



Mennonite
Mission
Network

Missio**Dei**

Exploring God's work in the world

Creating an Anabaptist church- planting culture



EDITED BY JAMES R. KRABILL

Missio Dei is published by Mennonite Mission Network to invite reflection and dialogue about God's mission in today's world. Some features in the series focus primarily on the biblical and theological foundations of the mission task. Others present ministry case studies or personal stories of attempts to be faithful to Christ's call. Perspectives represented reflect the passion and commitment of the agency: to declare in word and demonstrate in life the whole gospel of Jesus Christ, "across the street, all through the marketplaces, and around the world."

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Mennonite Mission Network, the mission agency of Mennonite Church USA, exists to lead, mobilize and equip the church to participate in holistic witness to Jesus Christ in a broken world. With offices in Elkhart, Indiana, and Newton, Kansas, Mennonite Mission Network supports ministries in 54 countries and 31 states.

Mennonite Mission Network is committed as an agency to providing relevant resources for the church. *Missio Dei* is such a resource, inviting reflection and conversation about God's mission in 21st-century contexts. It is offered free of charge to more than 1,500 pastors and lay leader subscribers. Donations are welcomed to cover costs for additional copies.

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Church planting—a Mennonite Church USA vision and opportunity

By Stanley W. Green, Mennonite Mission Network executive director

Why church planting?

Church planting is an essential part of our spiritual DNA as the body of Christ, even if we too often ignore and neglect it. As the people of God, our task and calling—guided by God’s vision of the future—is to grow communities of reconciled followers of Jesus through whom the demonstration of Christ’s kingdom is made visible. The earliest New Testament expressions of the work of the Holy Spirit were revealed in the evolution and growth of communities of believers in ever-widening circles of witness.

The future health of Mennonite Church USA is inextricably linked to our capacity and commitment to plant and welcome new communities of those who follow Jesus wherever they are. For this reason, I am excited that Mennonite Church USA has embraced church planting as a key priority in our Journey Forward.¹ I also celebrate the intentional partnership between the church’s mission agency, Mennonite Mission Network, and Mennonite Church USA to steward this vision.

¹ See: <http://mennoniteusa.org/journey%20forward/>



In 1968, an active discussion took place at Chicago's Englewood Mennonite Church, established in 1893, to determine whether a Voluntary Service unit should be affiliated with the congregation.

Church planting among Mennonites—key stages on the North American journey

The genesis of church planting by Mennonites in North America was in response to the need of migrant groups from Europe. These groups—either displaced by socio-political currents or eager to secure places for worship where they would be left in peace—transplanted and developed communities in which to pursue their spiritual aspirations. Often, the principal objective was to preserve cultural traditions.

After a century of church establishment and cultural formation and preservation, and in response to currents in the wider culture, Mennonites sensed a call to mission and evangelism, planting churches among Native American and African American urban communities. In this phase the objective was to plant “mission” churches. The resulting church plants assumed assimilation by the recipient cultural groups, reflected in the expectations for conventions in dress, worship practices, and other cultural expressions.

During the latter decades of the 20th century, numerous churches were planted in urban settings where Mennonite young adults had relocated in order to attend educational institutions. In the current 21st-century phase of church planting, many new communities have emerged as Mennonites and others from the global South have relocated to North America, or as neo-Anabaptists² have formed groups that seek affiliation with the Mennonite Church.

² People from other traditions who have come to embrace Anabaptist convictions.

Today, we are at the place where individuals with a sense of call, congregations motivated by missional impulses, and groups who for reasons of linguistic or cultural affinity, are gathering groups of people with Anabaptist conviction and interest to develop new church plants.

What is needed to fulfill this vision?

We need women and men and congregations with a passion and a sense of call to see communities of believers emerge in places where few viable opportunities exist for certain people. We celebrate large numbers of people gathering around Jesus, but we repudiate a preoccupation with numbers. We have identified the imperative of planting “peace” churches. The kind of churches that authenticate our witness will:

- Make Jesus the center of their lives in identity and worship.
- Intentionally commit to active discipleship formation by growing in the capacity to live as Jesus modeled.
- Missionally engage with their communities across the street and around the world in the Spirit and example of Jesus.
- Understand the critical necessity of a contextually-shaped approach to church planting with key missional questions like: Who is the

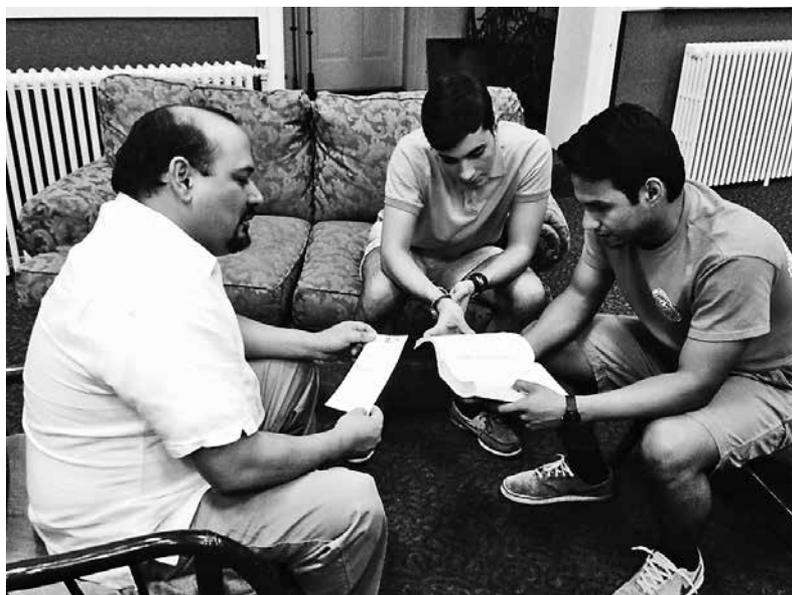


Photo provided

Through the Missional Discipleship Initiative, committed and experienced believers grow in their faith through mentoring relationships.

audience? What are their values and preferences? And what will best communicate and nurture their spiritual aspirations and needs in ways consistent with their cultural understandings and practices?

The hope we have and the prayer we pray

The good news is that we are already on the way to the fulfillment of this vision. A new collaborative framework and posture has been developed that fosters work between Mennonite Mission Network and the Executive Board staff for a joint campaign on church planting for the denomination.

- Mauricio Chenlo, minister for church planting with Mennonite Mission Network, reports that there are currently 92 churches being planted or in formation.
- The Sent conference—today an annual event for resourcing and supporting church planters and church-planting initiatives—grew the initial participation of around 15 people five years ago to more than 115 people in 2018.
- At that gathering in 2018 a new Sent Network resourcing curriculum was launched to recruit, equip and prepare church planters for their task. This resource will be introduced at the Constituency Leaders Council in the fall of 2019 in Wichita and again at Kansas City 2019.

My prayer is that we can encourage and support these initiatives with our prayers, our encouragement, and, where necessary, our resources. This support will enable us to continue to realize our vision and fulfill God's purposes for people everywhere to become part of the body of Christ and the people of God.

Creating a church-planting culture

By Mauricio Chenlo, Mission Network minister for church planting

Antonio was the name of my grandfather on my mother's side. He grew up in Potenza, Italy, during the second world war. In 1946, he migrated to Buenos Aires, Argentina. He didn't bring much from Italy, just a few documents and a small suitcase with one shirt, a pair of pants, and worn-out shoes.

Most of the Italians migrating in those times became part of the labor force in the growing city of Buenos Aires. After a few years in Argentina, my grandfather became a skillful bricklayer in high demand by busy contractors. When I was 12 years old, Abuelo Antonio took me with him to work with his crew in his construction projects. He became a contractor himself.

I recall a situation in which he was very angry with sloppy workers laying the foundation for a new fancy chalet on the coast of Buenos Aires. "A level ground is everything," he said to the workers. "Use your levels and metrics to be sure you are doing the job right."

Likewise, when individuals, congregations, networks, or denominations seek to plant churches, a strong support system is invaluable. At the same time, the most well thought-out and sophisticated support system is not enough if the workers do not feel the call to be the seed carriers of the gospel. The environment and leadership culture in which one is trying to plant churches needs to be established on solid ground where church planting is a high priority.

A strong, enduring, and passionate church-planting culture precedes the structures and support systems. It is toward this goal that I have been working for the past 10 years as minister for church planting at Mennonite Mission Network.

I have become convinced that a solid church-planting culture is set by three key functional practices in raising up and equipping a team of church planters. These are systems of call, sustainability, and multiplication.

Systems of call

Entrepreneurial leadership

At the heart of any form of church planting are leaders who have been called to partner with God to create something out of nothing. This is a trait common to church planters. It is foundational for any sort of faith adventure of attempting to gather together a group of followers of Jesus.

Before calling his apostles, Jesus spent significant time shaping his own call and messianic identity. He was even tested by Satan in his call to be God's chosen messenger to bring in God's kingdom.

Jesus' followers who are called to start a new church are by nature of their call entrepreneurial people. The dictionary defines entrepreneur as "a person who organizes and manages any enterprise, especially a business, usually with considerable initiative and risk." Two key words need to be highlighted in this definition—*initiative* and *risk*.

In the last eight years in my role as a denominational minister for church planting, I have met a significant number of leaders who have taken risky initiatives. These were often regular folks without much knowledge of the risks they were about to face:

- A journalist in Colorado Springs responds to the growing numbers of Latino immigrants, and decides to start a Spanish-speaking congregation in partnership with an Anglo Mennonite church.
- A couple of professionals become involved with immigrant clients through their medical and nutritionist practices, and host a home Bible study group in rural Minnesota.
- A group of young artists work together to launch an art school for children, and are encouraged by the children's parents to start a gathering for worship.



Bishop L.W. Francisco and his wife, Pastor Natalie Francisco (on right), with the family of Calvary Community Church (C3), Hampton, Virginia, engage their local community in unconventional ways.

Significant risk factors and a great degree of creative collaborative thinking and practice were key ingredients to these experiences. It is always easier to begin a new project with the structures and security systems in place. There is not much risk in a job that comes with the security of a monthly check and paid benefits.

Missional peace church planters are entrepreneurial by nature of their call. The history of Anabaptism spreading around the globe is filled with examples of farmers, carpenters, businesspeople, and men and women in many other types of vocations and professions who responded to the call to start something “out of the blue,” wherever God had placed them. In today’s context, the work of the kingdom will greatly benefit from leaders who take risks and venture into new forms of being church.

Assessing the called

Most church-planting coaches and experienced leaders on the field strongly recommend assessing those leaders who feel called to plant a church. In the business world this is known as quality control. Initiating a new church is a serious endeavor. Groups wanting to experiment with church planting need to be prepared to lay solid groundwork



Participants at the Sent 2017 conference surround Miami church planter Hilda Zapata Palacios in prayer.

for this endeavor. That doesn't mean that one needs to get picky and filter leaders by their academic or professional backgrounds, but it is important to be sure that entrepreneurial church planters have a significant percentage of success in what they are doing. On the Mennonite Church USA website, we suggest several types of assessment depending on the type of call and circumstances.³

What does it take to be an effective church planter? Dr. Charles Ridley conducted a study of church planters in the United States and Canada. Based upon his research and subsequent field-testing, he developed a list of 13 characteristics that define effective church planters. For more than a decade, these have been used to select church planters. The top three characteristics are:

- Visioning capacity.
- Intrinsic motivation.
- Ability to create ownership of ministry.

We believe that these features are key to anyone trying to start something new. No matter what church model the leader is going to pursue—a missional radical community, a conventional program church, a house church, and so forth—assessing the skills of potential church planters will definitely add value to those involved.

³ See: <https://www.mennonitemission.net/churchplanting>.

Partnering with local congregations and conferences

A partnership is an arrangement in which parties agree to cooperate in the advancement of their mutual interests. There are strategic and spiritual reasons why church planters choose to partner with existing churches and church-planting networks. Partnering increases the possibilities of success for those who really want to become a presence of Christ in a new environment. Partnering is intrinsic to God's trinitarian nature and the church as a diverse body of believers.

You will be surprised by how many local churches, nonprofits, and urban agents will welcome your vision and desire to be a kingdom presence. It is important to have clarity of who your potential partners might be. This is why articulating your vision and sense of call are so important in communicating with your potential partners. Clarity in advance prevents unnecessary miscommunications and potential areas of conflict and disagreement.

Sustainability

Coaching

Statistics show that church planters have a much higher success rate when they are involved in intentional strategic relationships that help them in the development of a church plant. Coaches are a significant asset for those interested in pursuing a church plant.

Church-planting coaching evolves around gospel, personal, and spiritual conversations. Coaching church planters is not something merely centered on strategies and tactics. Church planters greatly benefit from coaching when they are facing discouragement, lack of motivation, conflict, and many of the typical challenges facing someone planting seeds of the kingdom.

Coaching relationships should happen naturally. Ideally, church planters will know specific leaders with whom they feel an affinity and who can serve as models for their ministry. If not, missional leaders from the larger system—conferences and national—will provide names of potential coaches willing to walk with new church planters.⁴

⁴ For additional resources on coaching, visit the Mennonite Church USA website under “church planting” at <http://www.mennoniteusa.org/what-we-do/holistic-witness/churchplanting/>.

Long-term planning and development

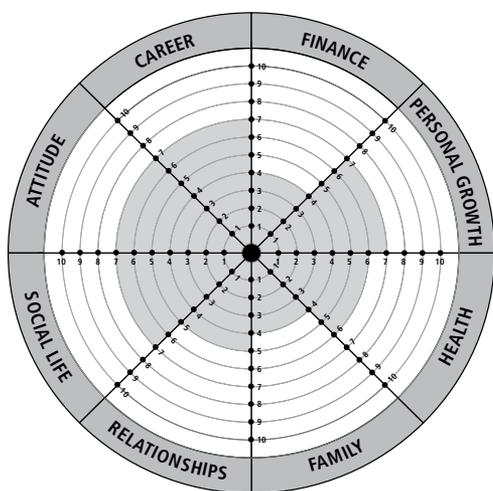
Most church planters I know generally resist the idea of long-term planning. This is due mainly to the nature of the work, as even Paul recommended: “Do not worry about anything” (Philippians 4:6). We live in a high-paced world and many balls need to be juggled simultaneously. I really enjoy traveling to my native country, Argentina, where I am refreshed in conversations with church leaders by a sense of total dependence on the Lord. But we live in America, where management is one of the leading brands of the culture. Church planters cannot escape this reality. They also have a busy life with family, work, and leisure time, and they need to take care of spiritual and physical wellness.

Efficient church planters normally set goals and use calendars to improve their work. I have used the Wheel of Life, an efficient tool

to discern proper use of time for different roles and responsibilities, with several leaders I coach. Most of them were not familiar with this tool and have resisted the idea of thinking carefully about their different responsibilities. But after getting used to it, many have expressed appreciation for using it consistently. There are several versions of the Wheel of Life; search for it online and you can pick your favorite.

Church planters also spend significant time developing their

donor base. They normally begin with their inner circle—family, friends, colleagues, etc. It all depends on the model one is using. If your project is quite informal and bivocational, you probably don’t want to stress the development factor. Another consideration is your life circumstances—marital status, age, financial obligations, etc. Even if you are not thinking of receiving any financial support from your base group, it is always wise to learn some of the basics of financial development. It will help you in different areas, like organizing special events and supplying new disciples with spiritual resources.



Bonding with a local network of missional peace churches

In the last few years we have seen a significant number of church-planting networks emerging around different visions, values, and practices. One way to get to know some of them is by attending the annual church-planting conference called Exponential.⁵ Though quite White/Anglo in composition and singularly evangelical in perspective, we have found it useful to connect with people who in key areas share a similar theology to Anabaptists.

You could also visit the sites of several networks and find out more about their values, practices and vision. At Mennonite Mission Network we are working to create a church multiplication network that will include active participation from conferences already involved in church-planting work or wanting to become more intentional about developing missional agenda.

Little has been written about church-planting networks that hold the vision of peace and justice as central values of their practices. One such group was ANEC—Atlantic Northeast Conferences—of Mennonite Church USA, which gathered on a regular basis to share about its church-planting work.⁶ We worked with ANEC to help organize three church-planting retreats on the East Coast with encouraging results. As of today, most conferences participating in ANEC have organized their own agenda to follow up with their own church-planting projects. If you are interested in learning more about any of these participating conferences, contact us or one or another of the conferences that best fits your interests and views.

Accountability structures

Another important practice for the call to initiate a new missional faith community is to have a set of relationships with people who might function as listeners, supporters, and accountability stakeholders in the work you are doing. Within Mennonite Church USA conference systems, there are groups that require church-planting committees or support groups to play this role.

⁵ See <http://www.exponential.org/>.

⁶ For more on the history of this network of conferences, see Gay Brunt Miller, “Atlantic Northeast Conferences: The Joys and Struggles of Partnership in Mission,” chapter 33, in *Fully Engaged: Missional Church in an Anabaptist Voice*, eds. Stanley W. Green and James R. Krabill (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2015), pp. 303-310.

In choosing accountability structures, leaders will want to be sure that members of the group selected will bring input and gifting that particularly shed light on blind spots. Accountable leaders are much aware of their blind spots. For example, if you know that one of your weaknesses is paying attention to details, you will probably benefit from someone in your support group who will fulfill that role. Finances and down-to-earth economics are some of the areas in which many church planters don't do well. Having someone to fill that gap will be a much-appreciated function.

Your support group is not the only circle from which you will benefit. Relating to your regional conference will be another important circle of relationships. Most conference systems have something in place to connect church planters to existing clusters of churches that meet periodically for fellowship, mutual support, shared-event coordination, mission festivals, financial matters, and other issues.

For assistance in this area, visit your regional conference website and find out if they have a church-planting or missional communities' commission. Learn how you can connect with this commission and develop an accountability group. If you have your own accountability system already in place, seek advice from your conference on how to include them in your circle.

Multiplication

Reproduce through discovery and sending new leaders

Most church planters share a natural passion for reproduction. Reproduction is part of their DNA. That said, it is not always evident that planters develop “discovery” and “sending” systems. There seems to be a trend to just move based on the agenda of accomplishing those goals that relate to the immediate needs of group development. Planters spend so much energy in getting their group started that little time and energy are left for thinking about how the new church plant might serve their context in reproducing leadership systems.

I believe that discovery is inherent to every planter. But discovery systems are not always a conscious practice in the ministry of planters. For example, churches wanting to plant new churches normally have solid ministries among youth and young adults. Calls are birthed and tested in the context of serving within the varieties of ministries



Photo by Mauricio Cheno

Secundino Casas and the church-planting team, *Seguidores de Cristo*, from Tampa, Florida.

displayed by the church. Yet in today's religious context, most young adults seem to be skeptical of institutions in general and the church in particular. That is why it is important to work side-by-side with young adults who are transforming the culture of calling.

I have met several young adults in the last few years who have an entrepreneurial spirit, but who will not function in the typical traditional systems and language of call currently in place in our churches. Many in this younger crowd are attracted to explore the social and cultural issues challenging our world today—environment and natural resources, growing local gardens, food sustainability issues, exploring diverse religious paths, resistance to violent means to solve social conflict, nurturing local communities, fair trade. The list could go on.

The church's discovery and sending initiatives need to be quite flexible and creative in dealing with this diversity of interests.⁷ Most young adults resist the idea of being straitjacketed or being pushed, boxed, or labeled. Nurturing entrepreneurial social and spiritual leaders is one of the biggest challenges we face today as established church institutions.

Networking new projects with established churches

Not all churches are missional and even fewer are interested in church planting. But the missional movement in America has produced a

⁷ It should be noted that Mennonite Mission Network does not plant churches or credential leaders, but rather connects church planters with Mennonite Church USA conferences and local congregations in the coaching process.

significant number of independent churches and networks of churches that are driven by planting new churches. Among Mennonites, few established congregations have included planting new churches in their bylaws and vision. Anabaptist entrepreneurial planters will struggle to find established Mennonite churches wanting to support them.

In many ways, planters attracted to the Anabaptist vision and church development will need to work side-by-side with pastors and leaders of established churches to spark a vision for expanding the presence of Mennonite churches. It is what Alan Hirsch has called “the forgotten ways.” Most of our churches and leadership have forgotten what brought them to life. Many have thought for decades—if not centuries—that the mission field is out there in some Third World land and all we need to do is to recount moving stories to constituents about how thousands of converts are being produced in those “poor” nations.

The landscape has changed, however, and younger generations of millennials are often less excited about international—sometimes stereotyped by youth and others as “colonial”—patterns of mission work. They are locally focused and want to see transformation happening right here in the homeland. Missional leadership and established churches will be revitalized, and find themselves greatly enhanced by connecting with the passions and visions of younger generations. As a result of these encounters, new opportunities to serve God’s kingdom purposes will most assuredly multiply.



Photo by David East

Naun Cerrato Lucoer, church planter of *Roca Viva* in Elkhart, Indiana, talks with others during a break-out session at the Sent 2018 gathering.

What kind of church are we talking about?

By Jason Boone, Mission Network coordinating minister for the Peace and Justice Support Network

Trying to determine what constitutes a peace church is tricky business. It would be straight-forward enough to make adherence to “Christian pacifism” the sole criteria. It sets a high bar and filters out many churches and communities who lean toward pacifism, but want to maintain lethal force as a last resort, just in case Hitler ever comes back.

There are interesting distinctions that can be made between violence and force, force and coercion, active and passive participation, and a thousand other nuances. But the main point is clear enough that no one is confused: Either you think what Jesus taught about nonviolence applies to all his followers, at all times, or you don't. We're not debating the validity of the respective sides, just pointing out that the line is clear.

But is this enough? As Mennonites move toward a vision of planting peace churches, is this the only standard we want to apply? Put differently, should we have higher expectations of a peace church than that it checks all of the “Christian pacifism boxes?” I think we should.

Pacifism was a bold stance for the first Anabaptists to adopt. It still is a bold stance to hold living in nation that mythologizes war and worships warriors. It remains a non-negotiable part of a peace church's identity. But a more robust understanding of shalom, mission, and the context in which we live requires peace churches to embrace

additional core elements as essential to their identity. Saying “no” to war will always be a central distinctive, but if our hopes for the church extend beyond its survival to its thriving, we must begin to hold other habits and disciplines in equally high esteem.

I propose five elements that would constitute a healthy, missional peace church. These are not new ideas in and of themselves. Many churches already embody these marks with varying degrees of emphasis. A missional peace church, in my view:

- **Makes discipleship central to its mission.** In the midst of all its activity, a peace church is a place for individuals to find, follow, and be shaped by Jesus. A peace church isn’t an exclusive society. It’s a place that welcomes people to join the community of believers.
- **Strives to be a living example of the God’s kingdom on earth.** A peace church, for example, does not just say it opposes racism, it strives to live out an alternative society where diverse cultures and perspectives worship and serve together. A peace church is concerned with walking the walk, not just talking the talk.
- **Works for the good of its community.** This is the positive side of peacemaking. One church may become involved in addressing gun violence if that is a problem in their community. Another church may become involved in supporting those struggling with opioid addiction. A peace church knows its context and neighborhood and looks for reasons to engage outside of Sunday morning.
- **Is committed to planting more peace churches.** Embedding a passion for planting churches into the DNA of new churches should be a priority for those committed to spreading the gospel and peace of Jesus.
- **Observes Christian pacifism in all aspects of its life and witness.** A simple rule of thumb: If you think it is sometimes necessary to kill people in order to follow Jesus, you are not a Christian pacifist. Members of missional peace churches are likely to disagree with fellow citizens on a wide range of issues, but they will do so graciously, “with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15).

There may be different or better things that should be characteristics of a peace church. If you think of others, be in touch and let’s talk. The conversation about how to best equip the church to proclaim the full gospel of Jesus is the most important one we can have today.

Coaching the church planter

By Sharon Norton, Mission Network co-director for Africa and Europe

Everyone needs encouragement when they take on a new challenge. They need someone who listens, who cares, who prays with them, and can help them find their path forward. Church planters are no different. Often seen as courageous people willing to start something out of nothing, one might think they are strong, fearless leaders who have everything together and can lead others. But we all have areas of weakness and places where we need to grow to become mature disciples of Jesus. Having a coach walk with a church planter or team can help meet those needs.

Coaching is becoming a more common practice in broader society and offers great ways of walking with people without being overly directive. Essentially, coaching is:

- Believing in your client.
- Practicing active listening.
- Asking open-ended questions that guide the client to taking actions that make sense.

Coaching is not telling a church planter what to do or pushing them to go one direction or another. Yes, a coach may have some life experience to share with the church planter from time to time, but it's much more about listening to God's heart for that person and helping them hear that voice themselves when they get stuck.

The coaching relationship can be a great sounding board for the church planter since there are so many unknowns in church planting.

- How do you decide which segment of the population you are focused on as a church?
- What type of church should it be?
- How do you get to know people of particular interest and focus?
- How will you find funds to buy equipment and materials?
- Who should be on your church-planting team?
- And on and on.

As church planters get started, they may find that the grand vision God gave them to start a church is a whole lot harder to implement once they start hitting roadblocks and obstacles. What does it mean when people don't respond to your well-intentioned outreach efforts? When your team has conflict and people quit? When unchurched people bring a lot of different issues with them that you have no personal experience with?

Even for those who have had seminary training, there is no way to adequately prepare for all the challenges a church planter will face. In those times, through coaching, the church planter can be led through a



Photo by Andrew Boddien

Olak Sunwar (second from left), Nepalese church planter of Living Water Community Church in Chicago, shares his experience during a workshop at Sent 2017.

process of discernment, exploration of possible solutions and potential obstacles that may present themselves, so that they can create a series of action steps that they feel good about.

Sometimes a church planter will realize that the problem or obstacle does not reside primarily *outside* of themselves, but has to do *with their own internal life*. They may have to deal with issues from their past that cause them to have difficulties in their current lives and relationships. One example is a church planter I know who had a strong need for perfection and especially how things looked on the surface. He would clean and organize and make the group's space look very beautiful, but then he would be angry that people didn't wipe their shoes or clean up their children's spills and generally messed up the space. At one point he finally realized that his need for perfection and his anger was hindering him from loving people. He needed to deal with that.

A common theme among church planters is feeling overwhelmed with all the need and the lack of people to help meet the needs. This is a common dilemma for many pastors and church leaders! A coach can walk with the church planter in sorting out priorities, finding ways to delegate and also to practice self-care. Making sure that your own needs are being addressed is absolutely essential or burnout will come. Church planting requires extraordinary faith, resilience, and perseverance in the face of multiple setbacks. Having an accountability partner like a coach can help the church planter develop a plan for nurturing themselves emotionally, spiritually and physically so that they remain able to serve.

Mission Network is committed to providing church planters in the Sent Network with coaches who will walk with them through the ups and downs of the typically rocky, hilly road called church planting. We believe that those whom God has called, God is also equipping. And we are pleased to offer this kind of service to our Anabaptist peace community planters.

Eight characteristics of successful new churches in urban settings

By Glen Guyton, Mennonite Church USA executive director

Urban ministry can be rewarding, but it comes with its own unique set of challenges. In urban areas you have a critical mass of people, cultures, and customs coming together. This does not mean they are coming together in synergetic harmony. You have class extremes—the rich and poor living in close proximity. Doctors and lawyers may live a few blocks from dock workers and bricklayers. There are also issues of communication. One neighbor may speak Korean; another may speak Spanish; and still another, Sudanese.

In addition, issues of social and religious heterogeneity need to be addressed before any relevant ministry can occur. While many churches need to learn how to preach the gospel to first-time seekers, can you imagine needing to do this in a room filled with former Catholics, Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists?

Yes, the density, diversity, and heterogeneity of the urban setting can be challenging, but there is an upside—namely, people. In the urban setting, there is never an absence of people. There are thriving multigenerational homes and people living on top of other people in an amazing amalgamation of cultures and understandings that form something distinct and new.

Often, because of the great needs and scarcity of resources in urban communities, there is a hunger for good news—a hunger for the gospel of peace. Urban dwellers understand that in order to survive, everyone must find common ground and develop new ways to live in harmony as one. Successful, thriving urban churches all possess several similar characteristics.

1. Identity

First and foremost, successful urban churches *know their identity*. In the midst of diversity, the church has to know its primary mission and the vision God has given it for the community. 1 Chronicles 12:32 illustrates the impact that wisdom has over brute force and power. When facing a time of war, 200 unarmed leaders with their relatives of the Issachar tribe were singled out from David's army. This small group of people understood the signs of the times and knew the best course for Israel to take. They are mentioned not because of their ability to fight, but due to their understanding of context. The successful urban church can clearly articulate its vision for anyone who asks. It is a prophetic vision that the community can identify with.



Sojourn Mennonite Church members Susan Goering, Pam Duncan, Zach Martinez (pastor), Megan Martinez, Margot Martinez, and David Diener attend a “dreamers” march in Fort Collins, Colorado. Zach is a peace church planter.

2. Spirituality

Successful urban churches have a *missional spirituality*. The missional church is not a theoretical concept to be discussed; rather, living and sharing one's faith are necessary tools for survival. The denseness of urban settings forces the church to reach out and touch the community. Leaders must rely heavily on the Holy Spirit to translate and interpret the gospel message in a way that transcends language and cultural barriers. In successful urban churches, missionality must manifest itself via a relevant word that fits the needs of the people. Talk is cheap, as some would say, but the word of God is transformative. The successful urban church must be able to share the gospel in meaningful and tangible ways.

3. Discipleship formation

Successful urban churches focus on *discipleship and Christian formation* for new believers. There is a strong relationship between evangelism and social connections in the urban context. Why? You need look no further than the social eruption resulting from racial inequality in places like Ferguson, Missouri. People in poorer urban areas need hope and positive role models. How do you end racism, the poverty mentality, and fratricide in the urban community? You end it through education



Photo by Gisselle Guity

Karen Martinez (left), leader of the Anabaptist Family West Palm Beach Church, engages with women in the community, witnessing and sharing the Gospel of Jesus.

and the gospel of peace. The message of Christ is necessary to combat the lies and unhealthy paradigms of pop culture and the world. Discipleship is by its very definition synonymous with discipline and self-control. Successful urban churches seek change, not from the Oval Office, but from helping new believers see that despite their flaws they are *imago Dei*—created in the image of God. Through discipleship and healthy role models, people are equipped for leadership within the community.



Mennonite pastors and leaders attending the Renewing Nations and Generations gathering meet together after a prayer walk outside the Nations Worship Center in Philadelphia. Pictured left to right: Paulus Thalathodi (Plains Mennonite Church), Fernando Loyola (pastor at Centro Alabanza de Filadelfia) and his wife Leticia Cortes, Charlene Smalls (co-pastor at Ripple), Emmanuel Villatoro (youth pastor at Philadelphia Praise Center), Danilo Sanchez (youth pastor at Ripple and Whitehall), HENDY Stevan (pastor at Indonesian Light Church), Chantelle Todman Moore (Franconia Conference Intercultural leadership coach), and Kiron Mateti (Franconia Conference board).

4. Diversity

Unlike homogeneous communities, successful urban churches *develop and relate to a diverse Christian community*, facilitating an intercultural fellowship of believers. The urban church is often an amalgamation of people with different expectations. Getting along under a single umbrella is not always easy, but successful churches figure it out. Diverse communities of faith gain a shared sense of grace and work on developing intercultural competencies. Competencies that can help dismantle systemic, cross-cultural, and intracultural racism. One key is that the diversity of the leadership of the successful urban church is typically a reflection of the people in the pews.

5. Interchurch partnerships

This goes hand-in-hand with successful urban churches *developing strong interchurch partnerships*. With so much diversity in the urban context, there is little time to focus on the many differences between groups. To quote



from Star Trek, “The needs of the many outweigh the [selfish desires] of the few.” To quote from Scripture, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few” (Matthew 9:37). Meeting great needs takes a number of great partners and a strong network of churches all working together—Anabaptists, evangelicals, independents, and others.

6. Holistic witness

Successful urban churches understand *holistic witness* in their respective context. For the church to survive, the people must survive. Better yet, when the people thrive, the church thrives. So ministry is not limited to preaching and teaching Scripture. The urban church ministry models the holistic ministry example set by Christ. Many urban churches, either alone or as a part of a network, are involved in the feeding and healing of the body through various programs. They are centers of social and political reform in the community. And they are often places that provide educational opportunities to help people climb the socioeconomic ladder, providing them with a sense of dignity. In addition, the urban church is a place of refuge for people when violence, disaster and injustice infringe upon the community.



Photo by Jolene VonGunten

Berea Mennonite Church in Atlanta, Georgia, has created a church community farm on their property called Oakleaf Mennonite Farm, with strong ties to the neighborhood and surrounding metropolitan area.



Photo by Andrew Bolden

Jaime Cázares (right) is a church planter and former pastor of *Iglesia Menonita Casa Betania* in Newton, Kansas. Currently, he serves as church planter with *Aposento Alto* in Wichita, Kansas.

7. Stewardship

Successful urban churches have sound *stewardship practices and knowledge*. They understand how to manage money and inspire good stewardship in the community. The successful church and its leaders put into place sound financial practices, operate with a measure of faith, and teach the principle of reaping and sowing. The church can help its members in practical living and education on how to manage personal finances, moving people in the community from a mentality of poverty and consumerism to one where needs are met with generosity. Successful churches can thrive even in an impoverished context because transformation begins to happen in the minds of the people. As the apostle Paul counsels, “Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect” (Romans 12:2).

8. Leadership development

Finally, successful urban churches have a plan for *leadership development*. Through mentoring, education, entrepreneurship, and sound management practices, the successful urban church continues to grow and thrive. In the garden of Eden, God told Adam and Eve to be

fruitful and multiply. Successful ministry recreates itself. It multiplies and expands its reach within the community. New leaders are trained and there are healthy opportunities for leadership internships and succession. The tools of success are not consolidated in one person or personality, but dispersed throughout the congregation. The leadership knows and understands how to utilize the gifts of others to maximize the effectiveness of the organization.

Every successful urban church may not possess all of these characteristics, but the majority of churches will be working toward efficacy in most of the categories listed. People often think that the miracle of the loaves and fishes is about making a bunch of fish sandwiches out of a few items. The miracle is actually in the preparation:

- Jesus evaluated the resources at hand.
- He got the people to sit down and organize themselves to prepare for the miracle.
- He trusted God to make it happen.
- And he had trained disciples in place to meet the needs of the people once God had delivered.

That is urban ministry at the core. If nothing else, the successful urban church understands that before God will take you to the next level, you have to be prepared for the journey.



Mauricio Chenlo presents the Sent vision to the Mountain States Mennonite Conference 2017 assembly.

On replanting a struggling congregation

By Matthew Shedden, pastor of Defiance Church, Glenwood Springs, Colorado

As I enter my fourth year of working to revitalize—or replant—a struggling congregation, it has given me a chance to look back at some of the lessons I've learned.

Let it die

One of the biggest struggles I've found in church revitalization is letting past programs and events die. It is not uncommon for congregations to still live with events and boards that served the church as they once were. To host a fair-trade sale when the congregation was younger and fuller was a great gift. However, over time what once brought joy has now become a chore and drain on congregational life, which makes it hard to see other things for the future. Our congregation was lucky that another local church was willing to take on our local sale so that it continued in the area, but freed our congregation to look toward new ideas and a different future.

Don't wait for kids

One of the things that helped bring us forward the most was not waiting until we had enough kids to start children's ministries. While people visited our church, we didn't want to promise them that someday we'll have those things and that they should just bear the waiting with us. Instead, we took seriously the faith formation of the few kids we

already had and started a kids church for them. Those families weren't there every Sunday, but we made sure it was ready each Sunday so that families would see that we do care about them now, not someday when they and others really commit.

Fixing structure helps, but it doesn't solve

As I have chatted with several leaders in the same boat, many tried to tackle an outdated and bloated constitution that made decisions difficult and made hang-ups for the congregation. So they decided to invest time and energy into changing the structure to allow for life and a different future. While sometimes this work is necessary, it mistakes solving a structural problem for real progress. What works better is empowering some leaders to work free of constraints to address problems and bumps to help new life emerge. When new life *does* emerge, it is better to tackle structure because you have a better sense of what the shape and needs of the congregation might look like.

No shortcuts

The biggest lesson I learned is that like most of life there are no shortcuts. The work of revitalizing a congregation and changing a culture takes time. I kept looking for a magic bullet that would open the door for us to jump instantly into the future. It took a friend to point out to me that even if a shortcut like that existed, I wouldn't be happy with the results. We wanted a deeper and sustainable growth. Losing the illusion that we would find that change pushed us deeper into prayer and relying on

the mysterious riches of God to lead us. Chasing simple solutions might be fun, but they are really just illusions of the real change you seek. It may be cliché to say, but it takes prayer and the work of God more than anything else.



Photo provided

Matthew Shedden, pictured here with his family, is pastor of Defiance Church.

The Sent Network

By Sandy Miller, Mission Network director for Church Relations

The Sent Network resource grows out of a desire to have practitioners share together on the journey of church planting. There are quality church-planting networks and resources available for people in ministry, but most are missing an Anabaptist perspective.

Some approaches promote the need for a core group of 30-40 people before opening the doors to a church plant. Considering the range of congregations in Mennonite Church USA, 30-40 people may very well be the size of an established church, so imagining that this many people are required to plant a church might seem overwhelming. Others focus on people in the margins that meet in city parks or abandoned buildings, living with or in close proximity to the people they minister to and meeting wherever there is space to gather. A very worthy model of church planting, yet difficult for the many rural congregations where members drive in from surrounding towns and counties.

In 2017, Mission Network Church Relations staff⁸ reached out to each Mennonite Church USA conference minister to talk about church planting, to inquire what their conference was doing in church planting, and to ask in what areas they could use help.

What was obvious in the results of these surveys was the reality that conferences had widely differing capacity for staffing and funding. Creating a peace church planting network would need to be flexible and adaptable, shaped by the interests and capacities of conferences in Mennonite Church USA.

⁸ The Church Relations team at Mennonite Mission Network relates to conference leaders and pastors in resourcing and equipping the church to be engaged in God's mission.



Photo by David Fast

Participants of the Sent 2018 conference.

There *were* some common things that conference ministers identified to Church Relations staff as potentially helpful. These included:

- A call for more networking across conferences.
- Help in igniting and increasing congregational passion for God at work in the world.
- Approaching others in culturally sensitive ways, especially with our growing immigrant population.
- Practical guidance on church planting, especially measurements for identifying and evaluating church plants.
- Coaching and mentoring for church planters.
- Anabaptist materials for leaders who have not had the opportunity to attend seminary.

The Church Relations team continued to move forward in considering what a denomination-wide church-planting system might look like. The Sent Network resource was born out of the efforts of Mauricio Chenlo, minister of church planting, and Marvin Lorenzana, director of the Missional Discipleship Initiative. They, along with others on the Church Relations team, are writing content for the Sent Network.

The Sent Network is set up in three phases—explore, equip, and send. Content is self-contained so that conferences can identify their needs without engaging the entire network. The content components identified are:

Explore

- The calling
- Individual and relational health
- Leadership gifts Ephesians 4—APEST
- Anabaptist identity

Equip

- Biblical foundations of mission
- Missional basics
- Missional discipleship
- Missional context



Photo by David East

Mission Network Church Relations representative Marisa Smucker talks with David Maldonado, one of the presenters at Sent 2018.

Send

- Forming a support network
- Re-planting
- Writing a church-planting proposal
- The launching plan

Some of the content will be available in a virtual manner to groups of interested people. Other components will be more conducive to gathering people together for a weekend learning retreat. Church Relations staff members are prepared to teach, coach, and network with Mennonite Church USA conferences and congregations. It is our desire to encourage individuals to act as missional Anabaptist church planters and leaders, prepared to engage in discipleship in such a way that it will be natural for leaders to be raised up and spawn new dynamic peace churches.

As we move into implementing these resources, we anticipate the subject matter may change and become more refined. We want to share our passion, experience and wisdom, and to learn with others as we walk together, responding to God's call. In our efforts, we hope to encourage the heart of conference ministers, pastors and lay leaders as we network throughout the denomination, inspiring a shared vision for creating Anabaptist communities of faith across the street and around the world.



Photo by Andrew Boddien

Sent 2017 attendees Hassan Dicks and Josias Hansen share their stories of ministry.

Shared theological and missiological commitments for church planting in Mennonite Church USA

The following shared commitments grew out of conversations about church planting at the fall 2013 meeting of the Constituency Leaders Council of Mennonite Church USA. During the following year, conference ministers, church planters, and coaches, as well as mission agency and denominational staff, participated in the drafting and editing of these commitments.

1. God is a sending God.

God loves the world and sent his son into the world, not to condemn the world but to save the world.

In church circles, we tend to forget that the object of God's love and redemptive purpose is not the church, but the world. God seeks to save the world from sin, injustice and evil. God sent Jesus into the world to free the world from darkness and to offer abundant life.

Jesus invites people to new life and draws them together to become kingdom communities, which he sends into the world.

The resurrected Jesus sends his friends into a broken, hurting world to

continue his work. Jesus calls and transforms people and knits them together as sisters and brothers who love each other and live in communities of grace, peace and joy. These communities are witnesses to God's new order where Jesus is Lord, in the midst of the crumbling old order of sin, injustice and domination. Jesus' followers carry on this task with a deep sense of humility, remembering that the church is a community of sinners being redeemed by God's grace.

We trust the Holy Spirit to form, guide and sustain these missional communities.

As the risen Christ sends his disciples, he breathes the Holy Spirit upon them. Missional communities are not formed by human intentions and effort alone. Instead, missional communities are yielded to the empowering and transforming work of God's Spirit that instructs, guides, and sustains them.

2. Visible kingdom communities are God's primary strategy for bringing healing and hope to every person and to the world.

Kingdom communities are God's primary strategy for reconciling a broken world.

Christians join God's mission in many ways—through marriage counseling, good preaching, letter writing campaigns, and acts of compassion, just to mention a few. But God's primary strategy for impacting our world is by birthing and nurturing kingdom communities. Like yeast in the dough, these communities permeate and transform the world around them. It is through the church that God wants to make known God's plan of reconciliation to the people and systems of the world (Ephesians 1:10, 3:10).

Kingdom communities live incarnationally.

In Jesus, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Likewise, Jesus-centered communities will enter deeply into relationships with their neighbors. Churches that are planted need not only to proclaim the good news, but to be good news. New churches will incarnate the reign of God through practices of mutual aid, love of enemies, and servant leadership. This will take new churches to places where sin, hatred, poverty, alienation, and oppression await redemption.

Kingdom communities engage their context with the good news of Jesus Christ.

Social, cultural, and geographical contexts are diverse by definition. Church planters will be students of the culture and will “learn the language” of their particular context. New church communities will look and act differently in different contexts. As apostles to the world, we engage our current changing contexts with Jesus’ whole gospel in creative and relevant ways.

When entering a new context, church planters will pay attention to what God has already been doing in that place. This includes approaching existing Christian communities with an open and charitable spirit, a desire to be in relationship, and a willingness to cooperate in God’s kingdom work.

Kingdom communities bear witness to the transforming power of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection.

Jesus empowers sinners to become children of God, members of a new spiritual and social order. Through word and deed, members of his body communicate God’s new possibilities with power and conviction. In and through Christian community, we and our neighbors encounter the living Christ who loves, forgives, and continually transforms us.

Kingdom communities make disciples and continue the work of Jesus in their setting.

Jesus-centered communities shape and form people to be more like Jesus. When they abide in Christ, they carry on the sin-forgiving, bread-breaking, enemy-loving work of Jesus, their Savior and Master. They invite those around them to join them in following Jesus in a community of faith. New church communities seek the welfare of the city where they are planted and seek to bless the community around them.

3. The church equips God’s people for planting kingdom communities. This involves:

Calling out church planters and testing this call.

Church planters sense a call to join with God’s Spirit in forming new worshiping communities. This call is tested and confirmed by their faith community and supporting or sponsoring congregations. Leaders

who are called to initiate new faith communities are willing to take risks and make significant sacrifices to pursue this calling.

Practicing spiritual disciplines and continued theological reflection.

Church planters are committed to grow in their faith through regular Bible study, prayer, spiritual accountability, and other disciplines. Church planting can be carried out effectively by those who have various levels of theological training. Ongoing study and training broadens one's understanding of God's reconciling mission in the world, strengthens one's skills, and deepens one's reliance on the transforming work of the Holy Spirit.

Forming teams.

Church planters are encouraged to form a team of coworkers. An effective team brings together many gifts and is able to connect with a range of people. Enduring, vibrant congregations that reflect the Spirit of Christ are often led by a team of people who share leadership roles, rather than by one charismatic and powerful leader. Care must be given to nurture this team as a discerning spiritual community and to work well with conflicts that naturally arise.

Entering partnerships and accountability.

New church plants find their place in the broader body of Christ for mutual support and accountability. These communities and their leaders intentionally nurture relationships with local congregations, area conferences, mission agencies, and denominational staff. Strategic partnerships enhance possibilities of success and provide opportunity for mutual blessing in pursuing God's kingdom vision.

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. What strikes you most as you read the essays in this booklet on church planting? What comments or chapters did you find the most intriguing? The most helpful in your own ministry? In the life of your congregation?
2. Mauricio Chenlo, Mennonite Mission Network minister for church planting, reports that there are currently 92 churches within the larger Mennonite Church USA family being planted or in formation. Are you a part of any of those? Would you like to be?
3. Has your small group, congregation, or district conference ever considered the possibility of branching out and forming a new faith community? Have you accessed the resources of Mission Network in that conversation, i.e., the Sent Network, the annual Sent conference on church planting, the materials on our website at www.MennoniteMission.net/churchplanting?
4. Church planting is a major theme in the book of Acts. But far from relating *all* of the acts of *all* of the apostles, Luke's story leaves us totally ignorant as to how churches were founded in Damascus (Acts 9:10), Galilee (9:31), Joppa (9:41), Cilicia (15:23), Alexandria (18:24-25), Ephesus (18:27), Ptolemais (21:7), Puteoli (28:14) and Rome (28:15). What kind of people do you think facilitated the birth of these communities? Tourists? Businesspeople? Gentile converts? "Tent makers?" Freed slaves? Jewish believers fleeing persecution?
5. Do you know of faith communities coming into existence "under the radar?" Are you part of such an effort? As a visionary Sunday school class in your congregation? In your neighborhood? In your own living room? Would you like to be?
6. Are you feeling God's call to explore a new adventure in seeing a body of believers come to life? Who else that you know might be interested in that conversation? Who might serve as a coach or mentor?

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www.MennoniteMission.net/ChurchPlanting.

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- No. 2** James R. Krabill, *Does Your Church “Smell” Like Mission? Reflections on Becoming a Missional Church* (2003).
- No. 3** Donna Kampen Entz, *From Kansas To Kenedougou ... And Back Again* (2004).
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- No. 5** Peter Graber, *Money and Mission: A Discernment Guide for Congregations* (2004).
- No. 6** Craig Pelkey-Landes, *Purpose Driven Mennonites* (2004).
- No. 7** James R. Krabill and Stuart W. Showalter, editors, *Students Talk About Service* (2004).
- No. 8** Lynda Hollinger-Janzen, “A New Day in Mission:” *Irene Weaver Reflects on Her Century of Ministry* (2005).
- No. 9** Delbert Erb and Linda Shelly, *The Patagonia Story: Congregations in Argentina and Illinois Link “Arm-in-Arm” for Mission* (2005).*
- No. 10** *Together in Mission: Core Beliefs, Values and Commitments of Mennonite Mission Network* (2006).*
- No. 11** James R. Krabill, editor, *What I Learned from the African Church: Twenty-Two Students Reflect on a Life-Changing Experience* (2006).*
- No. 12** Ryan Miller and Ann Graham Price, editors, *Together, Sharing All of Christ with All of Creation* (2006).*
- No. 13** Michael J. Sherrill, *On Becoming a Missional Church in Japan* (2007).*
- No. 14** Alicia Horst and Tim Showalter, editors, *BikeMovement: A Mennonite Young Adult Perspective on Church* (2007).*
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- No. 24** Paula Killough, *The "M" Word: My personal awakening to God's work* (2017).*
- No. 25** Brad Roth, *Growing the church in the rural neighborhood* (2017).*
- No. 26** James R. Krabill, editor, *God's miracle in Mongolia: Celebrating 25 years in partnership and ministry* (2018).*
- No. 27** Lynda Hollinger-Janzen, editor, *Food with love: Superflour transforms communities in Nepal* (2019).*
- No. 28** James R. Krabill, editor, *Creating an Anabaptist church-planting culture* (2019).*

*Available in Spanish.

Creating an Anabaptist church-planting culture

New faith communities do not fall out of the sky. They generally emerge slowly through the Spirit-guided vision, sweat, and intentional effort of followers of Jesus who believe that giving birth to new communities is, as Stanley Green puts it, “an essential part of our spiritual DNA as the body of Christ” (p. 1). The series of essays in this booklet cast a vision for church planting that takes seriously the obstacles one might face; the need for planning, networking, and coaching; and the specific goals and commitments required to see a result where the Spirit of Jesus and key Anabaptist values are evident. Readers will be challenged to consider participating in a church-planting initiative and are introduced to a variety of resources that could make such an effort happen.



James R. Krabill served for 42 years with Mennonite Mission Network in Europe and West Africa, and in recent years as an administrator for the agency’s global ministries. He is an author, speaker, and teacher on topics of mission, world Christianity, and global worship, and serves as a core adjunct professor at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary.

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