



Choosing a Location: From Vision to Place

Pre-Class Preparation:

Church Planting Handbook, 24-27, 133-148

Francis, *Church Planting in the African American Context*, 111-112

Maulphers, *Planting Growing Churches*, 150-162, 285-290

Moore, *Starting a New Church*, 76-87

Multihousing, 39-40

Redford, *Planting New Churches*, 61-70

Shenk & Stutzman, *Creating Communities*, 42-54

Stetzer, *Planting New Churches*, 96-102, 203-210

- When you are considering a church plant, you have you think of more than just a facility. You have to think of location where you want to plant. How do you determine the best place for your church plant? The question is: how do you go from vision to place? Watch this clip of Chris McNairy, Director of Multi-Housing Ministry with the North American Mission Board. Watch as he shares about his journey ...

Video: Chris McNairy on multi-housing church planting.

Did you know that 60% of the lost people in North America live in multi-housing areas? Most of those people leave their multi-housing setting to go out to a church somewhere else. As Evangelicals we tend to think of our people living in separate houses, maybe in suburban or rural settings. But the truth is very different from our perceptions. So as we think about that, and where we might plant a church, we're going to look at Jack Redford's book, *Planting New Churches*. This book describes the process of a mother church wanting to go out and plant a church. Redford provides a series of steps in that process. There are nine of them. When you choose a location going from vision to place, how do you do it? Look at . . .

Redford's Steps¹

⊕ Select Mission's Committee

- As a mother church wanting to plant a new church, the first step is to assemble this mission team. Their job is to begin to consider an area in which they see a need. God begins to work in their hearts. And then they . . .

⊕ Select Target Area

- A specific place must be determined. The next step is to . . .

⊕ Prepare Sponsoring Church

- The team goes back to the mother church and lays the groundwork for the new work. Then they . . .

⊕ Cultivate the Target Area

- The church planter is generally called around this time to consider working the area. After this they then begin to . . .

⊕ Start Home Bible Studies

- Remember that Redford wrote this book almost three decades ago and much has changed. Up to this point it is very similar to what goes on today. The primary difference today begins with the next step . . .

⊕ Begin Mission Chapel

- In this older model, there were three phases. First you were a fellowship. You then went to mission/chapel status. And finally you became a church. Most church plants take a different course today. Generally the skip step six and move down between #8 and #9. Number 6 is now **Launch the Church**. After this you . . .

⊕ Plan the Finances.

⊕ Secure Facilities.

- And then you **Launch the Church**. That's the new step between #8 and #9. And finally you ...

⊕ Constitute the Church

- Of these nine steps . . .

Sometimes number two is the most difficult.

Selecting the target area is *the* critical decision that is most difficult to make. It's hard for established churches and for church planters to do this. As a potential church planter you may be interested but you have no idea how to go about it. This is what we're going to discuss today. If you already have a place, in this lecture you'll find some tools to help you analyze it. We'll use some writings from a couple of missiologists that will help us in the task. So how do you go about finding the location? Before we answer that question it's important to realize that there are many places that we can plant a church. Watch this clip about finding the right place to plant your church . . .

Video: Church planters on location.

In these clips we see people talking about being willing to plant anywhere. Other church planters talk about first sensing that maybe they should go in one direction only to later have a clear calling of God to go to another area. It might be clear across the American continent or in your home town. The call is the key; where is God calling you to go? How do you best determine . . .

Location

Think through the location.

- You listen to the Lord and pray through the calling. Maybe this is one of those times of self-denial and fasting where your heart is completely focused on the Lord and His will. And then

after a season of prayer you should begin to get some impressions. Then . . .

You investigate what you sense He is telling you. During this time God will confirm those things you've sensed through prayer. And . . .

Once a location is determined, begin . . .

- **asking questions.** For instance if God is calling you to the city of Butte, Montana, you need to ask questions about the city. You begin the process first by . . .

⊕ Investigating the City:²

- **Learn the city's history.**

- What brought people there? Why did they come to Southern California and why are they so laid-back?
- What is its history? How did New York City get started? If you went to Sidney, Australia, what would you need to know? You'd discover that Australia was founded as a penal colony. That helps us to understand why Australia is one of the most hedonistic societies in the world today. You need to . . .

Be the expert on the city. Know the obscure facts.

- **Learn the city's structures.**

- If you wanted to plant a church in Manhattan, you need to know that a church planted in one area will need to be different from a church planted fifteen blocks away. Cultural differences change within a few blocks and the church planter has to be aware of those changes. There are different communities in Manhattan. You might have a church plant in Soho and one in the Upper West Side or the Lower East side, areas not so far from each other geographically but miles apart culturally. So you need to learn about the different . . .

Wards. These are neighborhood divisions with which people identify. Certain ethnic groups tend to gravitate towards them. Things like . . . rivers often are used as cultural lines. Certain streets act as division markers. You need to be familiar with the neighborhoods (and divisions). What we're saying is . . .

- **Learn the city's divisions.**

- Learn the difference between . . .

Dividing lines and . . . ethnic neighborhoods.

“Is this Little Italy? Is this the street that separates a Latino community from an African-American community?” In a suburban area this may not be as important, but in urban settings it is very important. But even in suburban areas there are divisions to which you need to pay attention. In the suburban area the dividing lines will often be interstate highways or major roads. County lines and zoning restriction lines are also important to identify. On one side of the line, the zoned area is made up of houses over 2,000 square feet sitting on 2 acre tracts of land. Just across the county line on the other side you'll find a community made up of manufactured homes. Familiarize yourself with these facts because they will help you determine where to go. Your focused profile will assist you in reaching your target group.

Then you need to . . .

- **Analyze the centers of Satanic power and opposition to the spread of the Gospel.**

- Roger Greenway says you should know the powers of the city. He lists the importance of knowing the “4-Ps”. The first is . . .

The police – who controls it? – Mafia?

The priests – Catholic or Protestant: What are the religious groups that lead the city? Is there a predominant religious persuasion that characterizes the area? In Detroit for instance, a Muslim imam may be the predominant religious leader in a particular area of the city.

Who are . . .The politicians – who are on Boards, offices? These are the political leaders who are in control.

And what about . . .The press – who controls it?²

- All of these things can be centers of satanic power that will oppose the spread of the Gospel. You should become aware of the powers in the city and then determine if Satan is using those powers. At the same time you try to build relationships and pray for these people in places of authority. If you'll go out of your way to make friends with them, you may find a friend who can help in those times when your church is having problems with zoning, publicity, protection, etc. Some of them you may be able to lead to Christ when they're in crisis.

Again, building relationships with those in authority is a key to church planting.

- **Learn the city's arteries.**

- Every city has a system of roads and sometimes rails. These are the arteries upon which people travel. If your church location is on an artery, you'll have a greater potential for outreach than if you are located far from an artery. The artery is a place where people are traveling in and out of the city. Get a map of the city in which you'll be working and identify the arteries. Study it to the point where you can reproduce all the arteries on a blank sheet of paper. This will help you to determine the best location for your church plant. In addition you should . . .

- **Find the growth areas.**

- Chamber of Commerce.
Planning commissions (local comprehensive plans).
Real estate agencies: They'll want to sell you a house and will be anxious to tell you about the fastest growing areas.
Government: Check with the highway department, sewer department and school districts. The plans they have for expansion will tell you where the growth areas are located. Check with these sources to find where the people are going. And then . . .

- **Learn the opinion makers.**

- Discover how news spreads and opinions are formed.
How does information get around?
By Conversations – who forms the opinions?
By Radio – most popular to the people you are targeting. If possible, get to know the on-air personalities.
By TV – most popular to the people you are targeting. Again, build some bridges to those who are influential.
By Newspapers – most popular to the people you are targeting. Many large communities that you may be targeting will have ethnic newspapers. If you're planting a church in the Hispanic community you need to go to the Spanish newspapers and publications. And then . . .

- **Investigate the Churches.**

- Locate the churches and identify them by denominations; by older and younger congrega-

tions.

Catholic, Protestant, what kind?

Are they Black, Hispanic (where from), white?

Are they alive or dead?

Are they evangelistic?

Analyze the types of existing churches.

Building or storefront?

Commuter or Community?

Renewal or Established (praise and worship or liturgical)?

Are they growing? If so, why?

What kind of growth? Biological, transfer or conversion?

Inquire about recent church planting and its success or failure. You don't want to go into a community with a big direct mail campaign when the last three churches used direct mail campaigns and they didn't work. Take a look at their direct mail if possible; the quality of it could be the reason for failure. Find out who has plans to plant new churches and what will be their methods and target?

Identify Christians in positions of influence – in business, politics, the media, education, entertainment, sports. Analyze their potential for assisting your church planting efforts. A church in Kansas City did a great job using Christian football players from the Kansas City Chiefs. They used their photographs in promotional materials and had them come and share their testimonies in some of the first few services. It attracted a large number of men to the church.

List and evaluate the para-church ministries in the city. Can any of them help you? (*Put this on your map*) This helps you to . . .

- **Choose a tentative focus area for analysis.**

- As you develop your map, mark it up with the arteries, churches, divisions and begin to pray, “God, if this is the target area of the city you want me to reach, how am I going to do it? How am I going to reach into that community?” This will help you narrow the area down. You and your team need to begin to analyze the situation and the information.

- **Secure an area map.**

- Note major geographic boundaries and features.
- Indicate churches, synagogues, and mosques.
- Get census data of:
Population, Socio-economics, Age, Ethic makeup. Then . . .

- **Pick a possible target and visit the area.**

- A demographic study of the target area for the new church is seriously recommended. This will tell you such things as the ethnic groups within the area by age groups, the median income, the number of people in all age groups, the time they leave to work, what type of jobs they have, languages spoken at home, educational attainment of each age group and much more.

Your pastor and core group should be representative of the people in the target area. Share with the mother church the demographics of the area the church will be planted in. Demographics for each city in the United States is provided free from the U.S. Census on the internet at <http://www.census.gov/>. But do a “Windshield Demographic” as you drive by and look out the windshield. Often times you’ll see things not reflected in the materials you’ve accumulated. In addition, things may have changed since the studies were done. So drive around and take note of what you see. If you see yards with toys in them, there are lots of children in the area. If you see a certain type of car it may tell you that there are large numbers of senior adults in the area. You can learn a lot with a Windshield Survey. As you do your thorough analysis you will come to . . .

- **Understand the neighborhoods.**

- Socioeconomics, age, growth/decline/transition. And then . . . do a mini-survey. Talk randomly to people living in the area and tell them, “These are some things I’ve learned about this area. Would you agree that this is true?” After this you should . . .

- **Do a prayer probe.**

- Some people call this “prayer walking.” Walk the neighborhood with core people and team

members and say, “Lord, is this the place where You want us to plant a church?” You may go through this entire process and when you come to this step of prayer probing, God says “no.” And there’s no passion for that community. What now? You find a new place. It may be in an area close to where you’ve been looking. You may be like Paul when he was going to Troas and Bithynia; he received his Macedonian call and God re-directed his path somewhere other than where he had planned. The prayer probe is important. It’s not uncommon to meet someone during your prayer walk who becomes the first prospect for your new church. God may confirm the call in any number of unexpected ways as you walk and pray. And then . . .

- **Make a decision based upon God's leadership.**

- Does this area need more churches? There are probably some areas in North America where there is such a variety of churches that there truly is no need. If there are, they are few in number. Perhaps the correct question is to ask, “Does it need more churches like this one?”

What are the resources that are available?

What methods are working? If you’re in an area where door-to-door visitation works and Sunday school enrollment campaigns are effective, then do it. Just be sure that the method you choose is a biblical method.

Are the people that are unreached responsive? What’s next? You’re building the core and planning a launch, but you must first . . .

- **Build the Core and Plan the Launch.**

- **Find a location in the target area.**

- Finding the focus area is one thing; finding a location in the focus area is quite another. Lay leaders surveyed in this process said that the difficulty in finding a location is one of the chief problems in this process. Retailers say that the three most important factors in establishing a successful store are location, location, and location. There are several options that are frequently used: Public Schools, Private Schools, Hotels, Day-Care Centers, Restaurants, Movie Theaters, Other Churches.

Remember that where you meet will build a perception in people’s minds. If you decide to meet in a store-front (and nothing wrong with that), people will consider your church to be a store-front church. If you choose to meet in a house (again, nothing wrong with it), people will have a certain perception of you. Find out about those perceptions by asking the lost and

unchurched, “What would your thoughts be about a church that met in a store-front location?” Negative and positive reactions should help you determine what best suits your work. Fire codes and building standards may make it difficult to use a store. Local merchants may object and create problems for your church. All of these factors are things you really need to think through before you move ahead on a location. If you find yourself moving frequently you will tend to lose people with every move. Some pastors have estimated a 10% loss of people with every move. Other issues to consider when choosing a location is the facility itself. Is there room for enough chairs? How about using a sound system? Can you put up a big sign out front? A facility should be comfortable and put unchurched people at ease. Let’s talk for a moment about . . .

■ Building a church building.

- If you should decide to choose this option, you should . . .

Wait as long as possible. Remember that we don’t want the shoe to set the size of the foot. Many churches have discovered it is wise to . . .

Buy land and build later. Particularly in an area that is growing rapidly, land will need to be purchased while it is affordable. When a church can afford to, often they will choose to . .

Build in Units. There are church architecture groups that are very helpful in this style of building. Lifeway has a Church Architecture Department. And remember . . .

Don’t go into heavy debt. Often young churches get in over their heads in debt and they cannot do ministry because they are paying out so much on their mortgage. God may even lead you to build debt-free. It requires fund-raising and a large measure of faith. In other words, you build as God provides the resources. Now let’s look at . . .

What to Consider During the Probe:³

⊕ How many people live in the community?

- Put together some basic demographic information. How many of them are there and where do they actually live?

⊕ Is the community’s population growing, stable, or declining? How does the rate of growth compare with other areas?

- We talk a lot about planting a church in a growing area, but what about an area that is in de-

cline? Often these areas are in greater need of new churches because established churches have left due to the decline. Frequently in many urban centers, an area that is primarily Anglo transitions to another ethnic group. As a result the Anglo churches relocate without new churches being planted to replace them that are appropriate to the context. Now they need an African-American church plant. Or maybe the area needs a Hispanic focused church plant. But it must relate to the new cultural context. Another thing to consider during the probe is . . .

⊕ **What is the age-structure of the community? Lots of children? Senior adults? Largely baby boomers?**

- You're simply trying to discover who is there. These factors will impact your methodology in obvious ways. Then you should ask . . .

⊕ **What is the racial/ethnic mix?**

- Is racial tension an issue in the area? In an area where there is racial tension, it is an opportunity to show the power of the Gospel by planting a multi-racial church. It is a clear demonstration of the Kingdom of God when racial groups unite for the sake of the Gospel. Another consideration during the probe is . . .

⊕ **What is the mix of household and family types? Married couples with children? Single-parent families? One-person households (individuals living alone)? Other non-family households (roommates)?**

- On the Upper West Side in New York City there is a church simply named Journey. One characteristic of the church is that there are very few children. It is a characteristic of that area; there are very few children. Many of the people in that area have dogs. So this church actually had an outreach event where they held a dog party in the local park. It wasn't anything odd. It wasn't a church service or anything like one. It was an evangelistic block party where they awarded prizes for dogs. It may seem odd to you, depending on your cultural context, but it was a very effective venue through which they were able to share the Gospel. It's what we call in demographic terms a "Double Income No Kids" community (D.I.N.K.s). The point is that as a church you're always looking for that point of contact.

In the Northern Virginia area and sections of Toronto, Canada, there are large sections populated by single adults. Many of them are civil servants involved in working for different branches of government. This is why it's so important to discover the mix of households and family types. In addition, you need to ask . . .

⊕ **What kind of housing do people live in? Single unit? Multihousing (apartments)? Manufactured homes? What percent of the housing is renter-occupied?**

- In some cities there are entire complexes that have doctor's offices and stores right next to condominiums where thousands of people live. How do we reach them? You need to ask these questions during your probe. In a renter-occupied area there is going to be a higher turnover as people move in and out. In an area where there's a military base this is not uncommon. People are transferred to different areas. So how will you address this issue in a new church? And then . . .

⊕ **What is the range of household and family income? Predominantly high income, middle income, or low income? How many people are in poverty? What percentage of the population?**

- Many Christians struggle with these types of questions because they have a heart to reach everyone in the area. But the reality is that most churches don't reach everybody. We want to and we should try, but ultimately we cannot reach everyone because we can't relate to everyone. People honestly have different lifestyles.

One church that may be a little more affluent will take their youth on semi-annual ski trips while another church is reaching a group that can't afford to go skiing. That church may be successful in youth ministry by taking their youth bowling or camping. While the church with people who have more wealth may never consider bowling and camping, it works well for the other church.

It's not a value judgment we're making on either church; we're simply recognizing the reality of the cultural context. And as a church planter you'll soon realize that as much as you want to, you cannot reach everyone. There is a range that will determine who will feel comfortable

in your church. A single mother struggling day to day is going to find it difficult to relate to the people who live in million-dollar homes, wondering about private schools or public schools for their kids. It's difficult for these different people to build relationships. And the neighborhood you pick will determine who comes to the church. Do not discriminate against people because there are always exceptions to the "birds of a feather" predisposition. There are some people who will come who could care less about those division, but they are rare. On the other hand, James told us to be careful how we treat both rich and poor and "not discriminate among yourselves" (James 2:2 NIV). But we must understand the demographics of the community *in order to make those of every demographic feel welcome in your church.* It's the reality of any church. Some people are not going to feel comfortable until they see someone like them. Church growth experts tell us that when people enter the door the first thing they ask is "Are there people like me in this church?" Another thing to consider is . . .

⊕ What is the educational level of adults in the community?

High school graduates? College graduates?

- This is going to affect how you preach. If you preach a sermon on the great kenonic hymn in Philippians 2 or you talk about the mystery of Jesus emptying Himself of deity and taking on the form of humanity, how do you say it to a congregation in a depressed area where few people graduate from high school? When you preach, how do you discuss the efficacious calling in light of God's divine sovereignty, when most of your people are high school graduates?

A story is told about D.L. Moody and his practice preaching. A cleaning lady was there in the auditorium straightening and cleaning. She wasn't very well educated and didn't possess a large vocabulary. But Moody asked her to interrupt him any time if she didn't understand a word he used when preaching.

Is it a true story? Who knows? But the point is that when you're preaching to a lower-middle class, high school or non-high school community, you need to preach differently than if you were preaching in a college town. You use the same text and break the points down in the same manner, but you use a different vocabulary. That's why it is critical to understand the educational level of your audience before you go out on the new field. If you aren't able to adapt your language to your crowd, you're going to have a hard time relating culturally.

⊕ When was most of the housing built?

- This will affect things. If it's old, is it still in good condition? Or is it old and neglected? That's going to tell you about the people who live there.

⊕ How mobile is the population? What percentage are newcomers to the community? Are new residents local or from out of state?

- People moving in from out of state present a great opportunity for church planters because they don't know anyone. They're looking for friends. Put out a mailer to new people in the area letting them know that you're new too. Let them know they can come and find a place to make friends and build a positive team experience with others. Then ask . . .

⊕ What do people do for a living? Where do they work?

- Are they blue-collar workers or are they upper-middle class yuppie types? Are these people who work predominantly with their hands, by the sweat of their brow, or is it a starched shirt and tie, at the office by nine crowd? What do they do? This will help you know how to relate to them specifically. And then . . .

⊕ What are the lifestyle characteristics of the households? What are their leisure activities?

- In affluent areas of the country, particularly in Southern California, Sunday morning is a time for recreational activities on the water. The same goes true in many southern areas of the country where people use Sunday for fishing and skiing on the lakes and rivers. Churches in areas where there's a large beach population have found Saturday night services to be very successful. So it's important to understand their characteristics and leisure habits. Then you should ask . . .

⊕ **How is the community changing? Is their racial/ethnic, age or socio-economic transition?**

- These things are important. Are people losing jobs? Are jobs coming in? Are the people leaving or coming someone you're going to try and reach? And then finally comes a . . .

⊕ **Critical Question: Is there a group of people *not* being reached by the churches in the community?**

- Missiologists call them “hidden peoples” who live in a particular area. For example, the clip we're going to see deals with Native-American work among the Choctaw Indians among others. The majority of these indigenous people in the United States live predominantly in urban centers. We often assume that most of them live on the reservation, but that's not the case. You need to look for these hidden people and ask the question, “Who is there that I can reach?” Watch this clip . . .

Video: Native-American church planting among Choctaw Indians

So what group of people do you believe God may call you to reach in the area that you study? Will it be a sub-culture in the art and performance community? In some major cities these people take up many city blocks. That church will certainly be different. Perhaps there will be beautiful artistry when you enter the doors. Even the programs contain art that ties into the message. In pre-literate societies often time the preacher will use artwork to describe a story. Perhaps in a post-literate society we need to use a similar technique, discovering value in the visual arts to communicate the Gospel. So what are the people groups out there and who has God called us to reach in that location? That's the process. It's thorough and effective in providing you with the information you'll need to successfully plant a new church.

