 15 minutes they’ll be asking for money, and we don’t have any.” So, when the CP conversation comes up yet again, you slip out for another cup of coffee and scan the foyer for someone to talk with about the weather. I’m sure this doesn’t describe you, but let’s face it, cultivating a CP culture in an existing congregation is anything but easy, especially in today’s cultural climate where the natural inertia is to simply maintain. As pastors, I think it’s easy to underestimate how relentlessly the current cultural climate presses against us, eroding our hope, making us cynical, emptying us of Biblical expectancy in the sure promises of Scripture. So rather than another cup of coffee and a conversation about the weather, what if, prompted by the Holy Spirit, you decided to listen to the CP buzz and consider how God might use you to help create a CP culture in your congregation? What would you need to do, where would you need to begin? The purpose of this article is to help you, the pastor, create a church planting culture in your congregation.

I. Hold your horses.

A. A New Power. Creating a CP culture begins with you, the lead pastor. Afterall you are the person God has called to lead and shepherd the congregation. But if you are like me, when faced with any task, I jump quickly into planning, organization, and structure. Don’t mishear me, plans and structure are essential but can be the wrong initial move in creating a CP culture for at least two glaring reasons: 1) Jumping too quickly to plans and structure can easily underestimate the current cultural idolatry and complacency present in all our congregations. 2) Plans and structure depend on good old American ingenuity. Americans are conditioned to think like the little train engine, “I think I can, I think can.” *I think I can* create a church planting culture if I employ the right methods and structure. Again, planning and structure aren’t bad, but if that’s all it takes, the US should have experienced the “Third Great Awakening” years ago. We are world experts in methods, organization, and structure. In fact, it might be our greatest idolatry. 2 Timothy 3 comes to mind, “*….lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having an appearance of godliness but denying its* ***power****.”* We are organizational experts but bankrupt of power. So, there’s an important and necessary step (I hate to call it a step) before organization. We need a new and fresh infusion of power by the Holy Spirit to *“open a door that no man can shut*”. (Rev. 3:8) At the end of the gospel of Matthew, Jesus instructs the disciples to go into all the world and make disciples. And then He promises to be present with them in this task*-“and behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”* We hear nothing else until the book of Acts. Acts 1 is paradigmatic for where the power for mission originates. Acts 1:4 And *while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but* ***to wait*** *for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”* Acts 1:8 *“But you will receive* ***power*** *when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.”* Acts 1:14 *“All these with one accord were* ***devoting themselves to prayer****, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.”*

B. Paradigmatic? Initial steps? My intent here isn’t to be exhaustive but to offer a few comments. Obviously, the key instruction from Acts is to wait and pray and the two seem to be connected. Pray as you wait and wait as you pray. Personal renewal usually precedes corporate renewal.

1. Pray. Repenting of personal and corporate “I think I can” initiatives. Realization and confession of our weakness, inability, and unbelief. Personal renewal usually precedes corporate renewal. Ask God for His presence and power.

2. Wait. Ugh! What’s the good in waiting? Waiting serves to heighten awareness of the real depth of our weakness, inability, and unbelief. Pray and wait, wait, and continue to pray. The repetition of this pattern will create a growing sense of “holy discontent” with the present state of things. Wait, for how long? No one knows which is what makes this both difficult and purifying. As we continue to wait and pray, we are being transformed. (Simeon comes to mind). However, Simeon knew when his eyes beheld the Messiah, and the apostles knew when the Holy Spirit descended.

II. Unbridle the horses.

A. Contenders. The largely understood but untried instruction above creates among other things, contenders for the faith. It opens a door that no man can shut. No wonder, in the rest of the book of Acts we read about how the apostles changed the world. The world needs contenders not pretenders.

B. Suggestions. Renewal begins with you. Ask a few elders and parishioners to join you in prayer and waiting. Pray about and use discernment about who to ask. Resist the urge to plan and structure too quickly. Confess your powerlessness together and humbly ask God for new power. Ask Jesus to do what He has already promised to do. Wait and pray. Pray and wait.

C. Giddy Up. When God shows up in the person of the Holy Spirit, you will experience new power and zeal for the task. His power will put new wind in your sail and the sails of your church. A door will fling open that no man can shut. Then explore next steps. Talk with Presbytery, regional, and national leaders in the CP arena. And whether you are a small, medium, or large church consider how you might become a parent, partner, or patron of church planting.

Suggested Reading: *Reappearing Church-The Hope for Renewal in the Rise of Our Post-Christian Culture* by Mark Sayers.

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