

## Church Planting – Local Churches Should Take the Lead!

I had the privilege of helping to plant Kentwood Community Church (KCC) in 1979 and to serve that congregation for over 30 years. One of the things I'm most thankful for is our involvement in giving birth to 10 additional churches – one in Atlanta (now called 12Stone), and the rest in the Grand Rapids area. I believe every healthy church will have a “multiplication” dimension to it, and that the best church planting happens at the initiative of a local church or churches.

In contrast to the creation of venues (which also is a valid expression of a missional church) KCC chose to be involved in church planting because:

1. We had the benefit of being part of a strong regional judicatory (The West Michigan District of The Wesleyan Church) which created a church planting culture, so we had a context into which healthy autonomous churches could be birthed.
2. Church planting allows for greater uniqueness – none of our 10 church plants resemble each other. Whether a church plant in the core city working with the marginalized poor, or a church plant in a very religious but nominally Christian suburb, or a hip hop church led by a former gang member, these are not “cookie cutter” churches. And different churches reach different people.
3. For leaders who have both leading and teaching gifts, a church plant (vs. venue) allows for the greatest expression of their entrepreneurial capabilities reach.

Here is the process of “parenting” that KCC followed:

1. We incorporated church planting into our vision and strategies. Affirming the biblical foundation and evangelistic effectiveness of church planting, we identified areas in the Greater Grand Rapids area that would benefit from a new church, seeking to match potential planters (who had already been affirmed through an assessment process) with a community context that best fit their passions, personality and giftedness.
2. We invited these church planters to cast vision to the KCC congregation, and invite our church family to be involved in praying, giving and going. Thankfully, in most cases we were able to send out a core of believers to join the planter in establishing a new church. Most critical to a church plants success is the right planter...followed by the right group of people to form the core of the new church plant.
3. When the time came for the public services of the new church to begin, we prayed over and commissioned both the church planter and the core in our weekend services, giving one more welcome to those who in the congregation who may feel led to join them. Part of the commissioning was to bless the faith of those stepping out to be part of the church plant, and to “release” them by ending my relationship with them as their pastor and commending the church planter to them as their new pastor.
4. We kept KCC updated on the church plants progress, and used those updates to continue to support them in prayer.

Healthy churches reproduce – is it time for your church to display faith and generosity in this way?