



Center for United States Missions

# Mission Moments



December 1, 2015

## Mis-Guided Mission?

By Rev. Michael Ruhl

With high energy and excitement, we made our way to Nashville, Tennessee on November 17-18 for the fall gathering of *Church Planting Leadership Fellowship* (CPLF). Facilitator Ed Stetzer and his research team promised to unpack the essential insights from the recent study called *The State of Church Planting in the U.S.* This study was conducted by surveying 843 church planters from 16 Christian-Evangelical Movements, including the LCMS.

One primary insight into this study ignited some serious concern: While the number of new church plants in the USA is experiencing incremental growth to around 4,000 per year, the amount of intentional evangelism is on the decline. In other words, the church appears to be advancing in the *science of starting new churches* – but weakening in the ultimate *purpose of planting new churches*, which is sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with people who are far from God and who lack saving faith in Jesus Christ.

Some of you will recall the earlier days of the *TV Guide* magazine. Before the days of pressing a button on the remote in order to receive a posted guidance of what we could watch on a listing of television channels, this little magazine guided television viewers in their mission of reviewing and selecting which program(s) they would watch on which channel. While the format was humble and technology deficient, people did receive accurate and timely guidance for their television viewing.

Certainly many evangelical Christians welcome and celebrate the recent breakthroughs in technology, leadership training, social dynamics, incarnational and attractional nuances and systems development which can serve the mission of how to plant a new church. But the planting of new churches is not an end in itself! Rather new church reproduction is one of the basic strategies for fulfilling Jesus' Great Commission to 'make disciples of all the nations'. And that makes intentional evangelism the very heart of church planting strategy and methodology. New churches emerge as new disciples are being made by the power of the Gospel and the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit working through that Word of the Gospel. If and when Christians are more concerned with the *science* of planting new churches than the *sacred purpose* of planting new churches, then it must be said that the mission is being mis-guided.

Let us pray that the Holy Spirit leads and guides the church to be and remain faithful to the proper role of new church multiplication.

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## Moment Extras

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### Questions for Discussion

Personal or Group Reflection

1. 1 Peter 3:15 urges all Christian to ... *Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.* What does this passage mean to you as the leader of your ministry?

2. How do the saints of your ministry engage in some form of personal evangelism that is *intentional*?

3. How can you deploy intentional witnesses and evangelists into the prime 'fishing pools' for mission work in your community?

Where do people shop?

Where do people gather information?

Where do people engage in relationships?

4. The five US states with the highest number of new churches are:

1. Texas

2. California

3. Florida

4. Ohio

5. North Carolina

How would you describe the new church multiplication ministry in your state and District? What are some of the reasons behind your observations?

5. Why do only 3-4% of mainline denominational churches sponsor the planting of new churches?

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## *Resources You Can Use*

### Related Books and Links

In his book, [Apostolic Church Planting – Birthing New Churches from New Believers](#), JD Payne provides a guide that can be used for planting in contexts among any given people group, domestically or internationally. It is an ideal resource for teams to work through together as they follow God's call in their community.

Ed Stetzer and Philip Nation challenge readers to look at love within the context of God, the church, and the lives of individual believers. [Compelled – Living the Mission of God](#), provides readers a basic theological grounding and a platform for personal application as they understand what missional living is all about.

[The State of Church Planting in the U.S. by Ed Stetzer](#), Micah Fries, and Daniel Im. The survey results you see in this report represent the largest, most thorough survey done yet on church planting in the U.S. since 2007.

In a blog post by Steven M. Pike, [Church Planting and Evangelism – A Prescription for Reaching America](#), he discusses five reasons why church planting is the best methodology of evangelism.

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