



## **Guidelines for Church Planting**

We believe that the mission of the church is to be a faithful witness to the saving grace of God which is revealed in Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. As the church witnesses, the Holy Spirit convicts people of sin, and they become converted. We believe persons become members of God's Kingdom when they repent of their sins and accept Christ and His Lordship into their lives and experience the new birth. These redeemed people become members of the church. Growing churches multiply into new congregations.

The Holy Spirit can use many persons and different models to plant new churches. These guidelines attempt to clarify the Virginia Mennonite Missions and the Virginia Mennonite Conference approach to church planting vision and administration.

### **I. LAYING THE FOUNDATION**

#### **1. Scriptural Foundation for Church Planting**

“Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:19-20)

“You will receive power after the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you shall be my in Jerusalem, in all Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

“We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (II Corinthians 5:20, 21)

#### **2. Theology for Church Planting**

- A. God's purposes in creation are most clearly discerned in His redemptive actions. Both the Old and New Testaments depict a missionary God that acts in love and mercy. (Isaiah 45:22-25)
- B. The foundation of the church is Jesus Christ, and all our church building efforts recognize that beginning point. (Isaiah 9:2-7; I Corinthians 3:11; Ephesians 2:19-21)

- C. The Bible is the authoritative guide for the new congregation, interpreted by the Holy Spirit through the believing community. (John 17:17; II Timothy 3:14-17; II Peter 1:19-21)
- D. The vision for church planting comes from the Holy Spirit. As we pray and wait, He gives the vision. We move forward in obedience to His call. (Acts 16:6-10; Philippians 1:5)
- E. As we participate with God in the multiplication of believing clusters of redeemed people, we commit ourselves to preserving the unity of the Spirit with all our brothers and sisters in Christ regardless of cultural or denominational background. (Ephesians 4:3-6; Colossians 3:11-14)
- F. Each new congregation is urged to reflect joy and the purpose of its worship in both celebration and discipleship that shows forth the Good News of Jesus to all those around them. (Exodus 15:1-18; Psalm 95:1-7; Psalm 100; I Corinthians 12, 13, 14; Colossians 3:16, 17)
- G. We confidently call new congregations of believers to associate in mutual accountability with a regional district of the Virginia Mennonite Conference, which has its membership in Mennonite Church USA. On the international scene this provides these congregations membership in the Mennonite World Conference. (Acts 15; Galatians 6:1-5; Galatians 3:26-29; Ephesians 5:21)

### **3. Reasons for Church Planting**

- A. The command to plant churches comes from Jesus Christ Himself.
  - 1) We see through the example of Christ throughout the Gospels that, though he did not plant churches, he established relationships with those in need, who possibly eventually became part of a “church plant” in the Apostolic spread of the Gospel.
  - 2) Jesus taught in Luke 15 that he has come to call the outcasts to faith. In telling about the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son, Jesus underscored the importance of seeking those who are lost in order to share the Gospel with them.
  - 3) The Great Commission deals with church planting because the church is called to baptize and disciple people. This will continue to happen in the local church, but a newly established church tends to possess more motivation to reach out and evangelize. That is the reason for their very existence.

- B. A new church encourages reproduction. Established churches often lose their thrust for reaching new people because they often give precedence to their own programs and close-knit fellowship. However, the drive behind the risk for new church planters is to reach the people around them. That's the reason for their very existence.
- C. A new church forms its ministry around those who are not churched. Those pioneering new fellowships ask the question, "What ministries do we need that will attract a postmodern, secular type of people?"
- D. A new church can effectively reach a new ethnic group. Established churches find it hard crossing the hurdles of new friendships, language or culture. A new church, however, faces this challenge up front.

#### **4. Creating a Mission Statement**

- A. According to George Barna, "a mission statement is a broad, general, statement about what the church hopes to accomplish." He says further that "the statement of the mission probably would describe in general terms who you wish to reach and what outcomes your ministry is seeking to realize." In another statement, "It is designed to reflect a heart turned to God in service and obedience, in which the church is a vehicle used to unite people to do His will."
- B. When developing a mission statement make sure that it is succinct, interesting, and memorable. Express it in one clear sentence in order to make it easy to remember. It should tell what the primary activity of your church will be with reference to your particular context and your biblical understanding of the nature, purpose and mission of the church. For a mission statement to have more ownership, it is very wise to get as many people together as possible within your new church to help formulate this statement.
- C. Some examples of mission statements from churches in Virginia Mennonite Conference are these: "We are called to be enabled for worship, equipped for community, and empowered for mission that in all things Christ may be exalted." "We at ..... seek to equip each other in embracing, living, and proclaiming God's saving love, healing, and hope in every area of life, both in the neighborhood our congregation serves and throughout the world." "To know Christ, so that we may be transformed into His likeness, and to make Him known so that God's grace, healing, and hope flow through us to the world." "God calls us to be followers of Jesus Christ, and by the power of the Holy Spirit to grow through worship, proclamation, equipping, and encouraging, so that God's healing and hope will flow from within us to others across the street and around the world." The well-known Saddleback Church has as its mission statement (they call

- D. Be creatively redundant in communicating the mission within your new church in order to ensure that everyone knows it well enough that it can form your identity as a group of people. That is one reason for making it brief, and somewhat catchy.
- E. In order to get people to know the mission statement, it needs to be boldly kept in front of the congregation. Some churches print the statement on all their literature. Some incorporate it into their worship, maybe on a banner in a very visible spot. Some may print it on magnets, or on bumper stickers, or t-shirts, in order to increase the chance that it is remembered.

## **5. Developing a Vision Statement**

- A. George Barna writes, “A mission statement is a general statement about what the church hopes to accomplish, in broad terms. While the mission statement is philosophic in nature, the vision statement is strategic in character.”
- B. Barna says further that “vision is a clear mental image of a preferable future, imparted by God to chosen servants based on an accurate understanding of God, church, self and context...vision creates specific, attainable milestones that require continual review and reflection.” He also says that a vision statement is “specific, detailed, customized, distinctive, and unique to a given church. It allows the leader to say ‘no’ to opportunities, it provides direction, it empowers people for service, and it facilitates productivity.”
- C. As with the development of your mission statement, you will want to decide what persons should come together to outline your vision and to help set your goals.
- D. The vision you have for each of the areas of church life will issue into goals – goals that are measurable, attainable, relevant, and trackable for different areas of ministry. As a way to remember the ingredients of goal-making, some people have used the acronym S.M.A.R.T. – S – Specific; M – Measurable; A – Attainable; R – Risk-taking; T- Time-bound. These goals can be used as milestone markers in your congregational development among your team members.
- E. Make sure that as new persons commit themselves to become members of your developing congregation, that they are kept abreast regarding your

- F. There may be those persons who react against that of setting goals because to them this appears too much like just running a business. They might say to just let the Spirit lead, and that is good enough. Often people react against numerical goals, feeling that leadership may just be out to “build a kingdom.” As a leader, you need to be clear to communicate that behind each number is a person that God loves, and for whom Christ died. A God-ordained vision which results in specific goals provides a baseline that will encourage you in your ministry. When the time comes that the congregation realizes that your goals have been accomplished, this can be a great time of celebration – a milestone that sets a new pace for moving ahead unto even greater things.

## **6. How Churches are Planted in Virginia Conference**

- A. An individual who has felt the call of God to begin a church that will draw people not now being reached. This church planter might focus on a certain age segment, such as young adults in an area around a college or university. Or the potential church planter sets his/her sights on a particular ethnic group, or a lower income strata of the city which is not presently being reached with the gospel.
- B. Virginia Mennonite Missions recommends that the potential church planter undergoes an assessment process. This is generally conducted by an organization or denominational agency. An assessment can take place in one or two days, or last a week. The longer ones might involve intensive psychological testing, one-on-one interviews, group interactions, and follow-up meetings. It needs to be remembered that the task of church planting requires people who are uniquely gifted. (To find out more about assessments you may go to [www.newchurches.com](http://www.newchurches.com) and click on *assessment* or go to [www.churchplantingvillage.net](http://www.churchplantingvillage.net) and click on *discovery tools*). For a listing of Charles Ridley’s thirteen behavioral characteristics that most successful church planters share, see Appendix A.
- C. A congregation has developed a missional focus, and because of its growth and space constraints, as well as deep convictions that it needs to be carrying out the Great Commission, decides to plant a church. It may call someone from within, such as an assistant pastor, to be the planter. Sometimes a congregation will “swarm” and send out 20-30 people, along with a key leader/pastor, and those who are gifted musicians, who will work with others in forming a new fellowship.

- D. A district with its several congregations decides that God is calling for them collectively to develop a new church within their region. This could be a church of a predominant cultural group, such as Hispanic, Asian, etc. Or maybe it would be a church that would be less tied to traditional patterns. It would be a more seeker-friendly place for persons with little or no Christian background. Depending upon the circumstances, the support of prayer and finances would be spread out among the several congregations in the district
- E. Virginia Mennonite Missions takes the initiative to strategize the planting of a church somewhere in the Virginia Conference area. It may target cities or geographic areas where no Mennonite churches exist, do demographic studies, evaluate the community, and send a church planter to this targeted area. However, it will attempt to do all this by linking up with the resources of a district that generally is closest to this targeted area.
- F. When the initiative comes from an individual, a congregation, or a district, Virginia Mennonite Missions will help with this startup by providing counsel, and giving assistance in the forming a church planting and ministry design team. It will help to set up a partnership arrangement that links a new developing church with a well established church in the Conference. VMissions will stay closely in touch with the district and the church- planting pastor in the launch of the congregation until the group develops to the size of about ten family units. As the fellowship grows, it will become officially aligned with the district and the Virginia Conference, and will look for general resourcing from the district overseer/bishop and the various commissions of Conference.

## **II. GETTING STARTED**

### **1. Forming a Team for Ministry**

- A. When a church begins, whether initiated by an individual, a congregation, district, or Conference, soon a ministry team or core group needs to form in order to establish a good foundation. The key is to form a team with multiple gifts so that each area of ministry life is covered with committed workers.
- B. Think carefully about the all the key roles that will need to be filled in order for your style of church to be effective. Listed below are the general roles needed.
  - 1) Leadership persons – along with the church planter, persons are needed who are adept at envisioning appropriate directions, and are futuristic oriented.

- 2) Relational people – those who are good at connecting with other people and have the ability to help assimilate them within the developing church group.
  - 3) Disciplers – those who have depth in the scriptures who can work with the church planter in teaching and training seekers and new believers.
  - 4) Administrators – persons who are good at bringing some organization to the church, so that the communication system is working well, and enhances the growth of the church.
  - 5) Business-oriented people - those who can creatively discover the sources of financial support and who looks realistically, yet are propelled by faith, concerning how these funds can best be spent.
  - 6) Organizers/managers – people who can effectively plan and support an event an ongoing activity.
  - 7) Musicians – since music is such an important aspect of church life, persons who have musical skills, along with the ability to bring vocalists and instrumentalists together as they lead the congregation in praise to God.
  - 8) Prayer leaders and pray-ers – persons to work with the church planter in regular calls to prayer, and keep prayer concerns visible with the developing congregation.
- C. Though at first you may not be able to fill all these roles on your team, think through how you will use those God sends you. Above and beyond the roles they may play, make sure that they have good character, and each one displays a servant heart. Positive and cooperative attitudes far outweigh an extraordinary or remarkable ability in the role in which they serve.
- D. Make sure your team is culturally and ethnically representative of the people group with whom you are connecting. If you are relating to a culturally diverse people, do some of the members of your team have cross-cultural relationship building experience?
- E. As you form your team, be careful to identify and select those persons who are a good fit. If you sense there are persons who have character traits that will not build up a new body of believers, but could sow division, it is important to be up front with them, and direct them to a more appropriate ministry opportunity somewhere else.
- F. It can sometimes be a mistake to allow someone to quickly assume a role, especially if it is in a leadership position, or worship leading area. They may need some time to become familiar with the developing church, and your leadership team may need some time to get to know them, their abilities and character.

- G. Consider carefully why people are attracted initially to your church plant. Have they had trouble in a previous church and are now looking for a fresh start? Do they agree with your basic DNA or do they have a different agenda for the church?

## **2. Selecting a Target Area**

### **A. Informal Forms of Observation and Conversation**

- 1) If there is an area that seems right for planting a church, then it is important that there be some personal interaction with people of that area. This increases the familiarity with their ways of thinking and expressing themselves. This also provides more understanding of their particular social- cultural characteristics. This could be done through in-home discussion groups or coffee-shop conversations.
- 2) “Prayer walks” or “Windshield Drive-bys” are ways to combine intercession and observation. These types of experiences can give one a sense of the layout of the area, and will reveal the socio/economic level of the area as well.
- 3) Church leaders (or ministerial groups) often know significant things about the community and the spiritual atmosphere. Making contact with these persons early in the process can help them understand that you desire to be a partner in sharing the gospel, rather than in competition (assuming that the focus of your new church will be that of connecting with unchurched people). Knowing how many people attend local churches can be helpful in estimating how many do not participate in local churches.
- 4) Various types of surveys can be used that will elicit valuable information from the community that you wish to target. You can use written surveys, mailed surveys, on-line surveys, telephone surveys, as well as going door-to-door. In this day and age, it is much more difficult to do telephone or door-to-door surveys, though the personal conversations with those who are willing to talk, can prove to be very effective.
- 5) Information to find out in any type of survey would be: age, ethnicity, language spoken at home, amount of participation in church, perceived needs such as loneliness and trouble with relationships, preferences of music, style of dress, hobbies, and sports activities. Questions that can be asked are: What do you think someone would look for in a church? What do you think the church could be doing to contribute positively to the community? Who do you think I should talk to in order to learn more about the community?



## B. Local Information Sources

- 1) Municipal offices – they are the level of government responsible for planning the future of the community.
- 2) Local libraries – librarians can direct you to resources and can access information about local history. Census tract studies are often available at libraries. Authorities say that these should be used rather than larger, potentially more diverse zip code-focused studies.
- 3) Real estate boards could provide access to regional development plans. Real estate agents often have much personal information about why people relocate.
- 4) Local universities and colleges that have majors in geography, civil engineering, urban planning, etc. may be running local projects that could provide good information. Sometimes social science students need to do research projects for their course work. It's possible that they would offer to work on a project that can be used in planting a new church.
- 5) Local media (e.g. radio, TV, newspapers, local web sites, etc.) often track ratings (e.g. local music preferences) and cover current issues.
- 6) Social development agencies (e.g., food banks, subsidized housing, community centers, etc.) may do in-depth research to provide planning resources and to secure grant approvals.

## C. Research Resources

- 1) Federal Government

U.S. Census Bureau: <http://www.census.gov>

From the home page:

Select “Search” and choose “Place Search.” This allows you to enter city, county, or township name and state and/or zip. From this screen you will have the option of selecting the Tiger map for the area or to look up census data from a wide variety of tables.

Select “Search” and choose “Map Search.” This allows you to select information by clicking on state and county maps.

“American FactFinder” offers a broader range of census data.

Check this resource at <http://factfinder.census.gov>

- 2) State Governments

Most states offer a variety of data from the U.S. Census Bureau, other departments of the federal government, and state agencies. The Census Bureau offers links to state data centers at <http://222.census.gov/sdc/www/index.html> or check your state web

site, often at <http://www.state.va.us> (substitute your own state's two-letter postal abbreviation), for links to the state data center (under a variety of department/agency names, such as development, commerce, labor, planning and budget, or population research center).

3) Private/Commercial Source

Percept Group, Inc. – <http://www.percept1Com/> (151 Kalmus Dr., Suite A 104, Costa Mesa, CA 92626; 1-800-442-6277).

Percept is a commercial organization directed specifically at the needs of churches and is your first stop in the search for purchased secondary data. Percept draws data from the U.S. Census Bureau, Equifax National Decision Systems, WEFA Group, and its own independent research to provide complete “Ethnographic Information,” including demographic, psychographic (attitudes, interests, lifestyles, values), praxiographic (behaviors, attendance patterns, giving, and faith involvement), and mediagraphic (through what media persons prefer to receive data) information. For about \$350 (often available at discounted prices through denominational agencies), you can receive Percept’s Ministry Area Profile (MAP) and Community Preference Assessment (COMPASS).

### 3. Choosing a Name and Logo

- A. Choosing a name and a logo are significant decisions when beginning a new church. Names for new churches need to be meaningful and contemporary. One of the main reasons your church has a name is to identify it to those outside the church, so you should choose a name that appeals to the unchurched.
- B. The name is one of the first things that people will know about the new church, therefore it should be easy to identify and remember. Actually the name should reflect some of your vision, ethos, and core values.
- C. According to church planter and author, Ed Stetzer, the church should not be called a mission or a chapel, because of connotations those designations give. Even the word “fellowship” does not seem to serve the best interests of a new body of believers. He recommends that it be called what it is – a church.
- D. There have been many debates about whether the denominational name needs to be embedded in the name of the church. Including the denominational name can imply to “outsiders” that the church is only for people of that denomination – in our case – Mennonites. And so deleting

“Mennonite” can imply that anyone is welcome; however, if the name is kept, it can bring a clear identity to those who know about Mennonites. Some persons feel that if the name is kept, it can evoke from the general populace questions about who Mennonites are, and that poses as a good segue into sharing a Christian witness.

- E. Our suggestion is that where “Mennonite” will be helpful as an identifier for the people group you are focusing on to reach, then it would be good to use it. If there is a question as to whether or not using “Mennonite” will add or detract from people initially being attracted to your church, then you should use discernment. Your relationship to Mennonite Church USA, or to Virginia Conference can be established in more ways than just the name. Whether or not “Mennonite” is used in the name has little to do with the theological direction of the church. The key factor is the awareness of and commitment to our Mennonite theology by the leadership of the church.
- F. A suggestion for finding the name for your church, and to see best what communicates, is to ask people. Write a list of five church names, and ask people in a local shopping mall to rank from 1 to 5 the church they would most likely attend if they know nothing more about the church than just the name. See what you discover.

#### **4. Establishing a Ministry Support Team**

- A. A Ministry Support Team (MST) is a group of five to eight people with a vital interest in missions. People on an MST for church planters within the territory of our Virginia Mennonite Conference have a special motivation for the birthing of new churches in order to reach people stateside. They commit themselves to mobilize others to make the worker’s vision and ministry happen. The main goal of the MST is to link a group of people from one congregation or several congregations to the church planter himself/herself and his/her family. In that regard the MST could be a Sunday school class, a Bible study group, or a care group from an established church. Or, as indicated, it could be a selection of persons from various congregations.
- B. Members of the MST would covenant to pray for the church planter and the newly birthed congregation, to assist in sharing news about the development of the congregation, and to take primary responsibility for raising funds for the first five years of the life of the new church plant. In some situations the term of support could be shorter or go longer than five years.
- C. After the church becomes an established and self-supporting congregation, the MST would not need to raise continued funds, but would continue to support the church in prayer and encouragement.

- D. Persons on the MST would, at various times attend one of the worship services, as well as participate in special events taking place in the newly established church, such as the opening celebration, anniversaries, fundraising events, and may serve as a teacher or helper in their Vacation Bible School.
- E. The roles that make up a Ministry Support Team are the following:  
(Adapted from a document issued by Mennonite Mission Network)
- 1) Leader
    - Organizes meetings and sets agenda
    - Keeps the vision for the ministry alive within the group
  - 2) Prayer Coordinator
    - Encourages others to pray regularly for the church planter and his/her ministries
    - Stays in regular e-mail contact with the church planter to learn of prayer requests
    - Passes these requests on to other MST members, and to congregations and individuals through e-mail or print as desired
    - Finds creative ways to encourage people to pray for the ministry
  - 3) Communication Coordinator
    - Maintains excitement for the ministry by making sure supporters hear from the church planter and his/her team regularly. If he/she is not writing regularly (at least six times a year), encourage him/her to do so
    - Makes sure that regular newsletters are sent to all friends and relatives who wish to receive them. Remember to send copies of these newsletters to the Director of USA Ministries at Virginia Mennonite Missions
    - Is available to speak to congregations about the ministry if the church planter is not available to highlight the development of this new fellowship of believers
    - Works with the Director of USA Ministries at VM Missions in the development of brochures, prayer cards, and other informational items to share with people
  - 4) Personal Support and Encouragement Coordinator
    - Sends cards, especially on birthdays and anniversaries, with a message or Scripture verse that offers encouragement
    - Keeps in touch via e-mail or phone as the church is being established
  - 5) Financial Coordinator
    - Works with the Director of USA Ministries of VMM along with the church planter in composing a listing of persons who might contribute to the new church plant on a one-time or continuing basis.
    - Keeps track of commitments

- Writes monthly thank-you notes for contributions
  - Monitors finances
  - Keeps the other members of the MST aware of the financial situation
- 6) All members of the MST are encouraged to:
- Pray for the church planter, the congregation and its ministry
  - Brainstorm about ideas for other sources of funding, such as grants
  - Send reminder notes to any supporters who have not given by the end of the year
  - In cooperation with the church planter, organize fund-raising events
  - Strategize visits to the new church, so that periodically the church planter feels personal support by those who attend and share in the worship and ministry of the church

## **5. The Partner Congregation**

### **A. The Purpose of a Partner Congregation**

- 1) To provide opportunities for encouraging one another in the mission of the church.
- 2) To promote greater understanding and a closer relationship between congregations of Virginia Mennonite Conference.
- 3) To help meet one another's needs within the Conference.

### **B. Relationship-Building Between Partner Congregation and Church Plant**

- 1) Exchange of church bulletins
- 2) Pulpit exchanges
- 3) Help in work projects
- 4) Assist in teaching/training where needed
- 5) Mutual visiting of Sunday services or other events
- 6) Mutual prayer
- 7) Sponsor children's attendance at summer camp
- 8) May consider financially assisting special mission projects of the new church plant

### **C. Finding a Partner Congregation**

- 1) Attempt to find a church that is in the same district, or in a district that is not far away, if possible.
- 2) The partner congregation does not have to be a large church, but strong enough to provide the kinds of assistance needed as a new church develops.

- 3) There is an advantage if there is some family or vocational kinship between the two churches.
- 4) Though another congregation, as a whole, can be looked to as a partner, there can be more attention given to the support of the church plant if the partner is a group within that church, such as a Sunday school class, or a men's group, etc. This entity, in tandem with the Ministry Support Team, can adequately represent the congregation.

## **6. Discovering and Developing Financial Support**

### **A. Setting up a Budget**

- 1) "A budget is a plan for allocating available resources. It is setting priorities on everything that you want to do so that the resources are used for the most important thing first." (Dr. Leroy Solomon, Ashland Theological Seminary)
- 2) The four characteristics of a good annual budget are these: a) it gives a complete picture of perceived costs for the year; b) it is attainable; c) there is some "faith" put into it – that is, you may not know for sure how all these needs will be met. You are being realistic, but yet are seeing it as a challenge. d) it is not overly complex, but meaningful to the average layperson.
- 3) In setting up your beginning budget it is helpful to get some outside consultation from VMM or your MST if this agency or group will be helping in your financial support.

### **B. Different Options for Financial Support**

- 1) Church planter retains a full-time "secular" job – engages in a "tent-making" ministry
- 2) Church planter becomes bi-vocational
- 3) Church planter contributes his/her time and depends on a pension, Social Security, or other forms of long-term income
- 4) Individual contributions by friends and relatives – relationships also nurtured by MST
- 5) Virginia Mennonite Missions or Virginia Mennonite Conference budgeted funds or grants (See Appendix B)
- 6) Regular contributions from the partner church
- 7) Regular contributions from multiple congregations within the same district

### **C. Developing the Resource Base**

- 1) Apply to VMM and/or VMC, both of which may supply at least partial support through their annual budget or through endowment funds

- 2) Seek out ministry partners by sharing the vision of the church planting, and selling the vision in an engaging way so that listeners are inspired to give. People give more readily to vision than to need.
- 3) Develop well designed brochures and pledge cards.
- 4) Through your MST keep your supporters informed. Besides just giving them facts, tell stories of how individuals' lives are being change physically, emotionally, and spiritually.
- 5) Write a personal note to share with your donors how the gifts are being used – this could be done in addition to MST notes of thanks.
- 6) As the church develops, the church planter should mention giving and tithing in Sunday messages, but it's best in the early stages not to have a tithing series.
- 7) In order to foster a sharing spirit among new church attenders it is most profitable to teach people how to reorder their lives, put God first in their finances, and then live below their income level. At one new church, the pastor ran a class series entitled, "Practices of Simplicity."
- 8) Share financially with other mission endeavors, even though it be a small amount at first.
- 9) It should also be noted that Virginia Mennonite Missions will consider providing funds to church planters when they wish to attend a church planting/congregational resourcing events.

#### D. Setting up a financial structure and a legal system

- 1) Appoint a financial officer and finance committee to handle the funds so that the church planter cannot be accused of mishandling funds.
- 2) Until becoming a bona fide member of Virginia Conference, when your church can be classified as a 501c-3 Non-Profit organization, consider channeling funds through the finance department of Virginia Mennonite Missions, or through your partner congregation.
- 3) Upon being received as a member of Virginia Conference of Mennonite Church USA, the new church automatically has a 501c-3 status.
- 4) Take out liability insurance
- 5) Set up a bank account
- 6) Work at articles of incorporation and by-laws
- 7) Obtain a tax-exempt number which allows you to not pay sales tax on church items purchased
- 8) Use invoices and receipts for all expenditures
- 9) Require two individuals for counting and depositing money
- 10) Those handling money should be "cash bonded" (an insurance contract that provides an institution with coverage against losses resulting from employee dishonesty or theft)
- 11) Annually have the books audited by an outside individual

## 7. Organizational Documents

- A. It is important that as the church develops that you create documents that provide an understanding of the basic purposes and organizational nature of the church. This is especially significant when becoming incorporated.
- B. Find out from a reliable source what legal or procedural documentation you will need to carry out the ministry that your church is planning to do. Following that, find out who are the best resource people to create these legal documents. These should be people with experience in organizational planning to help you discern what documentation will best fit your church.
- C. Make sure that the documents you create are clear enough to allow the accountability expected and flexible enough to allow, rather than unnecessarily, limit ministry.
- D. Be careful that your administrative work does not take away from the necessary time for meeting new people and nurturing relationships, particularly in the early stages of developing the church.
- E. If you do develop policies and procedures, be diligent in respecting them. Otherwise there may be additional legal liabilities or confusion as to why they are not being followed.

## 8. Structuring for Growth

- A. Structure is needed in any organization where people need to interact with each other. Some church planters, according to Ed Stetzer in the book, *Planting Missional Churches*, downplay the importance of biblical church structure. But when setting up a good structure is ignored, many problems can erupt later. However, he says too that “when a church *focuses* on structure, the planter spends more time servicing the structure and less time serving God.”
- B. Stetzer points out different kinds of leadership structures – elders, pastor and board, board and pastor, and pastor alone. But he contends that the approach of pastors and elders which uses a plurality of leaders, with the pastor being the “first among equals” is a preferable way to go. This model, he asserts, best fits the biblical teaching on governance...” The pastor at first within a new church will probably need to work part-time in “secular work,” but he/she would be the one to cast vision, and take major responsibility in overseeing the development of the new church plant.



### III. Moving Toward Establishment

#### 1. Finding a Meeting Place.

- A. Make your geographical selection wisely. If you are wanting to target a middle class self-sustaining congregation, then selecting a site, whether short-range or long-range use in mind, should not be in the inner city, or a lower economic area.
- B. Whatever space you choose make sure it is affordable, pleasant, culturally suitable, and easily accessible.
- C. Rent facilities when you have built up a strong base of operation, and have financial backing. It's been proven that growth is not hindered if you don't own your own building. Some new church plants have attained hundreds or even thousands of members, still using rented facilities. It is a good witness to new believers when they see money being put into people ministries instead of an inordinate amount being used for buildings.
- D. There are many different venues for worship and discipleship purposes: another church, public school building (gym, auditorium, cafeteria), day care center, movie theater, meeting halls such as those used by your local fire department, VFW, or local recreation center, hotel conference room, vacant space in a mall, Seventh Day Adventist church, etc.
- E. Rental of space brings into play that of portability – the setting up and tearing down of furnishings, worship aids, musical instruments, banners, etc. each Sunday. This challenge can be debilitating for those who are constrained to do it at each worship service. However, some persons can see it as a call from God to assist in this way, and will serve for a long time.

#### 2. Outreach Possibilities

- A. One on One - each member of the core group or in beginning congregation reach out to one person or family who is unchurched through work, at the health club, in the neighborhood, or through community service clubs and activities; offer to pray for persons, especially those you contact in the neighborhood around the church.
- B. Smaller Groups working together – give door-to-door invitations through personal contact or door hangers to announce upcoming events; from the inception of the church, begin small groups for fellowship, worship, and study, and intentionally make sure they multiply. The multiplication of small groups can create the critical mass it takes to launch your first public service.
- C. Congregationally Initiated - Friend Sunday, Vacation Bible School, plan social events like Lawn Festivals or host a community “garage sale,” offer series of midweek classes on life issues, mailing of *Together*- a community paper full of articles to help in personal spirituality or building up family life, display ads in the newspaper and radio, good signage, and many other creative ideas. (See [www.outreach.com](http://www.outreach.com) for ideas for advertising).

### **3. Launch Day – The Church’s Birthday**

- A. Why should you have a launch day? Why not just meet in a house church type atmosphere, and just grow gradually and, without much ado, move to a bigger space? Having a “birth day” is important because it can provide an opportunity for interested persons to experience your new church in a larger setting than in a small house church setting. Make sure you have a critical mass of at least 40-50 people or more. Keep your seating space commensurate with the projected amount of people who will come. Having 50 people spread around in a rented church auditorium that could seat 200 seems self-defeating. From the beginning you will want to foster the feeling of community. It is a challenge to get unchurched people to try this new church, and so when they come they need to feel like they are in a comfortable place. Scheduling a launch day for at least two or three months in the future gives time for advertising and for personal invitations to go out.
  
- B. When a church has a launch day, being adequately prepared is a must. If you start too soon, and there is little guarantee that you will have more than 15 or 20 people there, the endeavor may flop. Strong relationships need to be built beforehand within your context of ministry. Ideally, at least three small home groups should have been meeting in the weeks leading up to the launch. Then when they come together there are an adequate numbers of worshippers. Besides this, there are enough leadership type people to serve on a worship/music team, and there are people in place to act as child care attendants, ushers, greeters, etc. If all the pieces are in place, seekers will see that the church is well prepared. It is even a good idea to run through a rehearsal of your first service (and maybe others) so that everything comes off well, and when the launch day comes everything will be done “decently and in order.”
  
- C. Sometimes if a church begins too soon, and the leadership finds after a few months that it is difficult to move beyond a small church group of 20 or 25 (including children), it may a good idea to have another “grand opening” so they can refocus, and bring together more people. A move of the meeting place location or some other significant change could be a prime opportunity.

## **IV. Steps to Take in Virginia Conference/District Affiliation**

### **1. Congregation in Formation Status (Appendix C)**

Church planters will be given this document which outlines directives for a developing group who has been meeting on a regular basis for Bible study, prayer, fellowship, and mutual caring. This group would consist of at least ten to fifteen persons with the desire to eventually become a congregation. As the document

indicates, the “Congregation in Formation” status will normally be in effect for up to three years.

## **2. Ten Households**

As the group or groups develop under a common overall leadership, and reaches the size of about ten households, it has reached the stage of applying for District and Conference membership. These “households,” which could be a single person, a married couple, or a married couple or single person with children, would be gathering regularly for worship, fellowship and Christian ministry.

## **3. Partnership Agreement Form**

The recognized leader or pastor of this group would next complete a form entitled “Virginia Mennonite Missions/Virginia Mennonite Conference and Church Planter Partnership Agreement.” Copies of this form would be given to the District Overseer/Bishop, the USA Ministries Director of Virginia Mennonite Missions, and the Virginia Conference Minister. In an agreed-upon time these persons (along with any other leaders from the developing church that the church planter would desire to bring) would meet to discuss the response on this partnership agreement questionnaire.

## **4. Next Steps to Take**

Upon the completion of this “summit meeting,” the following steps would be taken according to the “Bylaws of the Virginia Mennonite Conference”

- 1) When the group is organized, it will present a written request to the bishop/overseer for affiliation with the Virginia Conference. The application will include a statement of faith, a statement of acceptance of the principles of the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* and the bylaws of Mennonite Church USA.
- 2) The district/cluster bishop/overseer will arrange with the respective district’s chairperson to have the request considered by the district for action.
- 3) The response of the district will be reported to Conference Council which will bring a recommendation for action by Conference Assembly.
- 4) Upon approval by Conference Assembly, the fellowship will be recognized as a congregation affiliated with Virginia Mennonite Conference.

By G. Edwin Bontrager  
Virginia Mennonite Missions USA Ministries Director  
2008

With help from other sources including the document  
produced by Mennonite Church Eastern Canada  
(Outreach Canada) entitled “Planting Mennonite Churches”

### **Books for Church Planters**

Jones, Tom. *Church Planting from the Ground Up*. 2004.

Moore, Ralph. *Starting a New Church: The Church Planter’s Guide to Success*. 2002.

Murray, Stuart. *Church Planting – Laying Foundations*. Herald Press, Scottdale, PA and Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, 2001.

Nebel, Tom. *Big Dreams in Small Places: Church Planting in Smaller Communities*. 2002

Nebel, Tom and Gary Rohrmayer. *Church Planting Landmines – Mistakes to Avoid in Years 2 Through 10*. Church Smart Resources, St. Charles, IL.

Roberts, Jr., Bob. *The Multiplying Church – the New Math for Starting New Churches*. Zondervan , Grand Rapids, MI, 2007.

Stetzer, Ed. *Planting Missional Churches – Planting a Church That’s Biblically Sound and Reaching People in Culture*. Broadman & Holman Publishers, Nashville, TN, 2006. (Stetzer has an annotated bibliography in the back of the book and lists 62 books on church planting).

Williams, Rowan. *Mission-Shaped Churches: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions in a Changing Context*. 2007.

### **Websites for Church Planters**

[www.outreach.com](http://www.outreach.com)

[www.churchsmart.com](http://www.churchsmart.com) - Strategy ministry tools for church leaders

[www.churchplanting4me.org](http://www.churchplanting4me.org) - Church Planting Assessment Center

[www.churchplantingresources.com](http://www.churchplantingresources.com)

[www.church-planting.net](http://www.church-planting.net)

[www.churchplantingvillage.net](http://www.churchplantingvillage.net)

[www.newchurches.com](http://www.newchurches.com) – offers tools and resources for church planters

[www.churchplants.com](http://www.churchplants.com) – a division of Outreach Ministries

[www.mislinks.org/church/chplant.htm](http://www.mislinks.org/church/chplant.htm) - detailed tool list for church development and mission work

[www.reclaimingthemission.com/2007/10/missional-order-of-st-fiacre-at-life-on.html](http://www.reclaimingthemission.com/2007/10/missional-order-of-st-fiacre-at-life-on.html) information on being a missional church planter

[www.midwestministry.org](http://www.midwestministry.org) - The Midwest Ministry Development Center has a very intensive program with a battery of tests, and can tailor that to assess church planter readiness.