

A variety of pictures are used to describe the church in the Bible and in current church jargon. Each has its strengths, weakness and limitations for communication. Each has a parallel picture for expressing the process of launching a new church. When we use the family model for the church, we often talk of mother and daughter congregations and birthing a church. The mechanical model sees the church as a machine and a new church as something to start. The organizational approach sees the church a structure to be administered and new churches are organized. Another model is the organic model that sees the church as a living organism and the new church as something to be planted.

Some object to this "church planting" motif saying it is too agrarian and rural to communicate in today's culture. There are at least two answers to that objection. First, in this day, planting is big business. A few years ago, one of the TV news magazines ran a story on yards and vegetable and flower gardening. It noted that in 1989, Americans spent \$14 billion on sod, plants, seed, fertilizers, equipment and contractors for yards and gardens. In 1994, that figure quadrupled to \$56 billion. This is not a rural or small town phenomenon. In the cities, gardening is big business too. It is not uncommon to find patio gardens growing on balconies 30 stories up in apartment buildings. I cannot begin to calculate how many flats of bedding plants are sold annually by all the Wal-Marts, Krogers, Home Depots, Pike's Nurseries and their competitors. A second reason for using this model was found in Net Fax number 26. This article contrasts the modern and post-modern worldviews. The form of the passing (modern) worldview is machine/mechanical. The form of the emerging worldview is organic/living. We

need to communicate in this more relevant, emerging worldview if we seek to touch the next generation with our message concerning the need for new churches.

Another issue to consider is all the pictures at our disposal when using the planting motif. Fields of grain, gardens (flower and vegetable) and trees all come to mind. Let's examine the range of pictures for tree planting. If I want a new tree in my yard, I can call a nursery and have them transplant a tree into my yard, using a truck mounted, hydraulic tree spade. The cost is relatively high; my personal labor expended in the process is minimal; the survival rate of the tree is good but not 100 percent. Less costly, but more labor intensive, is the ball and burlap method. I go to the nursery, get a tree with the root ball intact and wrapped in burlap and transport it home. I dig a hole of appropriate size, plant the tree and give it care over the next several months. Survival rate? Six of the last 12 trees I planted are still living, but one of them is still questionable. If I plan to cover a large area with trees, two additional methods might be considered: use of seedlings and the use of seeds. Seedlings are commonly used to reforest areas after clear cutting or natural disasters. Seeds are the natural method. If I do not harvest acorns in the fall or pull up the seedlings in the spring, they take over the flower beds. I currently have about three dozen pines from 12 to 48 inches tall in the backyard from seeds sown by the wind and birds.

The challenge faced by state church planting leaders, associational missionaries, church planting missionaries, minister of missions and pastors with a heart of kingdom growth is how do I facilitate church planting in my assigned area of responsibility? The church planter faces a similar question, "What principles do I need to understand and apply in planting this church and how can I facilitate planting other churches?" Facilitate is defined as: "To make easier to

accomplish a task or achieve a goal." Let me suggest five activities in facilitating church planting.

1. Learn the principles of the harvest, then teach them to others. These principles were identified during several years of studying various parables of Jesus, a long personal history of raising vegetable gardens and experiences from working on a farm as a youth. The first principle focuses on preplanting activities. There are three of those: soil testing, knowing the climate and knowing the desired crop. Let's explore each of these.

On the farm where I worked, the farmer leased several other farms. Each time he leased a new piece of land, he had the county extension agent do a soil test to find out what crops would grow best and what fertilizers should be used to enhance productivity.

I had several good gardens in Texas and Indiana. When we moved to Troy, Michigan, I planted a garden. About four weeks after tilling up the spot; I went out to hoe weeds prior to planting. I discovered that the garden plot was hard as my asphalt driveway. The soil had high clay content. To get a good garden plot I had to haul in several loads of sand, hay, barnyard fertilizer and work it for three years.

The people group (soil) in which you want to plant a church is a vital consideration. Think of the parable of four soils recorded in each of the synoptic gospels. People are different in their receptivity to the gospel. Also, some types of soil lend themselves to certain crops better than other soils. Some groups of people are more responsive to different styles of church.

When planting, knowing the climate is also important. I like okra and had good crops in Texas. It does not grow well in Michigan. The weather is too cool and the growing season too short. My wife likes gardenias. They grow fairly well outside in Georgia but will not survive the winters in Colorado. Not all church plants thrive with equal success in various cultural

settings. Issues related to climate include culture, lifestyle, socio-economics, education and personal preferences.

Knowing the kind of crop desired is the third preplanting issue. A widely accepted management principle is to begin with the end in mind. Do you just begin a garden with whatever seed is at hand, throwing it indiscriminately, whenever the mood strikes? If you want corn, you don't plant okra seeds. If you want roses, you don't set out pansies. Someone has said,

**To grow something that lasts a season,
plant flowers;
To grow something that lasts a lifetime,
plant trees;
To grow something that lasts through eternity,
plant churches.**

The second principle of the harvest is cultivation. There are normally two times of cultivation about which we need to think. Preplanting cultivation is preparing the soil to receive the seed. You don't cultivate for cultivation's sake. It is done with a purpose. Many communities and people groups are not initially receptive to the planting of a new church. Are they ignored because of that low receptivity? Do we push bullishly into the community? Often a better approach is to begin a process of cultivation and methodical seed sowing, realizing that the first few years harvest may be slimmer than future harvests. For church planting, cultivation is a variety of activities to develop relationships and open doors to people's lives. It is the building of confidence in the people who come to share the gospel so that the message (seed) will be accepted.

The third principle is sowing the seed or setting out the new plant. The seed must be gotten into the soil. Grass seed in the bag does not produce a lawn nor does corn seed in the barn result in a crop. Sometimes, to move the gardening process along, bedding plants are used. For

some types of crops and in certain climates this is a good method. With other crops and climates the best approach is seed. (Remember the first principle of the harvest.)

Back to the second principle, cultivation. There is also post sowing cultivative activities. One of my favorite passages related to this is from a parable in Luke 13. "And He *began* telling this parable: 'A certain man had a fig tree which had been planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it, and did not find any. And he said to the vineyard-keeper, 'Behold, for three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree without finding any. Cut it down! Why does it even use up the ground?' And he answered and said to him, 'Let it alone, sir, for this year too, until I dig around it and put in fertilizer; And if it bears fruit next year, *fine*; but if not, cut it down.'" (Luke 13:6-9 NASB) Many new churches could become more productive if we gave serious thought to how to "dig and fertilize" the soil.

The fourth principle is that of the early and later rains. Farming in Judea in biblical times was scheduled around the rains. Sowing was done in anticipation of the early rains. That rain caused the seeds to germinate and the plants to begin to grow. This was followed by a period of relative dryness when the roots reached down in the soil following the retreating water table. Little plant activity was seen above ground. The later rains caused the plant to mature and bear fruit. Specifically this principle speaks of two things, *crops take time* and *God gives the increase*. Paul wrote from similar view when he said, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but *God who causes the growth*. Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field." (I Corinthians 3:6-9 NASB) For many planters this is a difficult principle. We have trouble waiting on God to produce the crop. We want to dig up the seed periodically and

inspect its germination progress. We want to take matters into our hands and try to speed the process up.

The fifth principle is harvesting must be done. Jesus spoke of the urgency of the harvest in two passages, "Then He said to His disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.'" (Matthew 9:37-38 NASB) "Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, and *then* comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes, and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest." (John 4:35 NASB) Any way you look at it harvesting is work. Church planting is work. As I was preparing for the first church plant I did and had opportunity to interview a man who had planted a number of churches in the west. I asked, "What do I need to know to effectively plant a church?" He said, "Three words to remember if you're going to plant churches. The first word is work, the second word is WORK, the third word is WORK!"

After harvesting is done, the crop is gathered into the barn for preservation, distribution and propagation. In Luke another of Jesus' parables is recorded, "The land of a certain rich man was very productive. And he began reasoning to himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?' And he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years *to come*; take your ease, eat, drink *and* be merry.' "But God said to him, 'You fool! This *very* night your soul is required of you; and *now* who will own what you have prepared?' So is the man who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." (Luke 12:16-21 NASB) The man was not criticized for the productivity of his land nor for his gathering the product into barns but because of his attitude toward those

things and his spiritual poverty. In his egotism, he said, "They are mine!" He thought he could feed his soul on the material things that God provided.

Related to this sixth principle of the harvest is an old phrase that comes from another era. "Don't never eat the seed corn." Before the days of seed and feed stores, farmers gathered the best ears of corn, dried and stored them for next year's crop. Regardless of how hard the winter, nor how great the need, the seed corn was not eaten. It was next year's crop.

It seems that too many Christians and churches are consuming all their resources on themselves. This is seen in many churches that want to hold all their money, talent and people for their own needs and will not be involved in church planting. Related to this are two questions, "Do we really trust what God says, "Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, they will pour into your lap. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return"? (Luke 6:38 NASB) Second, does this promise relate only to economic issues of a believer's stewardship toward his church or does it relate also to the church's stewardship of resources (members and dollars) to Kingdom work

Multiplying laborers is the second activity of the person who will facilitate church planting. The facilitator will realize he cannot do it all. Harvey Kneisel, former Minister of Missions, admits that at one time he was a bottleneck in the Key Church work of First Baptist Houston. He had everything coming through him. When he began to multiply laborers, the work expanded. The same is true in many states, associations and new churches. The one who should be facilitating becomes the hindrance.

As church planters and church planting missionaries seek to multiply laborers, four ideas need to be kept in mind. The principle of indigenous church planting teaches that the laborers

need to come from the harvest. Also, three additional criteria are helpful: 1. They have a passion for the harvest, 2. They are teachable, 3. They are willing to work.

A third activity to facilitate church planting is to **multiply fields**. In many parts of North America, there are still many large open fields that have been overlooked or passed by. Some of those are language, racial, socio-economic, or lifestyle groups--people who are perceived as "not our kind" but they are God's kind. Others are fields that have been in the past difficult to penetrate, fields that we have given up on trying to reach but, unknown to us, have become receptive. Some are smaller fields that can be very productive with specialized crops. While the farmer I worked for as a teenager, looked for larger farms to rent for his cotton, maize and wheat crops, another farmer in the community looked for five to eight acre plots for his truck farm operation. Smaller fields, staggered planting, specialized crops were the secrets to his success as a truck farmer. Because of the size of my yard and its slopes, I am having to experiment with the square foot gardening concept--several small specialized beds. In many cities that appear overchurched, there are pockets of unreached peoples--fields waiting to be harvested if we go in with the right purpose and strategy. Some of these fields are found in apartment complexes or manufactured housing communities.

Let me illustrate the fourth activity for facilitating church planting from the county where I grew up. In the 1960s, two primary cash crops in Collin County were cotton and onions. I remember as a child seeing stacks of onion sacks at the railroad depot waiting for export. In 1994, the primary crops in the same county included wheat, grain sorghum, corn and cantaloupe. In 1998, only two farmers were raising cantaloupe commercially. In tough economic times, the farmers who survived have **increased the types of crops planted**. There was a time when we planted one type of church. Then we began to understand that one church does not reach

everyone. We must think in terms of a variety of targeted churches. Now we need to multiply the types of churches we are planting. I wonder if some strategist and planter who has insisted on planting one type of church, may hear his master say "You wicked, lazy servant!" (Matt. 25:26 NIV) A few verses later the servant was called unprofitable.

Finally, for those who would facilitate church planting, they need to **add to the tools used**. Let me shift pictures. In addition to gardening, I enjoy woodworking. Recently, my wife gave me a scroll saw for our anniversary. Now I have in my wood shop a radial arm saw, a table saw, a band saw, a power miter saw and a scroll saw. (Plus two bow saws, two handsaws, two jug saws, three circular saws, a drill press, four drill motors and 18 different hammers of various sizes, shapes and weights.) "Why?" you ask. They are different tools with different functions. There is the quote, "For man whose only tool is hammer, the whole world looks like a nail." Sometimes we get locked into using one tool in church planting--maybe a door-to-door survey and a church planting revival. It worked well _____ years ago in _____! The wise church planter and facilitator constantly look for new tools to enhance the effectiveness of their work. Some tools (ministries) are effective in cultivating a community prior to the church's public launch. Others have greater effectiveness after the church has had its public launch. Some tools have a variety of uses. Home Bible studies can be used to cultivate, sow, and harvest.

Activities and Tasks Checklist

Facilitating Check List

Where are we in the process of planting the church?

Preplanting tasks

- The soil understood (demographics gathered, analyzed)
- The climate analyzed (community/culture studies completed)
- The crop decided on (system design completed)

Preplanting cultivation

- Ministries identified
- Ministries scheduled
- Ministry team identified and trained
- Ministries conducted

Sowing/Planting

- Methods/evangelism strategy developed
- Strategy implemented

Postplanting cultivation

- Ministries identified
- Ministries scheduled
- Ministry team identified and trained
- Ministries conducted

Early/later rains

- Waiting on God and His Spirit's work

Harvest

- Methods for harvesting identified
- Harvest season calendared
- Harvesters enlisted and trained
- Harvest event conducted (church launched)

Preservation, distribution, propagation

- Methods designed for preservation (assimilation)
- Methods planned for distribution (involvement in ministry)
- Strategies identified for propagation (reproduction plan)

What are the plans for identifying and multiplying laborers?

What are the strategies to identify new fields (networks, community and people groups) to enter?

What new types of crop (small groups, ministries, projects, and programs) might be used to increase profitability?

What new tools could be used to increase effectiveness?