

The Importance of the Church and Church Planting*

By Marvin J. Newell



The importance of the Church in God's mission cannot be overstated. It is core to all Christ wants to accomplish both among believers and by believers in the world today. The Church is central to God's Kingdom purposes. He established it to carry out his divine purposes. Furthermore, he has lovingly guided it through the centuries as the primary vehicle of making himself known among the nations. Without the Church, ministry would be a hodge-podge of man-conceived endeavors with no center, no coordination and no clear identity. Craig Ott reminds us, "The scriptures tell us of no other people, no other message, no other power, no other movement that is the instrument of God's choosing for fulfilling his purposes in this age as is the church."¹

The importance of local congregations, the visual manifestation of the body of Christ, is invaluable. The local church is to be viewed in two dimensions. First, there is the internal aspect that primarily serves believers. Charles Swindoll has described it nicely:

I love the church. When it's functioning correctly nothing beats the church for effectiveness. Babies are cradled, children are loved, teenagers are challenged, parents are instructed, seniors find fellowship, singles are strengthened, and families are nurtured. When a church is running smoothly on all cylinders, its impact on a community is nothing short of remarkable.²

When all church ministries are considered together, nothing is better than the local church for the edification of the saints.

There is also the external aspect. When it comes to outreach to a lost and dying world nothing is

more crucial than the local church. It is the cradle of missions. It is the place where mission vision is rooted ... the place where mission passion is incubated ... the place where concern for the lost is highlighted ... the place where mission agencies discover their greatest asset—missionaries! The church is the place from where missionaries are commended for service ... the place where mission funding is generated ... the place where corporate prayers for missionaries are offered ... the place where furloughed missionaries report, rest, get replenished and renewed ... the place from where returned missionaries spring forth once again across cultures to bring people into the fullness of Christ. Local churches are both the anchor and the lifeline of missions.

It follows then, that the planting of churches should be the preeminent outcome of all mission endeavors. This is not to say that every missionary should be a frontline church planter—far from it. God has gifted each missionary with specific skills, gifting, and interests that round out what it takes to start churches. However, every

Notes

1. Craig Ott, Stephen Strauss, with Timothy C. Tennent, *Encountering Theology of Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 196.

2. Forward by Charles Swindoll in *The Church: The Body of Christ in the World Today*, by Ed Hayes (Word Publishing, 1999).

3. Floyd McClung, "Apostolic Passion," *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, Third Edition, Ralph D. Winter and Stephen C. Hawthorne (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1999), 186.

outreach activity (and most are valid and valuable) should have the launching and/or strengthening of local bodies of believers as their primary goal. Those bodies come in various stripes, sizes, and manifestations. One box does not fit all. But in the end there needs to be a visible group of believers who regularly meet corporately in the name and under the lordship of Jesus Christ—a church. Floyd McClung has said it well:

You might say, “I’m not called to plant churches.” Yes, you are! It’s always the will of God to have a people who worship His Son in the nations. You’ll never have to worry about making God mad if you try to plant a church. It seems crazy to me that people are under the delusion they need a special calling to save souls, to disciple them, and to get them together to love

Jesus. Whatever ministry you are with, you must understand one thing: church planting is not for us, it’s for God. We do it so God will have a people to worship Him!³

The articles that are going to be published in next Transform World e-Newsletter focus on the fundamental topic of church planting. Over the past several years there has been some creative thinking related to this topic. Some are “other religion” specific, while others are more issue related. This edition endeavors to bring a few of the best to you. It is our hope that these articles will stimulate even deeper thinking that will in turn enhance and refine global church planting endeavors for the swifter advancement of the Kingdom.

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