

THE SGI JOURNAL OF LEADERSHIP

No
17

Sept-Oct 2023

HOW TO PLANT AND GROW CHURCHES

PARTNERS IN PLANTING • PERSISTENCE • A THRIVING APOSTOLIC WORK • THE NEXT TOWN
REESTABLISHING A CHURCH PLANTING CULTURE IN NORTH AMERICA • THE PEOPLE FACTOR
DNA OF AN APOSTOLIC CHURCH • A HEALTHY HARVEST

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FROM THE SGI COMMITTEE CHAIR

Partners in Planting

Darrell Johns

FROM THE GENERAL SUPERINTENDENT

Persistence

David K. Bernard

A Thriving Apostolic Work

Bryan Parkey

DNA of an Apostolic Church

Nathan Scoggins

Reestablishing a Culture of Church Planting
in North America

Scott Sistrunk

The Next Town

Mark Brown

The People Factor

Paul Records

A Healthy Harvest

David Bryan

ISSUE 17 TOOLBOX

UPCI Church Planting and Church Growth Resources

THE SGI JOURNAL OF LEADERSHIP

MISSION STATEMENT

Leading the United Pentecostal Church International to think strategically about future growth.

THE STRATEGIC GROWTH INITIATIVE STEERING COMMITTEE

Darrell Johns, Chair

Bryan Parkey, Vice Chair

Nathan Scoggins, Secretary

GENERAL EDITING

Sylvia Clemons

Seth Simmons

GRAPHIC DESIGN & LAYOUT

Seth Simmons

DISTRIBUTION

Nathan Scoggins

Seth Simmons

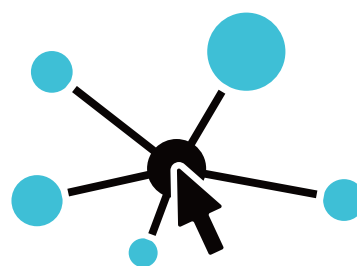
SPANISH TRANSLATION EDITORS

Trinidad Ramos

Rene Moreno

FRENCH TRANSLATION EDITOR

Liane R. Grant, *Certified Translator*
(Nonprofit Translation Solutions)



This resource is interactive. Click the items in the Table of Contents to move around and explore each issue.



SGI RESOURCES! CLICK THIS PAGE TO VISIT PENTECOSTAL PUBLISHING HOUSE

THE SGI
JOURNAL
OF LEADERSHIP



Search for books, bibles and more

Search

Hello, Log In

Create an Account



Curriculum

Books

Bibles

Bible Studies

For Churches

Media

Sales

Blog

Strategic Growth Initiative (SGI) Resources

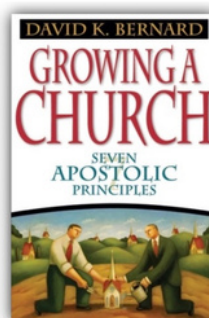
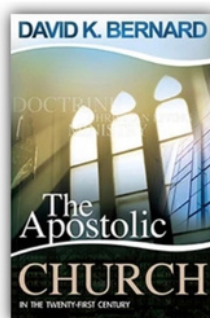
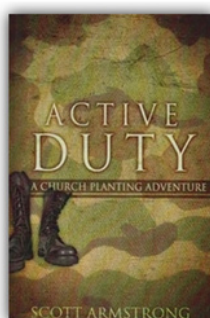
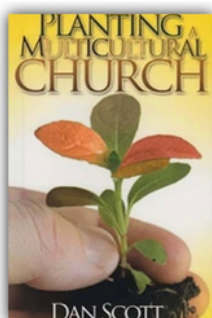


The Strategic Growth Initiative (SGI) was born in the heart of General Superintendent David K. Bernard as God gave him a vision for growing the North American church. The General Board of the UPCI approved the forming of SGI for the purpose of highlighting growth in the areas of the number of churches and ministers in North America. The four focus points of SGI are outlined below along with resources available through the Pentecostal Resources Group.

Feedback

Multiply the number of churches

SGI will assist districts by providing promotion, planning, and training with the goal of enabling every district to at least double the number of churches (including preaching points, daughter works, autonomous church plants, multicultural church plants, integrate independent Apostolic churches, etc.) in one decade.





Partners in Planting

Darrell Johns, SGI Committee Chair

Church planters have my highest respect. I have not been called to plant churches personally. My calling is more like that of Apollos, to water planted churches (I Corinthians 3:6).

As the pastor of an established church, it has been an honor to partner with others in the planting process, both in our metro area and by providing funds to assist others who plant churches. As a minister of the gospel and a member of the body of Christ, it is essential for me to be connected to the church planting process. Planting churches is integral to fulfilling the great commission. My participation is not optional.

With church planting partnership in mind, let's rehearse several insights from a church planter, the apostle Paul:

- The church planter and those who support the church plant (by watering) are not the main characters. God, who gives the increase, should be applauded (I Corinthians 3:7).
- Those who plant churches and those who support them are "one" (I Corinthians 3:8). We are one in unity and in purpose. We have different functions but are motivated by the same message and mission. A successful church plant is a win for everyone.
- Each of us will be rewarded by God based on our participation in planting churches (I Corinthians 3:8). If we are not involved, we are not rewarded.
- We are laborers together with God (I Corinthians 3:9). When we work together to plant churches, we are working with God. Together is an important biblical concept. No one should have to plant churches alone. In the context of I Corinthians chapter 3, the partnership involves the one who plants, the one who waters, and God. If we want to partner with God, we will partner with one another.

The Strategic Growth Initiative partners with UPCI ministries, districts, churches, and ministers to facilitate church planting.

"The mission of the Strategic Growth Initiative is to create a culture of health that produces spiritual and numerical growth in ministers, churches, and districts in the UPCI."

SGI is an extension of the vision of General Superintendent David K. Bernard and the General Board. We are a team of church planters and church waterers. We are committed to advancing the mission of the church through partnerships. The SGI Journal is one way we are seeking to add value to the church.

Regardless of your calling or place of service in ministry, I encourage you to strategically partner with the church-planting process. It is God's will that we grow His Kingdom. It is God's plan that we accomplish our mission by working together. We are partners in planting.

Darrell Johns serves as pastor of Atlanta West Pentecostal Church, Assistant General Superintendent of the Eastern Zone, UPCI, and chair of the Strategic Growth Initiative Committee of the General Board.



Persistence

David K. Bernard, General Superintendent

“Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient” (James 5:7–8).

James explained that we must wait patiently for the coming of the Lord, just as the farmer waits patiently for the harvest. The farmer is totally dependent upon the blessings of God—the sunshine, the rain, and the miracle of life in the seed. He cannot force growth to take place but must allow it to develop and unfold naturally. Yet he does not sit by idly and wait for God to work. He cannot do what God must do, but God will not do what he can do. Therefore, the farmer works diligently and, at the same time, waits patiently. The combination of diligent effort and patience is persistence.

Christian ministry requires persistence. Despite persecution, the apostles continued to preach and teach daily in the Temple and from house to house (Acts 5:40–42). To establish the church in Ephesus, Paul held discussions in the school of Tyrannus every day for two years (Acts 19:9–10). As the New Testament repeatedly records, the apostles persevered in their ministry despite intense opposition and hardship.

Paul exhorted Timothy to work hard to fulfill his ministry—continually being watchful, enduring afflictions, and reaching for the lost (II Timothy 4:5). He compared the preacher’s responsibilities to those of a soldier, an athlete, a farmer, a workman, a vessel, and a servant (II Timothy 2).

A Realistic View of Church Growth

In short, growing a church is hard work! It takes effort, time, patience, and persistence. When we hear reports of great revival and church growth, we should rejoice, but we should not think that there are shortcuts to growth. Instead, we should realize two important truths.

First, someone generally has labored diligently for a long time to lay the foundation for growth. If a minister seemingly builds a quick work, he is probably benefiting from the efforts of others over many years. In my own case, I am deeply indebted to the training I have received from my father and mother, to the many advantages afforded by the United Pentecostal Church International, and to the Apostolic ministry of many people over the years. In our congregation are people who first heard the gospel on a global mission field. I am reaping a harvest from the labor of home and global missionaries, fellow pastors, and even ministers who have retired or deceased.

Second, even when there is quick growth, significant effort is still required to ensure long-term results. For instance, if many people quickly and easily come into the church, then it will likely take quite a battle to retain and establish them solidly in truth and holiness. On the other hand, if there is slow but steady growth, then much of the work of discipleship will already have been accomplished during the conversion process. Either way, a significant amount of work will be involved. The point is not that we should prefer one type of growth over the other, but to recognize that however growth takes place, it will require hard work, patience, and persistence to see lasting results.

Some ministers continually search for a pathway to rapid success. This approach often results in disillusionment or deception. Disillusionment comes about when they identify a success formula and operate accordingly but the predicted results do not materialize. One minister was convinced that the key to planting a church was prayer and fasting. He went to a major metropolitan area, adopted a strict routine of extensive prayer and fasting, and began services. Unfortunately, he was never able to establish a work, and he became quite disillusioned because it seemed that God had failed him. In reality, while a personal relationship with God—developed through prayer and fasting—is indeed an important component of church planting and growth, no single method is the infallible key to success, nor can we earn spiritual results by doing good works.

Deception can take place when ministers seek rapid growth and revival without taking into account the need for persistence. In some cases, they identify a certain doctrine or practice as the key to growth even though they cannot demonstrate this point from Scripture. Consequently, they abandon sound biblical principles, and this approach leads them further into error. Typically, the key that they have identified does not in fact lead to the results they expect, so they drift farther and farther away from their biblical foundation. In many cases, they eventually redefine success by compromising apostolic doctrine, apostolic lifestyle, or both, so that they can finally claim the success they seek.

Some ministers achieve significant church growth but then promote a favorite idea as the key to growth, even though their own story of success involved a number of factors. They may neglect to mention hard work and persistence, and those who seek to learn from them do not think about this factor either. The reason is that most people desire more glamorous and exciting answers. All too often, the followers employ the recommended plan only to find that they do not achieve the same results. In many cases, they need persistence more than they need a particular method.

Persevering in the Work

Since we are seeking long-term, lasting results, we must be willing to work over a long period of time to obtain those results. A pastor may work for years with seemingly average results, but as long as he continues to feel confirmation from God, he should be faithful to his post of duty. God does not measure success as humans often do; He is more interested in our character and our faithfulness than in statistical results. If God has called us to do a work, we need to persist in that work until He releases us.

Sometimes we may question why we do not see greater results. It is appropriate to examine our attitude, motives, principles, and methods to see if any of them are hindering growth. If we find problems or inadequacies, we need to work on them. But many times we are doing our best, by God's grace, and we simply need to persevere. When we do not know what else to do, we need to keep on doing what we know to do. Sometimes the answer we seek only comes by persistence.

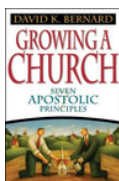
Several years ago, I was teaching a doctrinal seminar in the country of Belarus, which was a new mission field for the United Pentecostal Church International. At that time, our pioneer missionary had only two Spirit-filled converts, both of whom had received the Holy Ghost privately in their homes. After a year or more of services, with about forty in regular attendance, no one had received the Holy Ghost publicly. The missionary asked me for advice on what might be wrong. I told him that he seemed to be doing all the right things. He had fostered a positive, faith-building, friendly atmosphere with good prayer, worship, preaching, teaching, and fellowship. I concluded that he simply needed to persevere and that God would give the increase.

Sure enough, that Sunday three people received the Holy Ghost, including a first-time visitor. Today Belarus is aflame with apostolic revival. Even at that early stage, everything was already in place; the key to success in that situation was persistent faith.

Of course, hard work and persistence alone do not guarantee success. We can plant and water, but ultimately only God can give the increase (I Corinthians 3:6-7). Moreover, our labor must be in accordance with scriptural principles, and our persistence must be in a spiritual direction. Persistence in a worthy effort is commendable tenacity, but persistence in a misguided course of action is unreasonable stubbornness—and we cannot expect a reward merely for being stubborn. We must learn to work smarter, not simply harder.



David K. Bernard is the General Superintendent of the United Pentecostal Church International.



Recommended Resource
Article adapted from *Growing a Church: Seven Apostolic Principles* by David K. Bernard (Word Aflame Press, 2011).



A Thriving Apostolic Work

Bryan Parkey, SGI Committee Vice Chair

In the summer of 2019, Missouri district leaders came together to discuss how to affect Kingdom expansion in our state. We were encouraged by the ministry of Ken Stewart, the UPCI North American Missions promotional director, who had recently led the UPCI Florida district through a great season of new church plants. He shared with us the following principles for district growth.

- PARTNERS—Clear Vision, Support, and Example from District Leadership
- PROCESS—Revamping of Existing Policies to Match the Vision
- PASSION—Vision Casting at the Local Level (Sectional/Church)
- PRINCIPLES—Clear and Transparent Rules for Conflict Resolution
- PROGRESS—Accurate and Detailed Reporting of Milestones Achieved
- PLANTERS—Treat Planters as Heroes because Planters Attract More Planters
- PROMOTIONS—Quality Usage of Social Media, Email, and Website

He challenged us to "plan for success, celebrate every milestone, and leave no room for failure."

God met us in that meeting in 2019, and out of that meeting came a vision statement that has become the north star for everything we do.

The vision of the Missouri district is "A Thriving Apostolic Work in Every Community."

Thriving

We want to see every work thriving regardless of age, location, or circumstance. Ephesians 4:16 says, "He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love" (NLT). A thriving work is healthy, growing, and full of love. Our mission includes coming alongside established churches to help them reach their full potential. We can't afford to plant new works if we continually close established works.

Apostolic

New church plants should be fully Apostolic, not church-lite, but Apostolic in doctrine, experience, and identity.

Work

Instead of using the word *church*, we chose to use *work*. A work is any place where the gospel is being proclaimed. Sometimes, people are intimidated to start a church because they have preconceived ideas of everything they must have to start something new. Using the word *work*, we hope to lower the threshold for what is necessary to preach the gospel in a new community. It may be nice, but you don't have to have a keyboard and set of drums to start a work. You never know where revival may break out! In Acts 16:9, Paul had a vision of a man saying, "Come over into Macedonia and help us." However, he found himself at a ladies' prayer meeting when he got there. Lydia's conversion was the beginning of a great harvest. The opportunities and methods for starting a work may differ from place to place.

Community

There are geographical communities that need the gospel preached to them. However, many communities are defined by characteristics other than their zip code. Every community deserves to hear the gospel preached!

The first disciples of Jesus went forth and preached everywhere, turning their world upside down. We, too, must go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.

In 2019, our ratio of churches to people was one church for every 39,000 people. Today we have one work for every 32,000 people. With God's help, we will see that ratio continually decrease as we plant more works.

Behold the Field

For the past three years, the Missouri District has produced a booklet called "Behold the Field," which identifies target cities that need a work or additional works in the case of large cities. The presbyters select the target cities and then assign someone to be a prayer partner for that city. The role of the prayer partner is to pray for their assigned community until someone establishes a work there. "Behold the Field" encourages everyone to follow this five-step strategy.

1. PRAY

Pray for the target cities. Pray for revelation and receptivity to the gospel. Pray against principalities, powers, rulers of the darkness, and spiritual wickedness in high places. Pray for strongholds to be broken and light to break forth into the darkness. Pray for God to send laborers into His harvest. Pray for open doors and key connections. Pray for a divine strategy to reach each community.

2. PLAN

Work with the plans laid out by each sectional presbyter and NAM director. Make plans to expand neighboring communities and unreached people groups. Set a time-sensitive goal. Identify potential leaders for church planting. Familiarize yourself with the process of church planting. Communicate your desire to plant a work to local, sectional, and district leadership.

3. PREPARE

Avail yourself of every training opportunity related to the mission. Train up leaders to be sent out. Gather resources for future expansion.

4. PLANT

Start planting seeds of faith with a prayer walk, a prayer meeting, a Bible study, a home group, a block party, etc. "He that observeth the wind shall not sow, and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap" (Ecclesiastes 11:4). A perfect season will never present itself, but the faithful must move forward despite the present challenges. May the Lord give us favor in the field.

5. PARTY

Celebrate every effort, advancement, foothold, breakthrough, victory, and success, big or small. The joy of the Lord is our strength, so rejoice, and again I say rejoice. Share your wins with others. Connect with someone who will rejoice with you. A culture of celebration will produce the fuel of renewal that keeps us all from becoming weary in well-doing. And we will reap if we faint not!

The disciples of Jesus "went forth and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word with signs following. Amen" (Mark 16:20). As we go forth and preach the gospel in unreached communities, we too can rejoice that the Lord is with us and that He will confirm His word. May the Lord bless you greatly as you endeavor to see "a thriving Apostolic work in every community."



Bryan Parkey is the district superintendent of the Missouri district UPCI and serves as the vice chair of the SGI Committee. He and his wife, Lisa, have been married for twenty-five years and live in Wentzville, MO. Bryan is passionate about seeing a thriving Apostolic work in every community.



DNA of an Apostolic Church

Nathan Scoggins

According to Oxford Languages, a biochemical definition of DNA is, “the fundamental and distinctive characteristics or qualities of someone or something, especially when regarded as unchangeable.”

The Apostolic church should have a DNA that is fundamental, distinctive, and unchangeable! It must, first and foremost, be biblical. It must also have a vision; it must be growing, and it must be evangelistic. The DNA of the Apostolic church should never change! We, as Apostolic ministers, should aspire to have Apostolic churches that are unchanging in those basic elements of their DNA but that are also healthy and thriving.

Thom Rainer states in his book *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, “It usually isn’t a big traumatic thing that makes the nightly news. It’s not like the building suddenly disappears, or all the people vanish. It happens slowly... day after day. A decline so subtle it’s easy to deny, even when the evidence is right in front of our eyes. It is always an option to be blind. We have to choose to see the signs. Decline is not an event; it’s a process. Churches all across America are slowly dying. Do you know how to keep yours alive?”

What does it take to keep a church alive? Thankfully, we have the Word to lean on, and we can be assured that the following four principles are a good gauge for creating a healthy Apostolic church that is very much alive and growing.

Biblical

What does it mean to be a biblical Apostolic church?

The preamble of the Articles of Faith of the UPCI, it states, “We believe the Bible to be inspired of God, the infallible Word of God. According to II Timothy 3:16, ‘All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.’ The Bible is the only God-given authority which man possesses; therefore, all doctrine, faith, hope, and instruction for the church must be based upon and harmonized with the Bible.”

We are Apostolic in doctrine, founded upon the revelatory truths that are clearly defined in the Word of God, such as the Godhead and the Bible standard of full salvation, which is repentance, baptism in water by immersion in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and the baptism of the Holy Ghost with the initial sign of speaking in other tongues as the Spirit gives the utterance.

We must be biblical in teaching, preaching, discipleship, worship, fellowship, prayer, and leadership. Without the Bible, we are not a church. The first Apostolic church was alive, vibrant, growing, and multiplying! May we all endeavor to be an Apostolic church. (See Psalm 18:30, Psalm 19:7, Proverbs 30:5-6, Matthew 5:17, John 17:17, Acts 2.)

Vision

The late T.F. Tenney said, “Without a vision, people perish. But in Louisiana, if you don’t have a vision, you won’t have a parish.”

Unhealthy churches talk about vision but take comfort in only maintaining and staying in their comfort zone. We are not here to just maintain. If we only maintain, we will eventually perish. However, in pastoral ministry, some things never change, such as the doctrine that we have alluded to previously. However, change must be embraced for growth to be achieved. From the cradle to the grave, life is a developmental and growth process. Without change, churches lose life and become stagnant pools of imprisoned potential and prophetic possibility.

Through the past twenty-seven years of pastoring, I have discovered that timing is everything. My plans must be flexible enough to change if God should deem it necessary. In the Old and New Testaments, the Lord proclaimed new things through prophets and apostolic teachers. “Behold I will do a new thing” (Isaiah 43:19). The Lord is declaring through the prophet that He desires to do a “new thing.” He then poses the question, “Shall ye not know it?”

Even in our own ministries, the question is not whether or not the Lord desires to do new things. The question is, will we not know it? J.T. Pugh once said, “We must be future-focused, not past-possessed!” I never want to get so accustomed to old methods that God cannot birth new biblical things in me! The foundation of all Christianity is that Jesus made us all new creatures. New things are what God wants to do through us. We don’t need to be afraid of change; we can and must embrace it.

Growth

In the first section of his book, *Strategies for Growth*, our General Superintendent David K. Bernard gave us several keys to maintaining and sustaining growth within our churches. His first point was that we should seek the leadership of the Holy Spirit. We must have the Lord’s leading to accomplish His mission. We cannot merely rely on our own ability. We must hear from God and operate in the power of the Spirit.

Paul confirmed this in his letter to the Ephesian church when he wrote in Ephesians 2:19–22, “Now, therefore, ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.”

The Apostolic church is to be vibrant, alive, and growing. The church was established to impact the world around it. Paul emphasized that this was a possibility that would only be accomplished through the Spirit. If there was ever a day we needed to be Spirit-led, it is today!

We must be willing to grow out of some things in order to grow into something else. Not all change is about compromise. Much of the change that must occur is about growing stronger and meeting the needs of the culture around us. We must be willing to make whatever adjustments are necessary to win the lost while continuing to be a strong Apostolic church.

Evangelism

The church was established for the sole purpose of reaching and winning the lost. We must never lose our focus on the simple fact that the basis of Jesus’ ministry was to seek and save that which was lost. Jesus came seeking to save. This principle is simple, but it is also profound. When the church no longer seeks to save lost humanity, it fails to accomplish the very purpose of the church’s existence.

Jesus, God manifested in the flesh, made this statement, “They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick” (Matthew 9:12). He came seeking sin-sick souls of humanity to save them. Jesus did not avoid those who were lost, but purposely met them at their time and point of need. It was their need that motivated Him to minister to them. The misery of humanity became the object of His mercy and grace. He made it a point to be in the right place at the right time.

Luke 10:1 tells us, “After these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place, whither he himself would come.” It is intriguing to me that Jesus never asked His disciples to go to a place He was not willing to go Himself. The same is true for us. If we will go, Jesus will go with us. We must cast down every fear and every intimidation and reach our society with deliberate and dedicated devotion.

In His ministry, Jesus challenged the prejudices of His day. We must do the same through our evangelistic efforts by ensuring that no culture or ethnicity is left behind! Every healthy, thriving Apostolic church should reflect the demographics of its community.

Resources

There are many tools available through the UPCI to assist in cultivating a healthy church, such as **Healthy Churches (www.healthychurches.org)**. Led by Rev. Ken Gurley, a team of pastoral coaches is focused on helping pastors and teams grow churches that are healthy and thriving. With various assessment tools and strategies, churches utilizing this ministry can see measured and consistent growth using apostolic methods. Just as the apostles were only the width of the boat away from a multitude of fish (John 21:6), you may be within reach of experiencing a breakthrough harvest. Apostolic doctrine plus apostolic methods equals apostolic results.

Questions to ask yourself:

- Is the foundation of the church I pastor aligned with the apostles' doctrine?
- What new thing would the Lord desire to do in your church, and will you allow it?
- What change would be necessary to stimulate growth in your congregation?
- Is the church I pastor intentionally focused on reaching the lost?

Nathan Scoggins

Nathan and Bertha Scoggins have served together in ministry since 1984. He currently serves as pastor of Hope Center Church in San Antonio, Texas, as well as district superintendent of the inaugural South Central Texas district of the United Pentecostal Church International and the secretary of the SGI Committee.



Reestablishing a Culture of Church Planting in North America

Scott Sistrunk

It is undoubtedly a very high honor to be asked to serve the United Pentecostal Church. However, before being asked to serve, I felt distinctly proud to be a member of this organization because of the unwavering commitment to its mission: “the whole gospel to the whole world by the whole church.” Statistically, since about 1975, the growth of the North American church (US and Canada) has lagged the growth rate of the UPCI globally. I believe we can and must change this trajectory. In this article, I will offer some biblical values and strategies that I think are essential to growth.

The UPCI of North America must become a church-planting movement once again.

The early Oneness movement was, of necessity, a church-planting movement.

After the Oneness ministers left the Assemblies of God, no alternative remained. According to Talmadge French, in 1916, 156 Oneness ministers left the AG; by 1917, there were 142 Oneness ministers in the PAW and 154 in the GAAA. By the time of G.T. Haywood's election as secretary in 1919, there were 704 Oneness ministers in the PAW. G.T. Haywood estimated in 1930 that the Oneness movement consisted of 2,000 churches and 250,000 constituents worldwide. This fantastic growth rate is similar to that attributed to the Methodist Episcopal Bishop, Francis Asbury, but was accomplished in half the time. Like the Methodists, these numbers overwhelmingly represent the planting of new churches and gathering of new converts. We must become a church-planting movement once again.

From 1967 to 1977, we planted one new church for 29.5 existing churches. From 2012 to 2022, we have planted one new church for every 78 existing churches. Planting new local churches is how God's kingdom increases its territory. As the churches are filled with new believers, God's kingdom is established in that city, town, or community. The church's growth in North America depends on the widespread renewal of our commitment to preach the gospel and plant a church in the next town.

The first thing we must do to regain this church-planting impetus is to acknowledge that all churches will plateau at some point. While we would love to think that a local church will expand unendingly, we have no examples of a church that has grown numerically every year for fifty years. Once a church plateaus, heroic and well-meaning efforts to increase attendance seem only to provide a temporary bump in attendance no matter how much energy and money is spent. New churches are more effective at evangelization and growth. Let's be clear: Established mature churches, even though they may not be growing numerically, provide eternal and unmeasurable benefits to the Kingdom by training and sending ministers and serving the spiritual needs of their communities. We need both! Research shows that when a mature church gives birth to a new church, it quickly grows to its original size, and the new church begins reaching a new community and hundreds of previously unreached people.

Secondly, in the early years of the Pentecostal movement, church planting was done by the most highly respected leaders. Of course, this tracks with the Book of Acts. The activity of the leading characters of the Book of Acts was church planting. As the Apostolic movement developed in North America, somewhere along the way novices were assigned the task of church planting. The experience was highly beneficial to some while devastating for many. This is a deviation from the Apostolic pattern in the Book of Acts. We have avoided this mistake in our global mission practice. Globally, our highly trained and well-funded missionaries are tasked with planting new churches and training new ministers to do the same. We must return to the apostolic practice of our most seasoned and experienced ministers leading the charge to plant new churches.

Thirdly, we must be strategic in our church planting efforts. The Book of Acts represents the perfect blend of strategic church planting and being led by the Spirit. The Antioch church, under the direction of the Holy Ghost, formally sent Paul and Barnabas as missionaries. Plans were made, teams assembled, supplies gathered, itineraries set, transportation arranged, information collected on the challenges of traveling in each region, and many other details necessary for a ten-month journey. I'm thankful that we are making real gains in this area. We must continue to develop strategic plans to evangelize all fifty-eight of our districts in North America fully.

A God-given vision and an inspired strategic plan of action is an unbeatable combination that we believe will result in exponential growth in North America.

Finally, we must commit significant resources to plant new North American churches. The Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability surveyed 2700 North American church planters and found a direct correlation between the money invested in start-up costs and attendance. Churches with an average attendance of over 200 in the first five years' average startup cost was \$100,000, and first-year costs of \$225,000. Churches over two years old with between 100-200 in attendance, average startup costs were \$84,500. Church plants over two years old with an average attendance of less than 100 averaged \$10,000 in start-up costs and \$60,000 in first-year costs. While these numbers may seem shocking to us, in reality, when you consider the cost of the church planter's time and ministerial expenses, these figures are in line with UPCI church plant startup costs. (We generally rely on the church planter to carry these costs personally by being bi-vocational. Regardless, it's an actual cost that must be calculated. Ask any bi-vocational church planter.)

Thankfully, through Christmas for Christ and Move the Mission, every church planter of a self-governing work is eligible for a maximum of \$97,000 in grants over the first five years of the church plant. Even though it is not possible for the maximum award to be given to every church planter, we have increased the amount awarded to each church planter substantially because of the generous giving to these national offerings.

The UPCI in North America is hungry for revival. Our young people are highly motivated. The resources are available. God has promised that He will pour out His Spirit on all flesh. Let us do whatever is necessary to create a wave of church planting in North America just like our Apostolic forefathers saw at the turn of the twentieth century and the apostles experienced in the first century. I pray that every member of the UPCI will rise and carry the gospel to the next towns.

Scott Sistrunk

Scott Sistrunk is the director of
North American Missions for the
United Pentecostal Church International.



NEXT TOWN

1 **CLICK HERE TO FILL OUT THE NEXT TOWN CARD OR GIVE**

2 **CLICK HERE FOR OUR NEW ONE BUTTON TRAINING**

3 **CLICK HERE FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT LAUNCH**

4 **CLICK HERE TO EMAIL SCOTT SISTRUNK OR OUR TEAM**

Seventeen years ago, my wife and I planted a church in Watertown, South Dakota.

The first seven years were the most arduous years of our lives as we worked to see a breakthrough. The Lord gave us a verse in I Corinthians 16:8 to hold on to as a promise for our city, "But I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost." We believed that if we tarried in Watertown, one day, we would see a Pentecost happen there. That promise began to come to pass. In the fifteenth year, we finally broke the one hundred barrier, and it just so happened to be on the day of Pentecost!

That year I was in a service where Chris Green preached about others who have less truth but are making more sacrifice, while we with more truth are making less sacrifice. I felt conviction so strongly. Then the Lord began to deal with us about how Pentecost has not happened in other towns and counties across South Dakota. A friend of mine who is a missionary to an Access Challenged Nation once said, "At some point, delayed obedience becomes rebellion." It was at this juncture that my wife and I decided to make haste and not delay.

Our associate pastor, Jared Kemmis, became the senior pastor, and our focus began to be to reach The Next Town. We began to do prayer drives and prayer walks through communities to see where the Lord wanted us. Every town needs the truth, but we wanted to be Spirit-led like Paul in Acts 16:6-10. Asia and Bithynia needed the truth but the Spirit forbade them so they could go where there was an immediate cry for help in Macedonia.

Milbank (Pop. 3,300)

The Lord led us to the rural town of Milbank, which was forty-five miles away and had a population of 3,300. I began to look for a place I could have a weekly Bible study. I went to the visitor center and asked if I could rent a room once a week.

They said it would cost \$100 a month. I was excited and began to sign the paperwork. As I was doing this, the lady asked me about what we were doing. As I began to share with her why the Lord led me to be here and to teach Bible studies, she became emotional and offered to help in any way possible. She mentioned there was a church that had been vacant for over ten years. She gave me the contact info and I called immediately after that meeting.

The person on the phone said they could have someone meet me there in ten minutes so I could take a look at it. After touring the building, which was a 145-year old historic brick church, the owners asked what I thought about it. I told them that I thought it was great. They said, "It's yours if you want it. We will sign over the title and property at no cost." Before our first Bible study, we owned our first property and building in The Next Town!



Webster (Pop. 1,800)

The Next Town we felt released to reach was the rural town of Webster with a population of 1,800, and it was also 45 miles away. Our first meeting location was a community room in the court house that we used weekly for free! After a few months, we realized an Episcopal church was not being used on the main road. We reached out to them, and they let us use it for only \$100 a month. We don't even have to pay utilities.

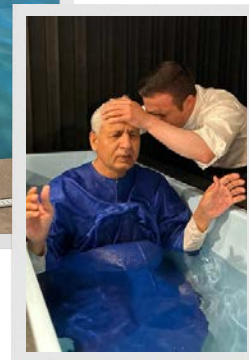
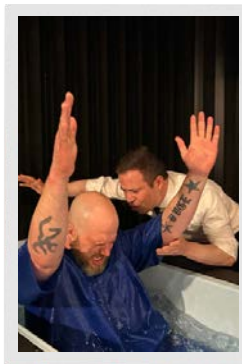


Brookings (Pop. 23,577)

While in process of being in those two towns, a member from a Oneness church that had closed reached out to us and asked if we would drive to their town which was also forty-five miles away and teach Bible studies to their group of five people. The library in the town of Brookings said we could use their community room for free since we were a church group. They provide sound, projector, and chairs at no cost!

The Next Town

Within one year of making an effort to reach The Next Town, we were teaching Bible studies in three towns that now have become approved churches. In this time period, five people have been baptized in Jesus name, and two people have been filled with the Holy Ghost. The combined attendance of these three new churches is forty-six.



This new venture has enabled us to disciple and train three other couples on how to reach The Next Town. One of them has become licensed, and two more are in the process of licensure. We feel very clearly that it is the will of God for us to have an Apostolic witness in all sixty-six counties of our state. In order for us to accomplish this, we must multiply the process by training and discipling others to reach The Next Town. The District of South Dakota is excited and is moving forward with starting new works. In just a couple of years, the district has gone from six works to fourteen!

To God be the Glory!

Mark Brown



Mark Brown and his wife, Jordan, have been married for nineteen years and have three children: Noah (thirteen), Grace (eleven), and Eden (eight). They have been pastoring for 17 years and planted four churches. Currently, they serve as district superintendent and rural missionary in South Dakota.



Recommended Resources

Click THE NEXT TOWN icon above or see Toolbox at the end of this issue for church planting resources.



The People Factor

Paul Records

We assume, and rightly so, that church planting is spiritual warfare. And we understand that church planting carries with it an element of financial warfare. But we must also recognize that church planting is relational warfare.

By this, we mean that success and vision fulfillment hinges primarily on the people involved. People can make church planting an exciting and wonderful process, but they can also make it a very heavy and laborious ordeal.

“Churchwork is different. Churchwork may be the only enterprise where the investors are the owners are the customers are the employees are the product. Unlike manufacturing, we do not load a machine with the same materials each day and get the same widgets out the back. While there is much to be said for processes and systems, they do not guarantee disciples are made. Every human being is different, has different needs, and responds differently to our efforts. Human beings are as mysterious, wonderful, and frustrating as anything in creation” (Rodney Shaw, *Churchwork*).

Scripture declares that "God is not slack concerning His promise" (II Peter 3:9) and thus, we are left to conclude that God is always working on our behalf and for the good of our church. This truth leads us to also conclude that if things are not working out, it is most likely a "people issue." Furthermore, this does not justify finger-pointing around the room or blaming others for our frustration or disappointment. Rather, it forces us to look in the mirror and analyze how exactly we are leading and treating the people around us. A neglected reality of ministry is that to cultivate longevity, a leader must continually improve his or her relational intelligence.

To last as church planters and pastors, we must get really good at working with people and navigating the complexities of people dynamics. A great strategy is worthless without people. Furthermore, people should not be viewed as pawns or tools to achieve a vision.

People are the vision.

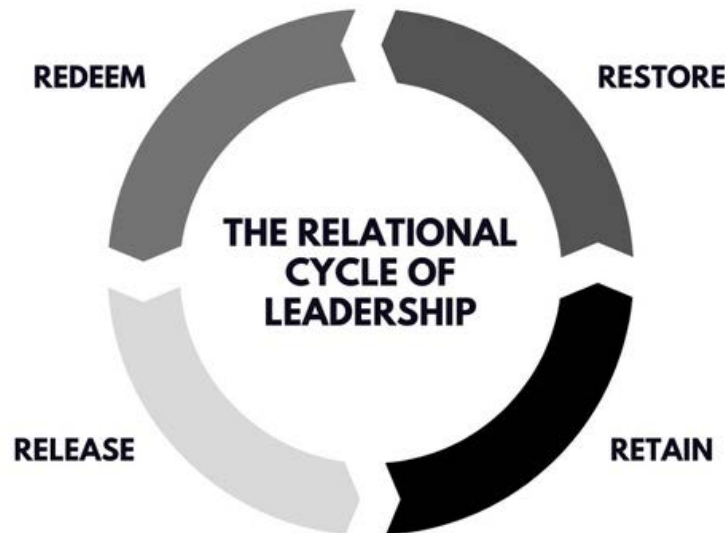
This means that if you want your church plant to last, you must work to cultivate meaningful and authentic relationships. Everything you do as a pastor hinges on "the people factor."

- You cannot evangelize effectively without building healthy relationships.
- You cannot disciple effectively without building healthy relationships.
- You cannot lead effectively without building healthy relationships.
- You cannot preach effectively without building healthy relationships.
- You cannot implement a God-given growth strategy without building healthy relationships.

God's plan for His church in the world today is implemented by building healthy relationships. Your effectiveness as a church planter and pastor is not determined by your speaking ability or social media platform. Your effectiveness as a church planter and pastor is built by how you lead and treat the people in your circle of influence. Therefore, you must work hard to cultivate a healthy relational culture within your team and in your church.

If people issues arise within the leadership team, they will be felt and indirectly experienced by the entire congregation. It has been said that within the first three years of church planting, we should "leave our commentaries in the closet and go buy someone a cup of coffee." In other words, we develop leadership capital with people through the art of vulnerable and authentic conversations.

If there is an issue keeping you awake at night, it is likely because you have neglected to have a crucial conversation with someone in your circle of influence. Throughout your church planting and pastoral journey, you will be called to redeem, restore, retain, and release people. This relational cycle is something that you cannot avoid in leadership. It is a cycle that continuously repeats itself over time.



REDEEM

When you meet someone in your city who is lost in sin, your role will be to help them experience redemption. In fact, if God has called you to a city, it is because He has identified people there in need of redemption. The moment you take your first step into your city, you should do so with the understanding that He has many people in the city that belong to Him (Acts 18:10). We observe redemption in the life of a person when they repent of their sins, are baptized in the name of Jesus, and are filled with the Holy Spirit.

RESTORE

In time, you will find that certain individuals and families also need to be restored. We observe this in troubled marriages, the addicted, those with great financial needs, and anyone who has experienced great loss or adversity. In each case, something is in need of restoration, and it will be your role to help facilitate that process. We accomplish this through small groups, counseling, recovery classes, need-specific education, focused prayer, and continued emotional support.

RETAIN

As your church grows and you begin to build a team, your role as the leader will be to cultivate an environment in which your team can flourish. You do this by giving each person ownership, allowing space for open feedback, and attuning to their unique skills and giftings. To effectively retain good people, you must practice self-awareness and understand how your temperament and strengths compare or contrast with those of others. In certain situations, you will need to confront or correct team members in order to retain them. This should always occur in the context of compassionate conversations. Over time, as you invest in people through active listening and relationship building, you will gain the credibility needed to lead them.

RELEASE

The most difficult part of the relational cycle is when you, as the leader, are called to release people. This can happen through death or loss but also through life transitions and job changes. In other cases, people may leave because you don't meet their expectations. Or, perhaps they were called to your church for a season instead of a lifetime.

No matter how people leave, take time to grieve the loss and ask God to help you release them into His care. Own the reality that as a church planter and pastor, you are not called to exert control over people. Rather, you are called to steward people to the best of your ability and then, as God leads, release them back to Him.

There will be critical moments in your ministry and in the life of your church that you will be called to release people. This is not something you can avoid. It is a requirement. At times, you will have to make decisions that are the best for people but difficult for you.

Rest assured that this process is a necessary part of vision fulfillment.

For the church to move forward, some people will have to leave, and you, as the pastor, will have to release them. Though you may not realize it at the moment, you will see in time that it was all a part of God's plan for your church in your city.

In each new season and phase of church growth, consider where you may be in the relational cycle of leadership. As each new person steps into your circle of influence, consider whether there is a need to redeem, restore, retain, or release them. God will lead you and give you strength for every stage in the leadership journey.

As you consider your leadership journey into church planting and pastoral ministry, take time to think through the following reflection prompts:

- How much time each week do I spend building relationships?
- When I think of the members of my leadership team, are there certain people I have not spent much time with? How can I cultivate more meaningful relationships with these people?
- Is there a crucial conversation I may be avoiding?
- Who is God calling me to redeem, restore, retain, and release?

Paul Records

Together, Paul and Alli Records served in student ministry, church administration, and pastoral leadership before hearing a call to plant a new church in San Marcos, TX. In addition to serving as the VC pastors, Alli works as a social worker, and Paul runs a men's ministry resource organization called [The Full Proof Man](#). They are also parents to Olive and baby Reed.

...



A Healthy Harvest

David Bryan

Answering the call of God to do the work of the Kingdom is an excitement like no other. The peace that comes with knowing that you are engaging with God on the highest levels of divine purpose is indescribably glorious. The joy that comes from leading others to a life of peace is unmatched in this world. With all the glory and excitement also comes the responsibility of engaging the not-so-fun-moments of the call to ministry.

Church planting, discipling others, and making communities greater for the cause of Christ are all exciting opportunities, but a healthy, realistic view of what that means in actual application can mean the difference between failure and success.

Jesus said, “For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him” (Luke 14:28–29).

Jesus made it clear that a successful finish or harvest requires two critical elements: 1) God and 2) our preparation.

RULES FOR SUCCESS

A HEALTHY PLANT COMES FROM A HEALTHY PLANTER

In all our dreaming, strategizing, going, doing, and getting, we cannot forget that a healthy harvest is at the mercy of a healthy planter. Don't allow yourself to be product-oriented only. This can be a slippery slope where the ministry becomes production and numbers-oriented, which is unhealthy. Remember, we are people who are working with people, and we all have limits and needs.

Don't get caught up in spending all your efforts reacting to the needs of your world around you. Remember the words of Polonius in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, “To thine own self be true.”

- Know you.
- Know your limits.
- Know your spouse's and family's limits.

Before you even get started, put boundaries in place concerning the time you devote to your spouse, your family, your own well-being, and, of course, to God. Invest in self-help before you need it. Always keep some good counsel on the line so that you can operate always at your best potential.*

A GOOD HARVEST INCLUDES YOU AND YOUR FAMILY

I Corinthians 9:26–27, “So I run straight to the goal with purpose in every step. I fight to win. I'm not just shadow-boxing or playing around. Like an athlete, I punish my body, treating it roughly, training it to do what it should, not what it wants to. Otherwise, I fear that after enlisting others for the race, I myself might be declared unfit and ordered to stand aside” (TLB).

Matthew 16:26, “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”

Neglect of self and family in the name of ministry and production is not a badge of honor in the kingdom of God. Rather, it is a tragedy. Part of the promise of God concerning the great things He desires to do in the world through you belongs to you and your household. Tend to these promises by including your family in both the labor and blessing of ministry.

- Be purposeful in creating a culture of moderation in all things in your life.
- Don't let other things overtake the peace of your home.
- If you don't value your time and your family's time and space, others will not.
- Care for your home and family in your ministry by creating an opportunity for everyone to feel valued and celebrated as an asset to the work of God.

Much can be done to prepare yourself for the work at hand. Don't just engage in ministry as an opportunity without really preparing yourself and your family for what it takes, both spiritually and emotionally.

David Bryan

David Bryan is the founder and director of Mission37, a ministry designed to partner with spiritual leadership and churches, providing leadership and organization consulting and strategic planning. David serves the kingdom of God in pastoral and evangelist capacities throughout North America and around the world. The Bryan family bases their work and home in Nashville, Tennessee.

*The UPCI has many great resources in place that can aid in creating a healthy emotional environment in your life and home.

<https://www.apostoliccounseling.org/>

<https://upcifamily.com/>



ISSUE 17 TOOLBOX

PRACTICAL TOOLS YOU CAN USE



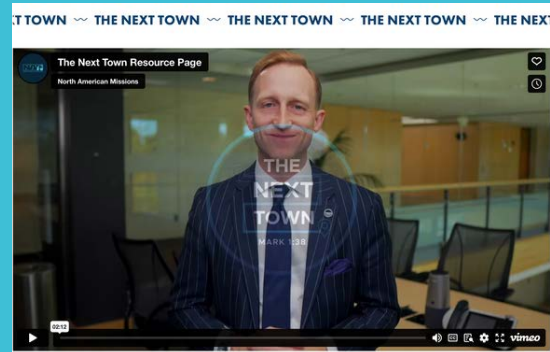
Church Planting and Church Growth Resources

NorthAmericanMissions.Faith and HealthyChurches.org provide a host of resources for aspiring church planters. Click the links below to discover more about how to plant and grow a church.

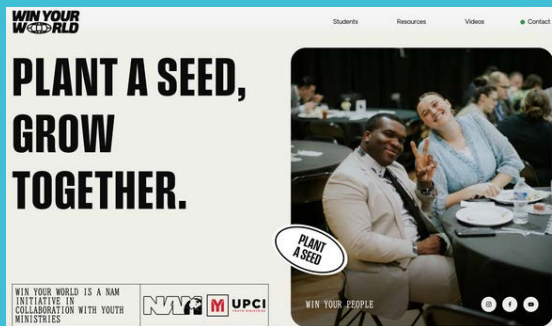
CLICK HERE >



CLICK HERE >



CLICK HERE >



CLICK HERE >

