

**NEW CHURCHES**

2015-2016 EXCLUSIVE REPORT

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# THE STATE OF CHURCH PLANTING IN CANADA

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*by* ED STETZER AND DANIEL IM



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# THE STATE OF CHURCH PLANTING IN CANADA

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# CHURCH PLANTING MATTERS

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In fact, it matters greatly. First of all, the Church matters because it is Christ's bride. But beyond that, church planting matters because the Church is God's intended vehicle to advance the gospel and grow believers into the image of Jesus.

Because church planting matters, it is important that we know the current state of church planting. What's happening out there? Are we succeeding? What trends and movements are shaping church planting? The survey results in this report represent the largest, most thorough study done yet on church planting in Canada (the U.S. version of this report is available at [NewChurches.com](http://NewChurches.com)).

The survey asked over 500 leaders of new church works across many different denominations and church planting networks (including church plants, revitalizations, mergers, and new sites) to share their experience in a 30-minute online survey.<sup>1</sup> Over 150 pastors and new church work leaders completed the survey. This report focuses on the 141 new church works (mostly church plants, but also new sites and plant restarts) started in 2005 or later and still operating today.<sup>2</sup>

While this survey had the highest number of participating church plants ever known to complete a survey in Canada, the response rate was typical of many surveys today (about 33%). No quantitative measurements of all church plants started since 2005 exist with which to compare these respondents. Consequently, it is uncertain how representative this survey is of new church works started since 2005. However, great care was taken at every step of the process to eliminate systematic response bias wherever possible. The full methodology and limitations of the study can be found at the end of this report.

## WHAT DID WE LEARN?

Well, you'll have to read this report to find out, but most importantly,

**we learned that new Canadian church works (including church plants, revitalizations, mergers, and new sites) that pray, equip leaders (volunteer and staff), and share Jesus have more commitments to Christ and**

**are more likely to be majority unchurched congregations that are financially self-sufficient.**

It is so exciting to see God use church planting to transform lives throughout Canada. May the Lord bless you and guide you as you seek to implement the findings of this report.

As a general reminder: most of the numbers contained in this report represent the mean (or the average). We intentionally chose this, as opposed to the median (the middle-most data point), because the general trends are consistent whether you look at mean or median, and also because we are accustomed to talking about mean (or average). Additionally, the findings presented in this report represent statistically significant findings, a statistical procedure that is based on means, not medians.<sup>3</sup>

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# METRICS AND MORE

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## WEEKLY WORSHIP ATTENDANCE

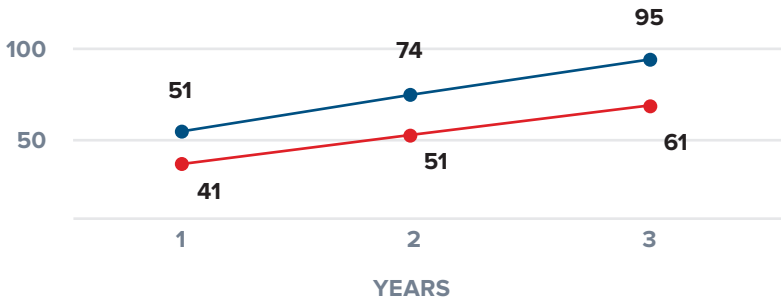
What's the average size of a church in Canada? How does that relate to the U.S.? With Daniel being Canadian and Ed being married to a Canadian, we both personally understand the difference between the United States and Canada. Not only are there historical, cultural, demographic, and size differences, but the landscape of church ministry and the attitude towards Christianity can seem night and day at times. As a result, it is no surprise that the average weekly worship attendance in Canada differs from the United States.<sup>4</sup>

In the United States, the average weekly worship attendance goes from 51 in the first year, to 74 in the second, and 95 in the third. Compare that to Canada, where it's 41 in the first year, 51 in the second, and 61 in the third.

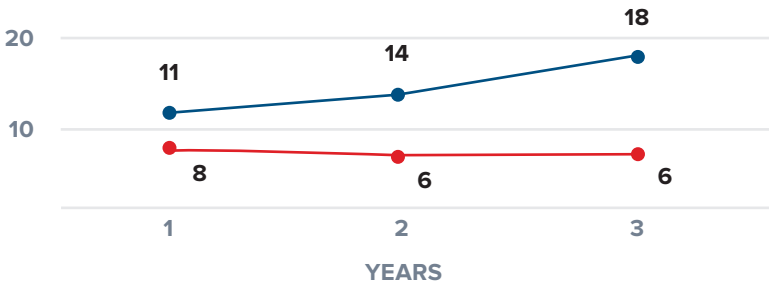
Not only is the average weekly worship attendance lower year-over-year in Canada, but the rate of growth is slower, as well. In the U.S., the rate of growth is 45% from the first year to the second, and then 28% from the second

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**Average weekly worship attendance by year in the U.S. and Canada**



**Average number of new commitments to Christ by year**



● CANADA

● USA

to the third. Compare that to Canada, where it's 24% from the first year to the second, and then 20% from the second to the third.

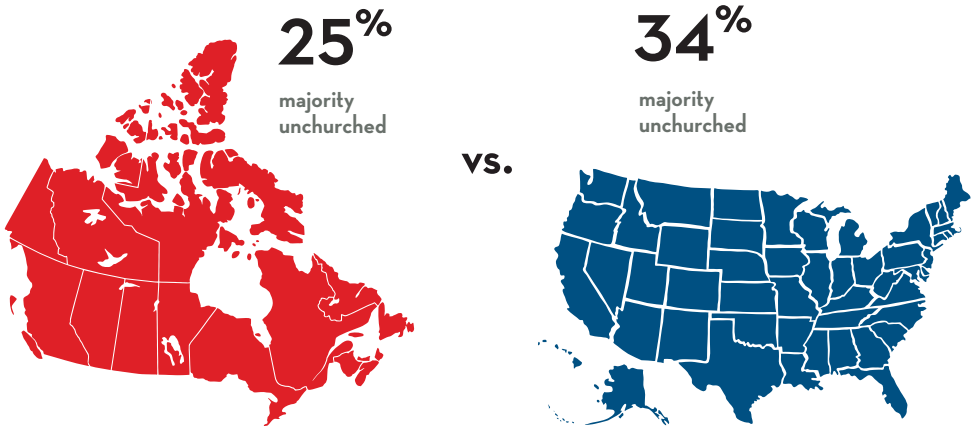
Clearly, the Canadian context is dissimilar to its neighbour to the South. The more evangelical context of the United States probably explains this difference.

## NEW COMMITMENTS TO CHRIST

While average weekly worship attendance is an important metric that

relates to the overall health of a church, it is by no means the only metric. Jesus has given us the commission to go and make disciples of all nations. This means that your church cannot only be composed of existing Christians who have changed their membership over to yours. It's critical that your church is intentional about evangelism.

The average number of new commitments to Christ is not only lower year-over-year for new church works in Canada, but the trend dips downward instead of up. As a result, the annual average for the number of new commitments to Christ in church





plants surveyed is under 10 for the first few years in Canada, while it is above 10 in the United States.

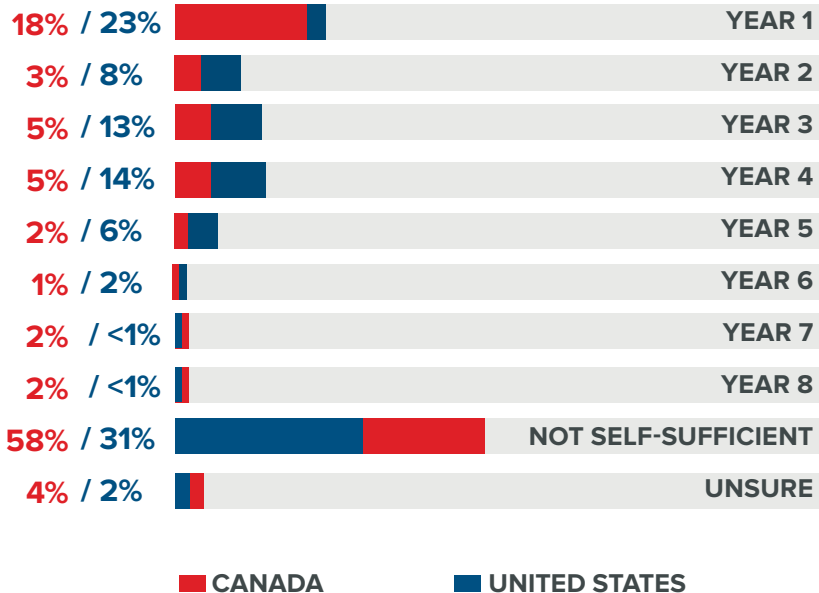
When planting a church, you often get a mix of both churched (individuals who have a church background) and unchurched people (individuals without a church background). In the survey, the results revealed that 1/4 of all new church plants in Canada are primarily made up of previously

unchurched people. Compare that to the United States where 1/3 of all new church plants are primarily made up of previously unchurched people.

## FINANCIAL SELF-SUFFICIENCY

Finances matter for a church plant, since there are both start-up costs and ongoing ministry costs. Amongst

### FINANCIALLY SELF-SUFFICIENT



those we surveyed, initial funding for the church came from a wide array and combination of sources:

- Initial funding from church attendees: 84%
- Initial funding from an affiliated denomination: 64%
- Initial funding from one or multiple sponsoring church(es): 46%
- Initial funding from a personal financial support network created by lead pastor or staff: 59%
- Initial funding from a single individual or non-profit foundation: 19%

As the new church work grows and matures, it is important for them to set a goal and have a plan to move towards financial self-sustainability, which means that no financial support is being received from outside sources. In Canada, 18% achieved financial self-sustainability in the first year or right from the beginning, but after that, the percentages drop off precipitously. In fact, amongst those we surveyed (church plants, new church sites, and church plant restarts) that were started in 2005 or later and are still existing today, 58% were still not self-sufficient. Compare that with the United States, where only 31% had not yet achieved self-sufficiency.

What's fascinating is that by year five, about a third of church plants that we surveyed in Canada were financially self-sufficient whereas amongst those we surveyed in the United States, it was over half. So it takes much longer for church plants in Canada

to be financially self-sufficient than in the United States.

The U.S. religious climate has been historically different than the Canadian one. Consequently, the patterns that lead to successful church planting in the U.S. are often different than those in Canada. Canada's post-Christian context is more similar to many countries in Europe where the lift-off for church plants is sometimes slower, takes more perseverance, and is not yet at the multiplication level occurring in many parts of the United States.

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# PRAYER IS POWERFUL

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We love this quote by D.L. Moody:  
"I'd rather be able to pray than to be  
a great preacher; Jesus Christ never  
taught his disciples how to preach,  
but only how to pray." Prayer is  
powerful. It's not the strength of our  
ability to pray that makes it powerful;  
it's the God to whom we are praying  
that makes it powerful.

We were recently encouraged when  
looking over the launch plan of Lorenzo  
Smith, a church planter that is a Plus  
Member at [NewChurches.com](http://NewChurches.com). He  
and his co-planter are men that know  
the power of prayer in church planting.

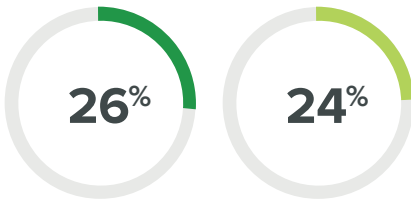
When they announced their plant and were recruiting others to join them, they called others to pray with them. Before launching their first Sunday gathering, they committed to a minimum of 12 months of focused prayer. This played itself out through a weekly prayer meeting together as co-planters and with others who were going to join the plant. They also had a monthly public prayer gathering that was open to everyone, including members from their sending church. A few months before launch, they divided their core group into six different neighbourhood prayer groups to pray throughout the week. Then, when they rented their facility, they walked through the property and prayed over it with their core group. All throughout the preparation and life of their church, Lorenzo and his co-planter made prayer a priority. Prayer is powerful, and prayer matters.

the difference is marginal since it's only a two percent difference. However, in our research, we discovered that this factor is statistically significant when holding many other aspects of church plants and church planters constant, making this factor of particular importance.

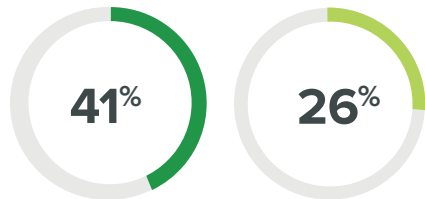
## PRAYER MEETINGS

Not only does prayer have a direct affect on reaching the lost and having more unchurched people in your church, but it also affects a church's ability to reach financial self-sufficiency. Amongst those we surveyed, churches that had regular prayer meetings were more likely to become financially self-sufficient within five years. 41% of the church plants surveyed who had regular prayer meetings became financially self-sufficient by year five, while 26% of church plants who did not have regular prayer meetings became financially self-sufficient by year five.

## PRAYER WALKING



The church plants that we surveyed who regularly conducted prayer walks were more likely to be unchurched. In fact, 26% of the congregations we surveyed, who regularly prayer walked, were found to be majority unchurched. Compare this to 24% of the congregations we surveyed, who did not regularly prayer walk, were found to be majority unchurched. When you look at this chart, it looks like



### **Make prayer an integral part of your church.**

Prayer is not just something said before meals, at the end of a worship service, or when someone goes on a mission trip. Prayer is action. Prayer makes a difference. Prayer engages you in spiritual warfare. This is why Jesus taught his disciples to pray, "Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). Let us pray for our cities, neighbourhoods, and street corners.

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# EQUIP YOUR LEADERS

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Leadership development matters. In the e-Booklet *Developing Your Leadership Pipeline*, Todd Adkins, Director of Leadership at LifeWay Christian Resources, references research we did on how churches engage in leadership development.

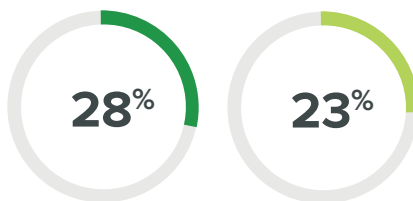
**“If you are reading about development, then the odds are likely you hold a conviction that your church should be**

**developing its people. In fact, research conducted with 1,000 pastors shows an overwhelming majority affirm the importance of training and development for church leaders and volunteers. Yet, that same study reveals less than 30% of churches actually have a plan in place to develop their staff members and only 1 in 4 churches require leaders and volunteers to attend the training that is offered. Dig a little deeper and you will likely find that even those pastors and churches with a plan have training best classified as initial onboarding of volunteers, not training classified as ongoing development. Our call as church leaders is to provide our people with a map for their development, not just a menu of ministry opportunities.<sup>5</sup>**

## **PRIOR CHURCH PLANTING TEAMS**

Serving on a church planting team before going out and planting your own church is important. In fact, according to our research, we discovered that those who had prior

experience serving on a church planting team had more unchurched people in their church!



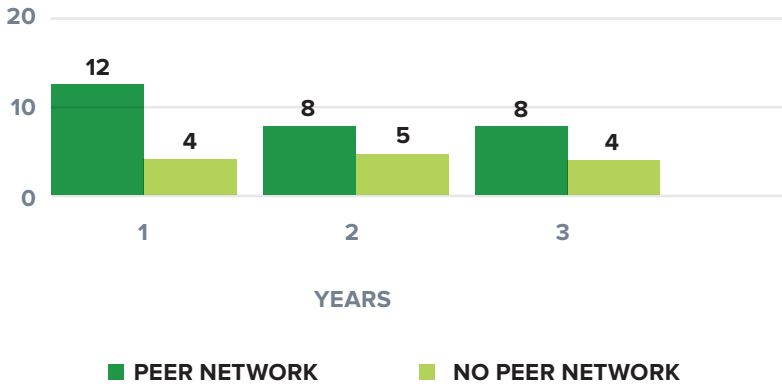
Amongst those we surveyed, 28% of the church plants were majority unchurched when the church planter was a part of a church planting team prior to starting their current church plant. That share of church plants with majority unchurched congregations dropped to 23% when the church planter was not part of a church planting team prior to starting their current church plant. Gaining the necessary experience before planting on your own makes a difference.

## **PEER-TO-PEER NETWORKS**

Development is not always a top-down matter. Encouraging and equipping one another in environments like peer-to-peer networks offers tremendous benefits to all involved. In fact, when peer-to-peer networks are provided by a sponsoring denomination, there seems to be a higher number of new commitments to Christ in the churches of those who are involved! More specifically, when a church planter was involved in a peer to peer network, we found that the number of new commitments to Christ in their church was triple in year one and almost double in years two and three compared with church plants whose

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**Average new commitments for congregations using church leader peer network provided by sponsoring denomination**



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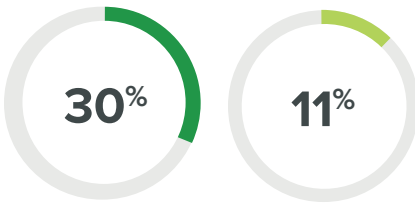
church planters were not involved in a similar type of equipping. This is not surprising, since peer-to-peer networks offer an environment for mutual accountability, learning, and intentionality when it comes to development. If you are not a part of a peer-to-peer network, join one. If you can't find one, start one with other pastors and planters in your city.

### **EVANGELISTIC TRAINING**

Offering evangelistic training for your lay leaders is beneficial in many respects. Not only does it raise the fervor and attention that evangelism requires, but it also equips your

congregation with the needed skills to share the gospel of Christ effectively. In fact, we will go as far as to say that if you aren't doing this, you are neglecting one of your responsibilities as a pastor and a leader! This is why it says in 1 Peter 3:15-16, "But honor the Messiah as Lord in your hearts. Always be ready to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you. However, do this with gentleness and respect." So pastor and church leader, equip and train your congregation so that they are able to proclaim and defend the gospel, but teach them how to do this with gentleness and respect.

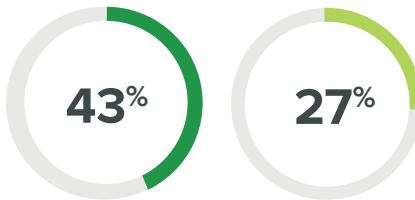
Amongst those we surveyed, we discovered that church plants who offered evangelism training for their lay leaders were more likely to have an unchurched congregation. In fact, about 3 in 10 church plants surveyed who had evangelism training for lay leaders were majority unchurched. By contrast, 1 in 10 church plants surveyed without evangelism training were majority unchurched.



## EQUIPPING AND SELF-SUFFICIENCY

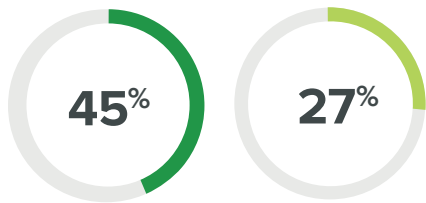
While a church's ability to reach the lost is influenced by its emphasis on leadership development, so is their ability to reach financial self-sufficiency within their first five years of operation.

For example, when a church intentionally offered a class to equip and train their new members, they were more likely to reach self-sufficiency within five years than those who didn't offer the same sort of class.



In fact, about 43% of church plants surveyed who offered a membership class were financially self-sufficient by year five, compared to 27% of churches who reached financial self-sufficiency without this class.

A similar percentage and trend was found for churches that used a covenant with their members. 45% of congregations using a church covenant reached self-sufficiency within five years, compared to 27% who reached self-sufficiency without a church covenant for their members. It is evident that clearly outlining your expectations for membership in a class and a covenant positively affects giving and commitment.





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# SHARE THE GOSPEL

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When it comes to growing your church with new believers, there's an often-repeated phrase that we say on the New Churches Q&A Podcast, "Spend time with leaders and the lost!"<sup>6</sup>

The previous section addressed the importance of spending time equipping your leaders, and it even touched on how that affects your engagement with the unchurched. This section is going to focus on what we discovered when church plants focus on sharing the gospel with the lost.

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# “Spend time with leaders and the lost!”

New Churches Q&A Podcast

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## MEETING IN A SCHOOL

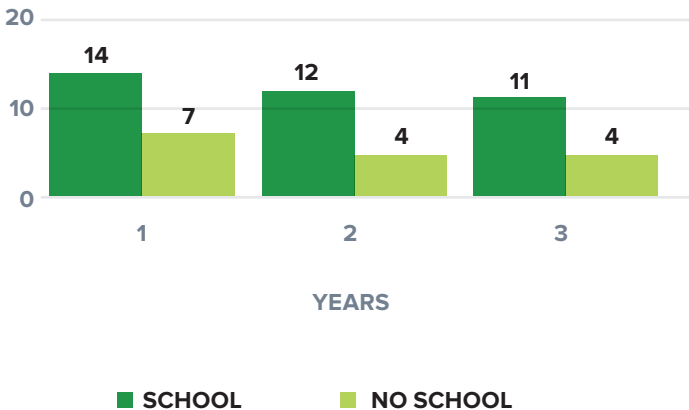
Before we look at the way evangelistic efforts like outreach Bible studies, visitation, and involvement in neighbourhood and/or city politics affect new church works, let’s look at the relationship your meeting venue

has with seeing individuals make new commitments to Christ.

Although not directly tied to sharing the gospel, using a school as a facility for your worship service is associated with a higher number of commitments for Christ. As in the U.S. study, going public by meeting in a public facility appears to have a positive relationship with having more opportunities to share the gospel and seeing more people make a commitment for Christ. In fact, amongst surveyed church plants, the number of new commitments to Christ is more than double each year for church plants that meet in a school compared with church plants that do not meet in a school.

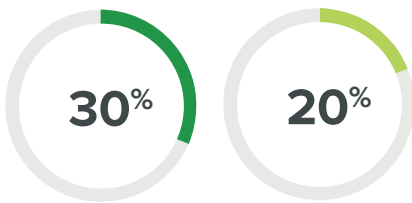
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**AVERAGE NEW COMMITMENTS WHEN CONGREGATION IS USING A SCHOOL**



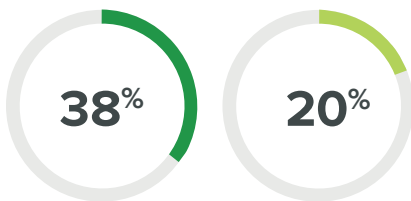
## OUTREACH BIBLE STUDIES

Using Bible studies to engage with the unchurched and as a method for evangelism works in Canada. In fact, we discovered that 3 in 10 church plants surveyed that continued to host outreach Bible studies were majority unchurched congregations! By contrast, only 2 in 10 church plants surveyed that did not have outreach Bible studies were majority unchurched. That's a significant difference when looking at the vast unchurched population in Canada.



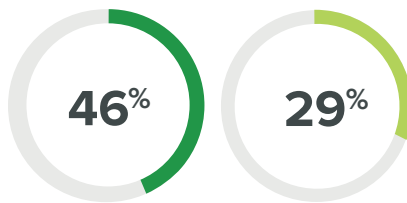
## EVANGELISTIC VISITS

Purposeful visits to share the gospel with people have sometimes become a relic of the past. But regularly conducting such visits, wherever their location, seems to be associated with a greater likelihood of being majority unchurched and being financially self-sufficient within five years.



And the differences are fairly dramatic. About 2 in 10 churches not doing evangelistic visits were majority unchurched, compared with nearly

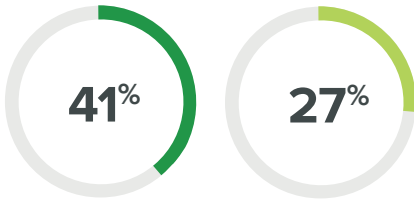
4 in 10 churches that were majority unchurched when they were continuing to do evangelistic visits. Furthermore, about 17 percentage points separate the self-sufficiency rate for surveyed church plants who were continuing to do evangelistic visits (46%) compared with church plants who did not do evangelistic visits (29%). It is amazing what a simple strategy like evangelistic visits can do for a church plant's ability to minister to the unchurched and attain financial self-sufficiency.



## MUNICIPAL INVOLVEMENT

Sharing the gospel needs to be done in both word and deed. The previous points emphasized the importance of sharing the gospel in word through outreach Bible studies and evangelistic visits. This point emphasizes the equal importance of sharing the gospel locally in your neighbourhood in deeds and good works. In our research, we discovered that intentional involvement in the church's neighbourhood positively affects a church's ability to reach financial self-sufficiency. This local involvement includes being engaged with municipal political issues. More specifically, about 4 in 10 church plants surveyed who were involved in their local communities were financially self-sufficient within five years, compared with nearly 3 in 10 church plants surveyed who were self-

sufficient when they were not heavily involved in their neighbourhoods.



Although the exact process between sharing the gospel and successful outcomes for Canadian church plants cannot be directly pinpointed, it is important to note that public sharing of the gospel, in a variety of forms, is making profound differences for church planting success in Canada.

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# CONCLUSION

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In this report you discovered the importance of prayer, leadership development, and sharing the gospel for church planting in Canada. Stay up to date with the latest research and insight on church multiplication by becoming a Plus Member at [NewChurches.com](https://NewChurches.com).

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# NOTES

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- 1. Church Planting Canada and C2C Network were the two cornerstone partners in this study. In fact, this study would not have been possible without the financial sponsorship of the member networks of Church Planting Canada. This project was initiated through the generous vision of C2C Network, who both contributed financially as well as worked with Church Planting Canada to invite Canadian denominations and networks to participate in this study.*
- 2. Two of the common sources of error in survey research are sampling error and non-response error. In this study, all new church works provided by denominations and church planting networks were invited to participate. Some denominations and networks were unwilling to participate in this study (though a complete list of missing groups has not been compiled); thus, not allowing the study to have a complete picture of church planting in Canada. Nonetheless, this was a census with no error introduced by sample selection among participating denominations and networks.*
- 3. It should be noted how significant the factors in this study were determined. A statistical technique called multivariate regression analysis was used to determine the factors associated with church planting success. All regression analyses controlled for church demographics, denomination/church planting network, province, church planter characteristics, and other church plant characteristics.*
- 4. More information about the State of Church Planting in the U.S. 2015 can be found by downloading the full report at [NewChurches.com/register](http://NewChurches.com/register)*
- 5. You can download this ebooklet for free by going to [www.lifeway.com/leadership/free-e-booklet/](http://www.lifeway.com/leadership/free-e-booklet/)*
- 6. On the New Churches Q&A Podcast, Daniel Im, Ed Stetzer, and Todd Adkins answer listener submitted questions about planting, multisite, multiplying, and church leadership. Listen to the latest episodes and submit your own question by going to [NewChurches.com/podcasts](http://NewChurches.com/podcasts)*

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# METHODOLOGY

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## OVERVIEW

In 2015, Dr. Ed Stetzer and the LifeWay Research team invited several denominations and new church planting networks in the United States and Canada to take part in an expansive study measuring the health and success of new church works, such as church plants, revitalizations, mergers, and new church sites. Church Planting Canada and C2C network took the lead in sponsoring this study.

The primary goal of the project was to clearly identify factors associated with higher worship attendance, new commitments to Jesus Christ, reaching the unchurched, becoming financially self-sufficient, and the multiplication of new church works soon after the new church work was started. (Due to the low number of responses, no statistically significant findings for worship attendance or church multiplication were found.)

## DEVELOPING THE SURVEY TOOL AND FIELDING THE SURVEY

The development of the questionnaire closely followed the content of the 2007 U.S. Church Planting Study done by the Center for Missional Research at the North American Mission Board. The questionnaire for the main survey was developed by Dr. Phillip Connor, researcher for the 2007 study, along with expertise from Lizette Beard, Scott McConnell, and Ed Stetzer. Key Canadian church planting leaders provided feedback to the questionnaire.

Major differences from the 2007 U.S. questionnaire were 1) changing baptisms to new commitments to Christ, 2) a greater assortment of choices and rankings for church models, 3) greater number of questions about small groups, church demographics, pastor demographics, and starting additional new church works, and 4) uniquely Canadian demographic categories for ethnicity. Unlike the 2007 study, this study



did not seek to answer questions surrounding survivability. The questionnaire was available in English, Spanish, French, Korean, and Chinese.

The questionnaire was fielded from June through November 2015 as an online survey. Pastors of known new church works were emailed invitations to complete the survey. This list of pastors and churches were provided by participating organizations and included both new church works who had closed and who continued to operate at present. Each pastor/church was contacted five times by email to complete the survey. If the survey was not completed after these invitations, the pastor/church was contacted by phone. With 520 potential contacts to respond to the survey, 169 completed the survey – a 33% response rate. This response rate is on par with many email invitation surveys.

## FINDINGS

Findings provided in this report restrict the analysis to survey respondents who started churches in 2005 or later, continue to exist today, and were started as new church plants, church plant restarts, or new church sites. The number of respondents eligible for this analysis is 141.

A statistical technique called multivariate regression analysis was used to determine what factors were significantly related to a higher number of new commitments to Christ, a congregation consisting of majority unchurched, and being financially self-sufficient within five years of being planted. All regression

analyses controlled for church organization, province, basic church composition (education, race and ethnicity composition, age breakdown, immigrant composition), and pastor characteristics (education, race and ethnicity, age, marital status). Significant factors are considered important and consistently true across all church plants no matter their location, church composition, or planter characteristics.

## PROJECT LIMITATIONS

No standard demographics across all new church works in Canada were available for comparison to the 2015 study. Consequently, it is uncertain how representative this survey is of new church works started since 2005. However, the bulk of major organizations starting new church works in Canada participated in the study, providing a high level of certainty that the findings represent a wide approach to starting new works.

Nonetheless, few closed works responded to the survey, indicating that the survey data leans more toward churches that are doing fairly well. Moreover, despite the availability of the survey in several languages, it is suspected that non-English speaking congregations are underrepresented. These data limitations can be muted by focusing analysis on the internal relationships of factors associated with a healthy and successful new church work (net of other factors) rather than focusing on actual attendance or commitment rates alone. Readers are encouraged to focus on general themes rather than precise differences in numbers.

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