

PLANTING AN
EX-OFFENDER
FAMILY CHURCH

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Planting An Ex-Offender Family Church

Table of Contents

	Page
Section One: Unique needs of ex-offender churches and pastors	
1. Why Should Existing Churches Plant Ex-Offender Churches?	3
2. Target Places For Ex-Offender Churches To Worship	5
3. Working Together As A Team (having monthly pastoral meetings)	6
4. Qualities Of An Ex-Offender Church Pastor	7
5. Ministering To The Family Of Ex-Offenders	8
Section Two: Planting An Ex-Offender Family Church	
1. Acts 16 Bible Study	10
2. Start-Up Steps	12
3. Lifestyle Church Planting	21
Section Three: Appendix-Helpful Resources for Church Planters	
1. Planning A Balanced Worship Gathering	24
2. Where To Look For Good Sermons	25
3. Direct Question Bible Study	27
4. Fitness Teams	28
5. How To Multiply	30
6. How Will We Grow	31
7. Find A Mentor	32
8. Baptism And The Lord's Supper	33
9. Visiting Someone In The Hospital	36
10. Giving Wise Counsel	37
11. Leading A Funeral	37
12. Leading A Wedding	38
13. Financial Considerations	40
14. World-Wide Vision	41

Why Should Existing Churches Plant Ex-Offender Churches?

One of the first things Prison Ministries tell offenders, that have accepted Christ while incarcerated, is to find a Church upon release. A big percentage of offenders that accept Christ in prison were never involved with any Church until they went to prison. So the only Church they know is “prison” Church.

Most Pastors don't have the time or experience with ex-offenders to “re-church” this group of persons. Nor does the average congregation know the difference between prison-church and free-world church. Just passing the plate will discourage the ex-offender because he never faced that in the prison church. It is a transition from prison life to free-world life and it is also a transition from prison church and free-world church. Many ex-offenders have turned their lives over to Christ in prison and have lost all the joy of it by going to free-world churches and not feeling like they fit in.

Why should existing churches develop ex-offender churches?

- To bring the ex-offender to a better understanding of what church is all about. The ex-offender church can be something of a training ground for ex-offenders to transition from prison-church to the free-world church.
- Once an offender is released from prison, all eyes are on him or her. Not only does society want to know if his or her transformation is real, but the church also wants to know. This can cause a fear factor in the ex-offender that can actually drive him away from the church. In an ex-offender church, he will be surrounded by other ex-offenders who know what he's going through.
- The offender leaves prison with lots of ideas and lots of thoughts that can become confusing if he doesn't receive the right answers. While in prison, he was able to share lots of things with the Prison Chaplain who provided nurture in the Christian walk. The ex-offender pastor will understand his needs and be a great resource.

Discuss the difference between prison churches and free-world churches with the study group.

The needs of the Ex-offender:

- To be biblically accountable to someone who will give him guidance, particularly in this difficult and crucial time of his life. The most crucial time of an Ex-offender's life is the first 3 months after release.
- To develop a maturing disciplined relationship with the Lord. The ex-offender will have to depend on the Lord more now than ever because there are going to be times when it seems like God is far away.
- Christian friends. The Christian Ex-offender has learned to associate with other Christians while in prison, but as these are life behind, he or she will need to associate with new Christian friends on the outside.

HOME STUDIES DUE NEXT WEEK:

1. What was prison church like to you? Explain in two or three paragraphs.
2. What did you find hard about your transition to the free-world church? Explain in two or three paragraphs. (use space below)

Target Places For Ex-Offender Churches To Worship

When we think of Church, we think of a big building with crosses and strained glass windows; that would only be an empty building without people in it. People make up the church. So, no matter where they are, people can gather to be a church. Wherever Christians are involved in worship, discipleship, servanthood, evangelism/outreach, and friendship, they are having “CHURCH.”

Here are a few suggestions for places to have church:

1. You can have it in your home. Many churches start in the Pastor’s home. In this type of church everyone is like a close caring family. (If you remember, when we were in prison we would have small outside-on-the-yard Bible studies, and sometimes we would have preaching on the yard. But...I want you to think back on the closeness we had with our Christian brothers.)
2. If you have a business, or know someone who does, you might try having a church inside it. (A Bar-B-Que business in Dallas opens up for an ex-offender meal on Thursday nights. The catch is they have church right after eating. Many have come to know the Lord through this weekly gathering.)
3. The “Church of the Called Out Ones” (the first intentionally planted ex-offender church) has services inside an existing church. They worship on Saturday mornings so it won’t interfere with Sunday morning service. You might talk with your pastor about this possibility, and to work out the details.
4. A park pavilion, playground, apartment complex or any outside place that you can think of would be good for an ex-offender’s church. Tell people to dress like they would for a football game if it’s cold!

Don’t let the Devil fill you with that lie that you’re not a very good pastor if you don’t have a big church building. You’ll reach many people through a small cluster of caring Christians.

Questions and Answer time:

- A. Name some of the places in the Bible where Jesus preached or taught.
- B. Name some of the places in the Bible where Paul or the other disciples had church.

Working Together As A Team (having monthly pastoral meetings)

The structure of ex-offender churches will only be as strong as the leaders in it. The downfall of this ministry is probable if the leaders are confused. Monthly meetings give us church planter pastors a chance to share the ups and downs of our church and what actions can be taken to make things better.

Your Ministry Leader (the trainer of this class) will structure and oversee these monthly meetings. If something should come up where you need an immediate response, call your leader and set up an appointment for a private meeting. We must all realize that there is strength in numbers, and teamwork is very important to this ministry.

When you establish your church, we pray that you will be looking for and investing your life in some “Timothys” to go out and start other churches. We encourage you to allow them to go through the same training you went through. If you would like to train them in your church with this material that would be alright too.

Here are a few reasons for having monthly team meetings:

1. Communication. When we're able to communicate with each other we're able to help each other grow and solve problems that arise in our churches.
2. Fellowship. As Ex-Offender pastors, we know the importance of fellowship. Fellowship is what kept us together in our Christian walk inside prison.
3. Worship. We want to use this meeting time to just give God praise for what He has brought us out of and thank Him for putting us in the ministry.
4. Prayer. This will be the backbone of our ministry. Without prayer, we might as well pack up and go home.

Questions and Answers:

- Write a paper showing where Jesus talked on the importance of working together as a team.
- Write a paper showing where Paul talked on the importance of working together as a team.
- What views do you hold concerning working together as a team?

Qualities Of An Ex-Offender Pastor

It takes a certain kind of person with a certain kind of heart to pastor ex-offenders and their families. We must always remember that ex-offenders come to your church with lots of baggage and lots of past hurts. As pastor, you need to build up a special spiritual character in order to deal with these issues.

Here are some biblical tools you need for this task:

- You must be a GROWER – Ephesians 4:13, 16
- You must be a NURTURER – Isaiah 49:15; 66:12-13; I Thessalonians 2:7-8
- You must be a PROTECTOR and PROVIDER – Matthew 2:13-16; 2 Corinthians 12:14
- You must be an INTERCEDER – 2 Kings 4:18-37; Mark 5:21-23; John 4:49
- You must be a TRAINER – 1 Corinthians 4:14-15
- You must be a DISCIPLINE-ER – Hebrews 12:4-13; Proverbs 23:13-14
- You must be a TEACHER – Hebrews 5:12
- You must be a SYMPATHIZER – Ephesians 6:4; Luke 15:20; Psalms 103:13-14
- You must be an ENCOURAGER – Proverbs 12:18; 2 Corinthians 7:4; Ephesians 4:29
- You must be a MANAGER – 1 Timothy 3:4-5; Ephesians 5:16
- You must be a SERVER – Matthew 20:25-28; 1 Peter 5:5-6

Assignment: Look up the verses and write a sentence or two on the qualities of an ex-offender pastor.

Ministering To The Families Of Ex-Offenders

The most sensitive, yet most important, part of your ministry will be ministering to the families of ex-offenders. There will be lots of healing that goes along with this ministry plus lots of hurts that you will encounter. This part of the ministry will take lots of prayer and Holy Spirit interaction.

Let's start with the mother of the ex-offender. I'm starting with her because she has a certain kind of love that might become a hindrance, rather than a help, to the success of the ex-offender. Although society looks at the ex-offender one way, and we as prison ministers see him or her as a changed individual, mama sees him or her as the angel she birthed many years ago. The ex-offender can talk mama out of anything. As long as mama rescues him he won't be able to let go and let God. Your job would be to teach mama the importance of "tough love."

The average stay in prison is about 7 years. That's a long time for a woman to carry the weight and become daddy, mom and wife. As much as the husband wants to come home and be the priest, provider, and protector of this home, it will take gradual adjustments for this to happen. It was a process for his wife to adjust to his absence, and it's going to be a process to readjust to his being home. Your mission will be to help reconnect this relationship. Understanding the problem will be the first step in cleaning it up.

Seven years out of a child's life is very critical when you think in terms of authority and leadership. The ex-offender wants to come home and take up where he left off, and that's not possible. Although the child will always respect him as daddy, it's going to take some work for them to see him again as father.

Our main goal, in working with the children of ex-offenders, is to break the cycle that sends 70% of them to prison themselves. We, as pastors, want to work hard to help them see their parent in a different way and also have a better vision of what God is able to do in their lives. We want to teach them how to appreciate church and see that God is the true source, of not only their ex-offender parent's life, but also their own.

Questions and Answers:

1. Review the three roles in families (mother, spouse and children), and write a paper on the needs of each.
2. Find scripture that shows the relationship family members should have with one another.

PLANTING AN “EX-OFFENDER FAMILY” CHURCH

Three Essential Resources

1. The church planter’s relationship to God...

Prayer-guidance from God in discovering the core people He has prepared

2. The church planter’s relationships with persons...

Prayer-caring for individuals until they are open to a church body

3. The church planter’s dependence on the Holy Spirit alone...

To prepare people’s hearts and arrange God-centered encounters

Acts 16 Church Planting Bible Study

Note the influence of the four distinct factors in this church planting passage:

1. **The Holy Spirit** guiding leaders to unlikely groups and preparing hearts in those groups
2. **Prayer** as a point of connection with not-yet-believers
3. **Relationship** ties quickly drawing family and friend-groups (oikos) into new relevant church bodies
4. **The absence** of money and facilities

v. 1-3

- What leadership traits did Paul see in Timothy? What qualifies a leader?
- Why did Paul circumcise Timothy? What compromises are acceptable in church planting?

v. 4-5

- What was the content of the “decrees” Paul and Silas were delivering to the churches? (see 15:28-29) What does v. 28 reveal about the Holy Spirit’s guidance and requirements?

v. 6-7

- What is the role of the Holy Spirit here?

v. 9-10

- Where do church leaders get their “vision” today?
- Paul’s response was immediate...what did he expect to find in Macedonia?

v. 11-13

- What do you imagine Paul was doing those first few days in the city?
- How many women were at the riverside? How much were women valued? Is this what Paul expected, based on the vision?
- How did Paul respond to the group he found?
- Did Paul find them by man’s wisdom, or God’s guidance, or both? Explain.

v. 14-15

- How long had God been working in Lydia’s heart? Why does it seem like a God-directed encounter that brought Paul and Lydia together?
- Was Lydia’s household (family/servants/oikos) with her at the river, or did she take Paul to them in her home?
- Who baptized them? Where?
- This group became a church in v. 15...agree or disagree?

v. 22-25

- How successful did Paul and Silas feel at this point?

- How did they respond?

v. 26-34

- How did the jailer know that term “saved?”
 - What factors were at work in his life to make him open to the gospel? Was the Holy Spirit using a crisis in his life to open his heart? Any evidence of Romans 8:28?
 - Would Paul have ever targeted the women’s group or the jailer with his own wisdom?
 - How did Paul manage to speak to the jailer’s household (family/servants/oikos)? Were they at the jail, or did he take Paul home?
 - This became a church in v. 33...agree or disagree?
- Why was the jailer not at the riverbank with Lydia?
 - Would her house and his join together now?

Summary:

- The Holy Spirit led Paul to two groups he would never have picked out with his own wisdom: a woman and her household, and a jailer and his household.
- Prayer became the bridge between Paul’s gospel and Lydia’s hunger.
 - If God has been preparing a person to hear about Christ, they are already spiritually hungry and often open to prayer.
 - If you connect with someone who is open to prayer, that can usually become a bridge to all God wants to do in his or her life.
- Both Lydia and the jailer had an impact on their families and friends, their circle of influence, their oikos. The new church plants crystallized around these relationships, not around events/activities/ programs. What God is doing in one life profoundly touches others who are close to that person. (see Appendix: How Will We Grow)
- All of this happened at a riverbank, a prison, and two homes which were adequate, relevant, and cost free.

“EX-OFFENDER FAMILY” CHURCH MODEL

Definition: An “Ex-Offender Family” Church

- is a fully functioning Body of Christ regardless of size
- with church life designed to meet the unique needs of ex-offenders and their families
- meeting in a no cost facility with a spiritually mature ex-offender as the leader
- seeking to multiply each year through an intern development process.

Start-Up Steps

1. **The church planter should pray (for about 30 days...or a significant period), specifically for:**
 - God to prepare the hearts and circumstances of the ex-offenders and their families that HE wants to be in the new church...writing down names HE brings to mind
 - God to guide in how to best find and contact the right persons
 - God to work out the right facility, meeting time, style of church life, and core group as the future church unfolds
 - God to give an intern, who will assist, learn, grow, and then multiply in another new church plant (see Appendix: How To Multiply)
 - God to anoint all that is done to bear fruit for His purpose and glory
...just pray, don't talk to people yet...depend on the Holy Spirit to guide you and prepare individuals.

2. **The church planter should spend another 30 days contacting persons in his circle of influence (family, friends, neighbors, acquaintances, work associates)...starting with any names God has brought to mind. Personal home visits, phone calls, letters, and emails are all okay depending on the relationship and the person – but all should be personal.**

Pray again, just before the contact is made, that God will have His Hand directing the encounter and conversation.

Share: (something like this, or put it in your own words)

- I'm looking into how I can start a little church for a group of ex-offenders and their families in the area, and

- I'm trying to find out who might be interested, and what their needs are right now, and then pray about those things...
- Do you have anything or anyone you want me to pray about in private?

IT IS SURPRISING HOW MANY ARE WORRIED/HURTING BADLY ENOUGH TO BE OPEN TO PRAYER.

Don't write anything down in their presence, just assure them that you will pray privately about their concern...your primary goal is to begin a faith-focused relationship, not complete a list. Do keep an informal private list of prayer requests in your Bible, AND PRAY FOR THEM DAILY for 30 days. You want what God can do in peoples' lives.

In some cases the person will want you to pray with them right then, but not often. Use discretion. Don't push it. Offer to pray immediately only if it's obvious they are aching and open.

In a week or so contact each person who has shared a request and let them know you have been praying daily about their concern...“Has the situation changed any?” Assure them you'll keep praying. If they ask about the new church start just let them know you are still working on it, still getting to know peoples' concerns, and you'll be glad to let them know when it's ready to begin. Keep praying, calling, and caring each week.

By continuing to build faith relationships for 30 days you should be able to mentally identify persons who are open to an initial gathering for discussion of the church start. Some might not be Christians yet, but include them too. Especially be asking God for someone who could become your intern, learn from your example, and eventually be sent out as a new church planter. Multiplication should be part of what people expect to happen from the beginning.

3. **Call a gathering** of those who have expressed an interest in the new church idea. Tell them ahead of time you want the group to discuss:
 - the best time for all to meet weekly for an hour or two (it might not be on Sunday!)
 - a cost free location/facility...even if you had it planned in your home, be open to their ideas and shaping...this gives them a sense of “ownership”
 - other persons they know that might be interested...have them personally bring those people to the first worship service.
 - names for the church that might be considered...what do they want “the name” to express? The name can be decided by this group, or later at the first gathering of the church...(remember, give them ownership).

Do not put theological or leadership decisions in the hands of this group at this stage of development. As honest questions arise about who will be pastor, what denomination, etc., just give firm but kind responses.

- “Once we get established, the Bible pattern is to seek God’s guidance together.
- “But until then, I’m asking you to follow my lead as the starting pastor. I’ve tried to prepare myself by getting some training offered, and I’m doing the best I can to follow God’s will.”

In many practical matters the church planter will need to be a guiding “coach”. Just ask persons with appropriate giftedness and personalities to lead/help in their area of strength. Use discretion. Ask God to guide you and give wisdom. The people who come trust you already or they wouldn’t be there.

Continue meeting weekly with this core group to pray and plan for the first worship service. Also use these pre-church gatherings to build relationships and help each person get involved.

4. **Set the date and location times for the first worship service** based on the feedback/brainstorming of the group. Begin to think through, plan, and share responsibility in the following areas: (all might not be needed in every church)
 - a. Worship. How can the group worship in a manner that is meaningful to them? Never compromise the gospel. Certainly be focused on God. But consider worship components that will fit the needs, size, preferences, and skills of the group. Everything from ultra-conservative to postmodern-artsy is acceptable if it is done in the right spirit. Try to include and involve every one in the worship experience with dialogue, creative activity, sharing, prayer, praise, scripture reading, silent meditation, etc.

Possibilities: (see Appendix: Planning A Balanced Worship Gathering)
 - Worship Music with various instruments, on tape, CD, or DVD
 - Testimonies: Why I Became A Christian, How God Met My Needs, What Prayer and Faith Have Done in My Life, etc.
 - Drama/Skits
 - Children’s story or song
 - Non-traditional (but effective) activities like: a video clip, candles/meditation verses, on-going wall mural, prayer labyrinth, majestic nature scenes, hand-written notes on a homemade cross, etc.
 - b. Discipleship. Since the church probably isn’t having a separate Bible study time yet (and may or may not in the future), how can you build

discipleship into the time you are together...then make it stretch through each person's week? How did Jesus do this? Make discipleship both learning and doing what Jesus taught.

Possibilities: (see Appendix: Fitness Teams)

- A Verse To Live By this week (written on notecards for each person)
- Prayer Chain
- Accountability Partners (perhaps by phone)
- Scripture Memory selections or emphasis
- Christian Basics sermon topics
- Daily Quiet Time testimonies, guides, or sermons

Much of your discipleship will happen as you ask various ones to join you in ministry activities you carry out. Also, your personal contacts and conversations will often be aimed at strengthening and guiding someone in Christian living.

- c. True Friendship. This often involves eating, but it must also encourage relationship building and mutual support among group members. Grow a gathering that resembles the New Testament Christians who loved one another with their actions...(Acts 2 & 4).

Possibilities:

- Spend intentional time each week having them share about their ups and downs. Have them describe their week in exactly 3 words, or rate it from 1 to 10, or describe it as a weather report. Then tell why and pray for each other.
 - Eat together on a regular basis. Let everyone help, eat, and clean up. Try having the Lord's Supper before or after a meal.
 - Look for opportunities to support, encourage, and care for one another. Go out of your way to model serving one another. The best fellowship happens in selfless service.
- d. Giving, Meeting Needs, and Missions. Make giving personal, not just a dull routine. Help the group be a part of changing lives through what they give.

Possibilities:

- Give them a lot of "ownership" in the giving practices of the church. Let the group decide how they want to take up the offering (a plate, hat, boot, basket, and bucket have been used). Also, give the group flexibility about when and how the offering is taken.
- Share missions and missionary stories, needs, and prayer requests often (weekly if possible). Lead the church to support

missions by praying and giving a regular percentage amount of their offerings to missions agencies, causes, missionaries. (see Appendix: World-Wide Vision)

- **In many, even most cases, you will serve the Kingdom of God best by having regular, full-time employment with insurance, and from that foundation pastoring the church. Then you will not need a church salary, but will still have financial stability, and the members won't think you alone are paid to do the work of the church.**
 - Reserve a portion of the weekly offering for the group to give spontaneously each week to needs that arise...a teen going on a mission trip, a family whose house burned, a mom with kids who is deserted by her husband at Christmas. Let them count the money and decide as a group where to send it. Giving gets personal and comes alive in such an atmosphere.
 - Take up cans of food during every service for someone to take to a family in need or benevolent center. Vary who delivers it.
- e. Bible-time or Sermon. The Bible-time or Sermon for such a church might be more casual than in a church with a steeple. Allow the “sermon” segment of your worship gathering to be like it might have been in Aquila’s church (that met in his house...perhaps sitting down, asking the group questions as you go, allowing responses, but always with a challenge to respond to God’s message).

Always prepare spiritually before the sermon time. Take a few quiet moments to pray simply and sincerely...“God, You empower me to be your leader even though I don’t deserve it. Let every person get a word that is from You. Keep me free from distractions, self-consciousness, or an impure heart or motives. Bring spiritual fruit from this time. I trust this service to You.”

Pray, study, and prepare for what you want to communicate from God’s Word. But, don’t share the Bible in such a way that people say, “Wow...what an impressive speaker.” Instead, communicate thoroughly and carefully in such a way that they say, “I could share with a group in that manner!” One of your highest goals is to multiply by planting new churches. Those who see your example need to realize they can do what you are doing. (see Appendix: Where To Look For Good Sermons, and Direct Question Bible Study)

Base every gathering on God’s Word and don’t be discouraged by your “feelings” afterwards. Emotions are NOT a good measurement of whether or not God has spoken to the group. He will use His Word in the lives of people!

- f. Evangelism. Reaching unsaved and unchurched persons will tend to happen relationally in a church like this...just the way it was begun. You will want to intentionally build outreach and sharing the gospel into the weekly life of the church. (see Appendix: How Will We Grow)

Possibilities:

- Always include something in the Sermon/Bible-time about having a relationship with Jesus. Even if this is not the primary topic, it can be worked in.
 - Have planned testimonies regularly in the worship service.
 - Encourage members to do just what you did in starting the church. Pray 30 days for people (with whom they want to build a faith-focused relationship)...then approach them about prayer needs and let Christ and church come up naturally as the relationship grows.
 - Notice persons who are struggling or searching. Pray privately for them. Talk with them after the worship service. Go see them. Be real in your concern for their spiritual wellbeing, and God will show you a way to share.
 - Don't focus on big events or high-attendance day. **Don't let an event substitute for the on-going responsibility to pray for God's working in a life, and to form caring faith-focused relationships.** Build the Body of Christ through trust. All the people who come to an "Ex-Offender Family" church will do so because someone formed a relationship with them, and God used it to draw them to Him!!!
- g. Toddlers, Children, and Teens. Are some or all of these age groups likely to be present? If so, is there some way church life can be designed to include them throughout the time together? Because things will be a bit more casual they won't need to sit still and be quiet for an hour. Maybe they could help with some aspects of the service (read a passage, sing, ask questions in the sermon, pray, help with handouts, play an instrument, etc.). This allows church to engage all ages in participation. There is no underlying sense of "performance" for an audience. Church is something you are all experiencing/doing together!

5. **Summary: You can do most of these things in a 60-90 minute meeting a week, if you plan the basic functions of a church into every meeting.**

Read the following example and underline the five functions of a church as you see them lived-out in it.

1. Bible-based worship
2. Discipleship
3. Evangelism
4. Giving/Meeting Needs/Missions
5. True Friendship

Kindness and Prayers Baptist Church

Imagine a church with no windows and no doors and, well, no walls either. The only roof is a large tree and the only carpet is God's green grass. The only "pews" are rows of lawn chairs that go up just before the service begins and are stashed away in truck beds or car trunks soon after the closing prayer.

God pretty much takes care of the upkeep of this "facility" where the congregation that calls itself Kindness and Prayers Baptist Church meets. The tree and surrounding grassy area are in the middle of a parking lot in the heart of the city park by the baseball fields.

The church has been meeting every Sunday morning, rain or shine, since January of 1999. If the weather is too wet, there is a pavilion nearby. "Just prepare like you're going to a football game," the pastor instructs them, and with that mindset the weather is not a problem.

The podium is hand-made by a member of the congregation and is covered on all sides by the autographs of all who have attended services there. The offering "plate" is an old Cowboy boot that sits nearby for people to walk up to anytime and drop in their offerings. Since the church has no overhead and no salaries, the undesignated offerings are divided 70% to the Cooperative Program and 30% to the local Baptist Association. The members like the idea of "giving everything away."

The church has a generous heart—sending shoes to Russian orphans, paper goods to the Hospitality House (for families of inmates) in Fort Worth, and providing Christmas gifts for a family who lost all their possessions in a fire, for example.

The services are simple, and there is opportunity for several in the group to get involved. Someone passes around a cardboard box every Sunday to collect food for the needy. There is usually an item handed to someone in the congregation which is to be invested in another person in some way the following week. (One such item was a carton of 12 eggs and \$20. It was given to a college student and his family.) One member hands out song sheets and plays a keyboard as she leads the singing. Someone often gives a testimony. Others share praises and prayer requests. Another tells a missionary story. Then one of the three men who take turns preaching shares from the Word. Always the congregation is encouraged to "be Jesus' hands and feet during the coming week."

After the close of the service no one rushes off. There is much hugging and laughing and sharing among the congregation before they head for their vehicles, lawn chairs in tow. Some say they come because of the basic simplicity of it all. The non-threatening, casual openness of the service is inviting. Most of those who come have not attended a church regularly for a while, having felt themselves distanced from the traditional and more formal church. For a few, this is their first church experience. There is a healing process going on as those who are hearing the Word on a personal level can recognize its significance in their own lives in a new way. They say the warmth and love of this small group is very special to them.

Although they were expected and would be welcome, there are almost no walk-ups. Usually people who come have been invited by someone who has attended before. It is a congregation built on relationships.

This simple small gathering IS a church? They are doing all the things a church is supposed to do: worship, discipleship, ministry, evangelism/outreach, and fellowship.

Most churches will be a little more complex/organized than this, but it is a good example of how everything can be meshed together in one meeting each week.

Eventually the church might add another meeting to the weekly schedule for discipleship, or ministry projects. Perhaps some will pair participants as accountability partners who get together on their own each week. Please, avoid adding more meetings just because you have always met several times weekly. Some churches still build all the basic functions of a healthy body-of-faith into one meeting time...but they also encourage participants to “do what Jesus would do” as they encounter people throughout the week.

6. **Begin inviting people to the first worship service** (probably 2-3 weeks away). Ask those who attend the initial planning gathering to bring friends who might be interested.
 - a. Encourage them to pray 7 days before they ever start inviting people, just like you did, and to write down the names God brings to mind. Then approach those persons about coming with them to a church starting for a group of friends.
 - b. The church planter also needs to go back to all the persons with whom he has been cultivating a faith-focused relationship and let them know the church is about ready to begin.

Common responses or hesitations might include the following:

- I don't really go to church.

Answer: “That’s one reason I’m doing it. A lot of ex-offenders around here don’t have a church they are comfortable in, and I

believe we can make one together...I want you to honestly consider it.”

- I don't have any churchy clothes.
Answer: “This is not going to be a churchy-clothes group. Everyone's just going to wear their regular stuff.”
- I don't go much, but I was raised in another Church so I guess I better stay with them.
Answer: “I'm sure not trying to compete, but since you haven't been going maybe deep down there is a reason. I want you to at least consider trying this new church with me.”

...almost any excuse has a kind but compelling reply!

- c. **As the church planter, you will want to treat whoever comes like a personal friend. Rather than write their name on a card, ask them to write it in your Bible,** and let them know you'll be praying for God's guidance and help in their lives each week. Include them fully. Look for ways to let them “be on the journey” with you, even if they aren't believers yet. Maybe they have an openness to helping deliver canned goods, bringing a good worship CD, or cleaning up after the gathering is over.
- d. How many persons should you expect? How many did Paul expect on the riverbank, after his Macedonian vision from God (Acts 16)? Probably a lot. How many were there? Probably only a handful of ladies. What did Paul do with that group? Right!...No matter how many come, start with them. Be a sincere Body of Christ and others will soon be drawn from the relationships of those who start out.

LIFESTYLE CHURCH PLANTING

...the passionate choice to plant custom churches
without salary

*You thought you had it all figured out.
You were working on or had a degree in hand.
You even had a job lined up or perhaps you are pulling in the bucks doing exactly
what you were trained to do.
Then IT happened . . .
You felt God's call to do SOMETHING.
That means pastor or missionary, right?
That means seminary or more education, right?
That means starting all over, right?

Wrong. Or at least not necessarily.*

Reaching those who have not yet heard the gospel (or seen it lived out) in a way they can understand or embrace it is going to take on many different forms. We're going to need communities of faith who come together where they work. We're going to need house churches and ones that meet in apartment complexes or student dormitories. We're going to need churches that are defined by the people, not a place.

And much of what is yet to be for the church will not be led by salaried staff.
So, PLEASE, don't give up your day job!!

We used to call such a choice “becoming a tentmaker” – ala Paul supporting himself on his missionary travels. Check out 1 Corinthians 9 in the *Message* and you'll find:
“I want to make clear that I've never gotten anything out of this for myself, and that I'm not writing now to get something. I'd rather die than give anyone ammunition to discredit me or impugn my motives. If I proclaim the Message, it's not to get something out of it for myself. I'm *compelled* to do it, and doomed if I don't! If this was my own idea of just another way to make a living, I'd expect some pay. But since it's *not* my idea but something solemnly entrusted to me, why would I expect to get paid? So am I getting anything out of it? Yes, as a matter of fact: the pleasure of proclaiming the Message at no cost to you. You don't even have to pay my expenses!”

While Paul also points out that “the Master directed that those who spread the Message be supported by those who believe the Message,” it's almost as if he saw the days ahead and knew that as non-believers become believers they don't instantly become supporters.

He doesn't let the church off the hook but he certainly suggests that church planting and especially movements where the action is non-stop and practically chaotic aren't always going to be funded by established means.

So Paul took up a profession that kept him out and about and one that could be easily resumed in a variety of locations.

There are dozens of guides/courses/websites on how to begin a church, ranging from very simple to thoroughly detailed. **The key, though, is to see that what you are really doing is living life with people, not establishing another institution or establishment.** With that in mind, new faith communities can begin almost anywhere. In places like:

Apartments	Mobile Homes
Cafés	Breakrooms
Homes	Parks
Community Centers	Club Houses
Dorms	Parking Lots

When you “live life” with people and know their likes, dislikes, what makes them who they are, what they consider to be real and what reeks of falseness, then you can begin to see the contextualized approach to take as you share what a difference following Christ makes in your life. That means that all these “communities of faith” will look very different and act very different from one another, but nevertheless, they will each still be a body and part of the Body of Christ

If you are in that wonderful stage of having options as to what you are going to do to support yourself, you could consider at least some of the following as you complete that application or send out that resume:

- **A job that allows for flexible timing** . . . you never know when you might need to drop everything and “pastor” someone in need
- **A position that covers insurance costs**, even if it's not in the salary range or hours you prefer
- **Somewhere that allows you to connect regularly** with folks you believe God wants to use you to reach

Currently, there are churches emerging that are led by salesmen (everything from insurance to batteries to candy), technicians, consultants, marketing gurus, office and warehouse managers, coffeehouse staff, and students. Frankly, you are only limited by your own thinking on this one!

To read the full article by Karen Simons, and contributors Shannon Hopkins and Lindsay Cofield, go to www.semesterchurch.org.

APPENDIX

Some or all these resources will be helpful in developing a new Church.

- Planning A Balanced Worship Gathering
- Where To Look For Good Sermons
- Direct Question Bible Study
- Fitness Teams
- How To Multiply
- How Will We Grow
- Find A Mentor
- Baptism And The Lord's Supper
- Visiting Someone In The Hospital
- Giving Wise Counsel
- Leading A Funeral
- Leading A Wedding
- Financial Considerations
- World-Wide Vision

Planning A Balanced Worship Gathering

One meeting a week is all that some churches are able to have, so it takes a little forethought to nurture all the basics of church life in that time. The five components to plan for are (1) worship, (2) evangelism/outreach, (3) discipleship, (4) servanthood to others, and (5) friendship (relationships and support). The two following agendas can serve as frameworks on which to build the service each week, but don't limit yourself...these are just to give you the idea.

Sample One

We Time...everyone share a "thanks," or a "prayer request," or "what God is doing in my life"

...sharing needs of the church family

...prayer together (silent, group, sentence, directed, or led by one person)

Worship Time...music, testimony, scripture, drama, video, CD

...offering

Word Time...Bible study or discussion, individual response time

Works Time...ministry ideas, projects

...missionary highlight and prayer

...who needs our love, support, outreach this week?

Sample Two

Inner: sharing, prayer, fellowship, eating snacks or a meal

Outer: ministry projects, outreach, support for friends

Upper: worship, giving, Bible time (discipleship and evangelistic)

One leader encourages such groups to simply spend time (1) eating together, (2) praying together, and (3) in God's Word together! It can be as simple as that...but include all five components of church life.

Use calls, visits, letters, etc. to care for people, and seek conversations after gatherings and during the week in which to share Christ, counsel, and encourage persons.

Where To Look For Good Sermons

1. **Where do you find helpful scripture passages?** Perhaps it is helpful to mention the places NOT to begin “looking.”

Don't try to find your weekly Bible-study scripture from an outside source like the Internet, or your favorite TV preacher. Those ideas might be great, but they haven't been processed through your life and heart by God's Spirit. Even if such sources contain good biblical truths (and they usually do), they are a shallow substitute for finding a scripture that really helps you.

Also, avoid choosing a scripture based on an urgent reaction to the crisis of the month in the life of your church body. For example, don't teach on “gossip” every time you hear second hand that someone criticized you. On some occasions a current situation in church life calls for a clear word from the Bible (like a great tragedy or momentous undertaking), but “superficial circumstances and feelings” generally are a poor guide for choosing the scripture to discuss.

2. **Your own devotional life will lead you to good Bible passages**, assuming you have a regular time of prayer and listening to God's Word. (If not, then you need to begin, because as one Bible teacher said, “You cannot feed others the Word of God, when you aren't eating too well yourself.”) What is God saying to you about your own life, struggles, and Christian disciplines? How are you seeking to obey? What helps and hinders as you try to live by His guidance, promises, or correction during the week? You can be certain that the people you speak to will have the same struggles, experiences, and needs, and that a verse will help them just like it does you. Choosing a scripture you have “lived with” for a few days is always a good idea. But, don't limit yourself solely to passages from your personal devotions.
3. **The Bible itself is the place to BEGIN looking for your scripture.** Don't begin with a catchy title or idea and then try to find a verse to fit. **BEGIN WITH THE BIBLE.** You don't have to thumb from Genesis to Revelation in your weekly search either. Here are practical plans for settling on a specific passage:
 - a. Go through a book of the Bible over a period of weeks. Generally, this is best accomplished by selecting a book with many varied truths. Philippians would work better than Leviticus! In a few verses it will cover several strong Biblical truths.
 - b. Pick one basic topic like: Prayer, Faith, Temptation, Forgiveness, etc. In about 4 to 6 Gatherings you can cover the major passages on a topic. Check a topical

Bible or Bible concordance to find verses on one subject (often such helps are in the back or margins of your Bible).

- c. Focus on the lives of Bible characters like: David, Abraham, Samuel, Nehemiah, Ruth, Paul, Barnabas, Mary, and Mark. Pick 2 or 3 passages that give the best overview of their life lessons. Reading about a person in one passage then looking up references in other passages will provide plenty of insight.
- d. Focus on life situations like: new beginnings with God, crisis times, temptation times, great opportunities, etc. This is a bit harder to prepare for, but using your Bible's "marginal notes" will probably be adequate. Start with a story like Paul and Silas in prison and look in the margins for related scriptures about such situations.
- e. Focus on how Jesus responded to different people in the book of John. Read through the gospel and pick out 4 or 5 "people encounters" that stir your heart.

You might preach a sermon in the traditional manner, behind a pulpit, or you might be sitting down in a house, apartment, or mobile home living room, using the Direct Question Bible Study method for your sermon time (next page).

Direct Question Bible Study

Passage: This needs to be chosen ahead of time by the leader...usually 5 to 20 verses or no more than one chapter. A passage that is practical is more easily used for this type study than one that has a confusing context.

Group Participation: Ask a volunteer to read one verse, then lead the group to discuss it by answering the questions listed below (in any order). Move to the next verse and repeat the process.
(Vary this procedure to fit your church)

1. What does this verse say to me:
 - about myself?
 - about others?
 - about God?

2. How does it guide, correct, or encourage me?

3. What is unclear to me about its meaning?

4. What will I try to do this week because of its teaching?

Fitness Teams

...a weekday discipleship training method for 2 or 3 Christian friends

(form new Fitness Teams as you bring friends to this accountability group,
and it begins to grow beyond 3 people)

- A. Bible Conditioning. Agree on one of these passages and read the entire selection during the week. Reread the same passage each week until the entire team finishes it in one week...then choose another.

Philippians	Ephesians	John	Acts
James	Psalms 119	Matthew 1-11	Luke
Proverbs	Ruth	Psalms 1-30	2 Corinthians

- B. Fitness Building. Spend time sharing with one another about how you are doing, as an individual, in these areas of life. Be honest about yourself. Be encouraging to each other. Never judge. Pull one another up! (same gender teams are recommended for this section)
1. Have your words, actions, or treatment of another person shown that Jesus Christ is the leader of your life?
 2. Were you able to finish the entire Bible reading this week? Did you find a promise, guidance, or life-correction from God? Are you living by it?
 3. How Christ-like have you been in the following areas of your life: (go through each item, but share specific details only as appropriate)...
 - loving others unconditionally
 - trusting God in a situation, not worrying
 - positive or grumbling attitude
 - priorities: Christ, family, people, job, things
 - hurtful words, bad language
 - anger, bitterness, unforgiveness
 - impure thoughts
 - reliability in finances
 - wrong habits/addictions
 - servant heart and actions

C. Prayer Lifting. Take turns, back and forth, praying for one item at a time, as listed below:

1. Ask God to especially help each one on the Fitness Team...in the way they need Him most this week.
2. Pray for friends who are not-yet Christians (each team member can share 2 or 3 names and list below).

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

- Lord, I pray that you draw (names) to Yourself. John 6:44
- I ask that (names) would hear and believe the Word of God for their lives. 1 Thess. 2:13
- Would You give me or someone the right time to share our faith with _____ (specific person). Col 4:3-6
- I pray that (names) would accept Christ as Lord and grow into all He wants for their life-journey. Col. 2:6-7

Note: A more disciplined approach can be found in “Life Transformation Groups” (the original concept upon which Fitness Teams are based) by Neil Cole, at Church Multiplication Associates, 562.961.1962, www.cmaresources.org. The Fitness Teams example is used by permission.

How To Multiply

Talking about a multiplying church is easy...but how do you plan from the start to have a “church planting” church? Wanting it to be so is just not enough! Here are three specific traits to build into church life which naturally result in the birthing of new churches.

1. Lead the activities of church life in such a “down-to-earth” way that any participant sees the potential to carry out your leadership tasks through his or her own God-given personality. Don’t be an expert! God will not guide every person to lead a new church, but He will lead some that you wouldn’t have guessed. Give away as many ministry tasks as you can, every week, to those who are ready for a specific task (or almost ready). Nudge people to grow and stretch their limits.
2. “Ask, seek, and knock” for God to lead you to an intern or apprentice (maybe even 2 or 3 at one time). The ideal would be to have an intern when you begin the church and allow him to take the lead in as many items as possible. Help people see their potential in the Lord. Spend extra time with them. Be as patient with them as Jesus was with Peter. Pour your life into them.
3. Guide the church to pray regularly about planting new SEEDs in new places that will bless others. Believe that HE will lead persons to become servant-leader/church planters to multiply His work time and time again! **MAKE IT PUBLIC THAT YOU ARE ASKING GOD TO PLANT A NEW CHURCH, OUT OF THIS CHURCH, EVERY SIX MONTHS.**

How Will We Grow?

House churches don't grow by mass evangelism, rather they grow one person at a time. With thousands of house churches growing, the result can be.... a mass of people won to Christ. The secret to relational ministry is to have a servant-leader who can role-model for others. When the servant-leader is out investing time in other people's lives, the flock will go and do likewise.

Relational growth is usually slow, but remember, in a house church setting, the idea is to gather a few unchurched people and spend enough time with them that they become real disciples of Christ. You are not competing to corral existing disciples. The truth is, some of the ones drifting around from church to church (and who offer to come and help you) will be more of a liability than an asset.

Tom Wolfe, formerly of Golden Gate Seminary, teaches “oikos evangelism,” that is, “household community” evangelism. He says you can train your people to look for prospective people to win and disciple in four arenas, or sources:

biological	members of their extended families
geographical	the people who live near you
vocational	the people you work with (co-workers, clients)
volitional	the people you choose to spend time with (friends)

With house churches, as opposed to “program churches,” you are going to attract some people who will share these characteristics:

- a) they have never been involved in a large church before
(so they aren't so focused on the “program” mentality),
- b) they have been in a large church but felt “left out” or hurt in some way,
- c) they don't like to “dress up” or attend events with large crowds.

What can you offer that a large church cannot? (what advantages do you have)

- a) personal attention-- everybody is somebody at your church.
- b) accountability-- no spectators or hypocrites here. As in a small town, everybody knows what's going on with everybody in the circle.
- c) intimate fellowship-- a sense of belonging to a true spiritual family.

(This material has been edited from an original manual, **STARTING HOUSE CHURCHES**, by Jim Walters, copyright 1998. Used by permission. Contact at jimwltrs@aol.com)

Find A Mentor!

Almost everybody involved in church planting seems to agree... a person seeking to start a new church needs an experienced leader or pastor to talk things over with, on a regular basis!

Roddy Clyde (pastor of the Fellowship at Forest Creek) effectively mentors dozens of young men and suggests these guiding principles for such a relationship:

- **Seek out an experienced, trusted advisor.** Ask someone in whom you have confidence to consider meeting with you concerning your church planting endeavor. This person might be a pastor, deacon, Bible professor, chaplain, Bible class teacher in the church, or mature Christian friend. They don't need to be an expert, but a listener, sounding board, confidant, wise counselor, and friend. Tell them you want their:
- **Time...**about 1 hour each week. Sometimes you'll need less and sometimes you'll both have to skip, but set a definite hour that you meet, share, and pray together. You might meet over breakfast or over the phone (but in person is best).
- **Honesty...**to help you identify weakness and problems, as well as priorities and healthy patterns for your leadership style and church life.
- **Encouragement...**to get you past obstacles and discouragements...to help you be faithful and growing as a Christian leader...to push you in reaching your full potential.
- **Insights...**in handling (or avoiding) problems, and caring for your SEED CHURCH effectively.

Agree on a set number of weeks to try out this "Paul-Timothy" relationship...perhaps 6 or 12. At the end of this time decide if you both want to continue. Is time a factor? Should adjustments be made? Has it been of value? Should you find another mentor for the next 12 weeks? A mentor's influence will be helpful for at least the first year and may continue much longer.

Helping The Church With Baptisms And The Lord's Supper

BAPTISMS

The Meaning of Baptism

The significance of baptism is profound. Its meaning includes at least two aspects:

- It illustrates Christ's death, burial and resurrection. "Christ died for our sins...He was buried...and He rose again." 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 (also Colossians 2:12)
- It illustrates a believer's new life as a Christian. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" 2 Cor. 5:17 (cf. also Rom. 6:4)

Baptism doesn't make a person a believer – it shows that he or she already believes. Baptism does not "save," only one's faith in Christ does that. Baptism is like a wedding ring - it's an outward symbol of the commitment made in the heart.

The Mode of Baptism

When we look in the Scriptures, we find at least four reasons why baptism is to be by immersion:

- Because Jesus was baptized that way "*As soon as Jesus was baptized, He went up out of the water.*" Matthew 3:16
- Every baptism in the New Testament was by immersion. For example—"*...Then both Philip and the man went down into the water and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water...*" Acts 8:38-39
- The original word for baptize is *baptidzo*. It always means "to immerse or dip under water."
- Baptism by immersion best symbolizes death, burial and resurrection.

Who Should Be Baptized

The Bible teaches that every person who has professed faith in Christ should be baptized—"*Those who believed and accepted His message were baptized...*" Acts 2:41 (also Acts 8:12, 13).

Baptism of Children

How old should a child be before he or she is baptized? Just old enough to have a personal, saving relationship with Jesus Christ! People sometimes argue that a child convert should not be baptized until he or she is older, just to make sure they understand the meaning. The answer to this objection is that if the child is old enough to make a real profession of faith, they are old enough to be baptized. If the child cannot understand what baptism means, it is unlikely they understand enough of the Gospel to be saved.

A more likely scenario is a child who wants to be baptized although he or she doesn't understand what baptism means. The child's parents may try to pressure the church to baptize their child because the child "asked Jesus into her heart." As Baptists, we wait until our children are old enough to believe and understand the true meaning of baptism before we baptize them.

Where Baptisms Take Place

Baptisms can take place anywhere there is sufficient water. The baptistry may be heated or unheated. It may be commercially pre-fabricated or it may be homemade (some churches use a large metal container purchased at farm and ranch stores).

Churches may choose to have their baptisms outdoors. For example, many baptisms are still done at a lake, in a bay or a creek. Apartment churches frequently hold baptism services in the community swimming pool.

More important than the location of the water is the location of the congregation. Remember that baptism is a public profession of faith. Consequently, baptisms should take place in a location and at a time accessible to the entire church gathering. Family and friends of the person being baptized should be given a special invitation. This is a great way to celebrate a changed life and share faith with not-yet Christian attendees.

Guiding Principles

While the church's leader is often the person who actually does the baptism, anyone acceptable to the church may do it. This can include teachers, parents, or the friend that led the person to Christ.

The person to be baptized should wear a comfortable set of pants or jeans, and a shirt or top. An extra change of clothes should be brought, along with a towel.

It is good for the person to make a short statement about his or her faith in Christ. However, if the person is shy, do not force them to say anything. Baptism should be a spiritually uplifting experience, so it is important that everyone feel comfortable with the ceremony.

THE LORD'S SUPPER

Jesus instructs us to remember His death and resurrection. He gave the church two visible symbols as reminders of His death. These two symbols are Baptism and the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is an object lesson that represents a great spiritual truth for believers.

Paul's instruction to the Corinthian church regarding the Lord's Supper can be very helpful to glean an understanding of its meaning. (1 Corinthians 11:23-28)

Guiding Principles

For the individual worshipper, participation in the Lord's Supper is an act of devotion and consecration. The individual should examine and make right his motives in worship, his relationship to Christ, and his relationship to other people.

The New Testament gives no instruction as to the frequency of the observance of the Supper. Churches observe it variously—some weekly, others monthly, and others yearly.

Any group of responsible persons in the church may prepare for the Lord's Supper. They will arrange for trays and glasses in which to serve the bread and grape juice. Unleavened bread, or loaf bread, can be used.

At the appropriate time the leader should share about the meaning of the Lord's Supper and call for a time of private, personal prayer. He will then read an appropriate Scripture, help pass out the bread and juice, and lead in partaking of the broken bread and the grape juice.

Visiting Someone In The Hospital

Serious illness is a time during which both the sick and the family members need to be assured of God's love, comfort, guidance and power. Recent studies have shown that faith is sometimes as important as the physician's skill in determining whether a patient recovers or not. It is our responsibility to bring awareness of God into the hospital room and to encourage the faith of all involved.

Guiding Principles

Observe posted signs. If a sign says "No visitors" or "immediate family only," go to the nurse's station to find out the patient's condition and if a visit is appropriate.

Knock on the door before going in. Don't just barge in on the patient. If the door is closed, it is for a good reason.

Be sensitive to the patient's needs. If the patient is sleeping, it is usually wise not to wake him up. Instead, leave a card or a note so that patient will know you were there. If the patient is awake but weary and/or struggling, do not stay longer than two or three minutes. If a large number of visitors have already stopped by, it is sometimes better to come back at a later time so that the patient can get some rest. If you are sick, *stay home*. The patient will appreciate your consideration.

Let the patient do the talking. Many people are uncomfortable with hospitals and compensate for their discomfort by talking too much. A wise counselor suggests that you listen, listen, listen. The patient may be concerned with the outcome of his or her illness, about death, or about spiritual matters. Or, the patient may just need someone with whom to talk. You might be the only person willing to listen to his or her concerns.

Don't try to play doctor. Sometimes, people share their personal experiences with certain illnesses. You should never render an opinion on the patient's care or condition. The rule here is to give support to the medical staff and encouragement to the patient about the quality of care being given.

Stay only as long as you are needed. People frequently find themselves either overstaying or understaying their welcome in the hospital room. A visit that is too short may communicate a lack of true caring, while a visit that is too long communicates lack of consideration for the patient. When making decisions about how long to stay in the room, pay attention to the patient's condition. If the patient is in ICU or other critical care unit, a very short visit is appropriate. If the patient is lonely and needing companionship, a longer visit is fine.

Pray appropriately. When praying, follow these guidelines:

- Ask the patient, "How can I pray for you?"

- Listen carefully for unspoken concerns and pray for these.
- Pray for the well-being of family members.
- Try to hold the patient’s hand if possible. Do so, gently!

Giving Wise Counsel

(Adapted from James Cooper, “How to Survive as a Counselor,” *Church Administration*, April, 1980, 19-20.)

Current surveys show that at least one third of all persons seeking professional counseling have first sought help from a Christian leader. Because you are on the front line, listed below are guiding principles for giving wise Christian counsel.

Believe that most of the help you can give will take place during the first [conversation].

Don’t jump in over your head. Do not attempt in-depth counseling. While you should give biblical and helpful advice, you probably are not equipped to do “therapy” in the technical sense of the word. If professional counseling is needed, then gently encourage them to seek that out.

Be wise about the place you do counseling, especially with a person of the opposite gender or with a child. In such cases, the counseling should be conducted in a place where other people—family or friends—are nearby.

Ask God to guide your thoughts and words as you listen and share with a person. Sometimes you might write out an encouraging Bible verse for them and end with a prayer of support.

Leading A Funeral Or Graveside Service

Guiding Principles

As soon as possible after hearing of the death of a person, you should go to the family, whether in the hospital or the home. A few quiet words and a brief prayer are usually offered. If asked to conduct the funeral service, you might set an appointment to come back later to plan the service. Be cautious about talking too much during this first visit. The family will likely not remember anything you *say* at this time; however, they will

remember and deeply appreciate your *presence*. Talking too much can actually be an annoyance for some family members.

At the appointed time, go to the home or meet the family at the funeral home to plan for the service. The time for the funeral should be decided by the family, the funeral director, and the leader conducting the service.

The primary purpose of the funeral service is to help people work through their grief in a normal fashion. You should encourage grieving persons to express their emotions normally, and share good memories as part of their time together that day.

A brief Bible encouragement is appropriate. Its purpose should be to affirm truth, to support and comfort the bereaved, and to provide a challenge for future living. You should neither condemn nor stress the faults of the dead.

A funeral service is not the end of a church's ministry. You and other friends should visit the home as often and as long as necessary to provide support and guidance. The bereaved person often goes through a period of shock. He or she is better able to receive help some time after the funeral.

Leading A Wedding

The Christian wedding is a ritual of commitment for those entering the marriage. It is a celebration of God's establishment of the home.

Prior to the wedding, you should counsel the couple concerning such matters as:

- the basic responsibility of commitment in a marriage relationship,
- family finances,
- adjusting to each other's families,
- planning for their future,
- the relation of their home to the church.

The planning of the wedding with respect to the type (formal vs. informal), time and place, and procedures for the wedding ceremony should be agreed upon.

The laws governing marriage vary from state to state. In Texas, the bride and groom must get a marriage license from the county clerk's office. A waiting period of seventy-two hours is required except under specified emergency conditions.

The person officiating must at least be licensed as a minister of the gospel. Immediately following the wedding you should fill in and sign the wedding certificate, and mail it immediately to the office issuing it. Note: You can be licensed as a minister of the gospel by the vote of your church at its regular gathering. It is wise to record the date of this decision on a certificate (available from Christian bookstores) or in the printed record of the church. In Texas your license does not have to be recorded at any government agency.

Sample Wedding Ceremony

There are many variations to the standard wedding ceremony today. Below is a basic order that can be added to or subtracted from as desired:

Music

Seating of Groom's Parents and Bride's Mother

Pastor, Groom, and Groomsman enter

Bridesmaids enter

Bride and her Father enter

"Who gives this woman to this man that they may be joined in Christian marriage?"

Wedding Sermon (a Bible encouragement to the couple), Prayer

Exchange of Vows

Sample Vows:

"(Name) in taking the woman you hold by the hand to be your wife, do you promise to love and respect her, honor and cherish her, in health and in sickness, in prosperity and in adversity, and leaving all others to keep yourself only unto her so long as you both shall live?" (repeat same vow from the bride to the groom)

Exchange of Rings

Pronounce Couple as Husband and Wife

A Home Wedding is usually much less formal. Often the leader or minister simply asks the bride, groom, and whatever friends and family are present to gather around with him. He then gives a brief Bible encouragement, leads a prayer, has the couple exchange vows and rings, and pronounces them husband and wife. Even here it is important that the Marriage License be available and appropriately filled out.

Financial Considerations

1. What do you need money for?

It seems impossible to do anything without money. The less of it you use to start up your church, the better.

Model missions support through prayer and giving, from the very start, so that the church will develop an Acts 1:8 vision, i.e., pray for missionaries and give to missions. Call the Director of Missions at your Baptist Association office for information on how to support mission causes.

2. Finances...What are the sources?

Tithes and offerings of church members. Granted, at first, this may be very small, but every new church plant should plan its financial future only on the offerings of the church participants.

A church planter who works at a “day job” will have more credibility with people who also work hard at their jobs, and the people within his church will more easily see the need to do their part in the work of the church.

3. What does the IRS say is a church?

The exact wording of IRS guidelines and court decisions on “what constitutes a church” are complex and ambiguous. This handbook is not an attempt to give legal advice, and it wouldn't hurt you to obtain legal advice in the state where you're planting. A newsletter called “The Church Tax and Law Report” writes on this subject. From their articles, the basic elements the IRS looks for to determine if something is actually a church are:

- your church has a written document defining itself as a church [perhaps a listing of its name, vision statement and core values as agreed upon by the participants].
- your church has a minister or servant-leader and a congregation.
- you are holding regular public meetings for the purpose of worship
- you have set up a bank account for the church (not your personal account), and you are keeping proper financial records as a church.

Meet these guidelines, and you likely won't have a problem in this area. (see Non-profit Note on next page)

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World-Wide Vision

- An Ex-Offender Family Church can touch and change lives far beyond its community...
- Like all churches, it needs to have a vision for impacting lives locally, across the city, statewide, and around the world (Acts 1:8).
- Every church can do its part by giving a monthly voluntary offering.
- It is a common practice among churches to divide 10% of its total offerings between:
 1. The **local Baptist Association** of churches (3%)
 2. The **Baptist General Convention of Texas** (7%)

Through these two networks you help support things like:

hunger relief	family crisis service	mission trips
medical clinics/poverty areas	missionaries	inner city ministry
church planting	disaster relief	prayer & evangelism

To participate in this world-wide vision:

Pray about it as a church and decide how much you want to give as your part in touching the world for God. Then make your giving an act of worship!

1. Send a monthly gift to the local Baptist Association, (contact the BGCT, 214.828.5390/lindsay.cofield@bgct.org for info if you are unsure about the address for your local Baptist Association...and,
2. Send a monthly gift to the statewide Baptist General Convention of Texas: BGCT Adopted Budget, 333 N. Washington, Dallas TX 75246-1798.

Non-Profit Note: Churches that give regularly to the Baptist General Convention of Texas are provided a letter identifying them as a cooperating body under the BGCT non-profit tax status.