

CoachNet® Executive Summary

Church Planting Forum, June 5 with Ed Stetzer

Introduction

Through our Planter Community, Dr. Ed Stetzer hosted an online forum on June 5, 2006 to discuss the planting of “missional” churches.

Participants

Twelve participants from our Planter Community signed into the forum and posted replies, although it was not clear whether additional members read material but did not post information. In order of login, the participants included:

- **Bob Logan**, *Executive Director of CoachNet International Ministries*
- **Ed Stetzer**, *Missiologist and Research Team Director at the North American Mission Board in Alpharetta, GA and co-pastor of Lake Ridge Church in Cumming, GA. Author, professor and church planter*
- **Zack Newsome**, *Initiating a missional community in Phoenix, Ariz.*
- **Patrick Ferguson**, *Director of Church Planting Solutions*
- **Charlie Worley**, *Regional Minister with the North American Baptist and a church planting leader*
- **Evan Drake**, *Communications Specialist of CoachNet International Ministries.*
- **Jeremy Dunlap**, *Former political campaign advisor turned pastor, considering church plant in Nashville, Tenn.*
- **Kermit Wilson**, *Associate Director of Indiana Ministries for the Church of God*
- **John Teeling**, *Connecting Pastor in Charlotte, North Carolina. Interested in church planting.*
- **Runette Litzenberger**, *North American Division Evangelism Institute*
- **David Limiero**, *Church planter in Bakersfield, California*
- **Tom Herrick**, *National Director for Church Planting for the Anglican Communion Network*

Structure

The 1-hour, “live” forum was conducted through a message board formatted web page. To focus the time better, the forum was broken into four segments:

- 5:00-5:15pm: What does "missional" mean? How is it distinctive?
- 5:15-5:30pm: How far is too far when engaging culture?
- 5:30-5:45pm: Share insights and questions from your own experience.
- 5:45-6:00pm: Final reflections

Content

The following content includes key ideas and quotes collected from the forum. Participants logged more than 130 posts in 1 hour.

What does the word “missional” mean? How is it distinctive?

- Definition of “missional.” Stetzer identified three values of a “missional” church: Incarnational, Indigenous, Intentional. Here are his descriptions of each type:
 - **Incarnational:** Missional churches are deeply connected to the community. The church is not focused on its facility, but is focused on living, demonstrating, and offering biblical community to a lost world.
 - **Indigenous:** Churches that are indigenous have taken root in the soil and reflect, to some degree, the culture of their community.
 - **Intentional.** Missional churches are intentional about their methodologies. There are scripturally commanded requirements about church, preaching, discipline, baptism and many other biblical practices. Church and worship can't take just any form. In missional churches, those biblical forms are central, but things like worship style, evangelism methods, attire, service times, locations, and many other man-made customs are not chosen simply based on the preference of the members.
- Principles guiding the idea of “missional” churches.
 - **Biblical principles** appear throughout scripture, Kermit Wilson said: Great Commandment Lifestyle Matt 22, Great Commission oriented Matt 28, Biblical Community Practiced Acts 2, Equipping Believers to Engaging Culture Eph 4, Sending Out Believers to Engage Culture Luke 10
 - **Go and be sent.** “For too long we have focused on fixing up the barn to get the wheat to harvest itself... it is not working. It is time to get into the harvest,” Stetzer said.
 - **Organic versus missional.** Charlie Worley wondered how to explain the difference:
 - If you mean the Neil Cole house church model, that can be missional,” Stetzer said, “but I think only in places where house churches are missiologically appropriate... and that is not everywhere, it would appear, if we look at sociology and history.”
 - Stetzer said the house church model is biblical, but it might not fit the culture. “If we are in a culture that does not respond to house church (Korea), I think it would be an odd approach to use,” he said.

How far is too far when engaging culture?

- Summary of the problem. “Too many church planters start the church in their head and not in their community,” Stetzer said. “They come with preconceived notions, things they have always wanted to try, ideas they picked up at a conference, and strategies they were never allowed to use.” The challenge is to be culturally understandable while being countercultural, he said.
 - Calling to a culture. Kermit Wilson and Stetzer agreed that a calling is “not to a vocation, it is to a people and a mission.”
 - Is the concept of calling biblical? Here are several stories from scripture participants cited:
 - Old Testament Prophets, Jesus looking at Jerusalem and weeping, Paul sending out Timothy to a people and a place.
 - Paul spoke of his passion for Spain. He considered himself an apostle to the gentiles. He has a specific call to Macedonia.
- Practices that effectively engage culture
 - **Walk the streets.** “I encourage planters to walk their neighborhoods, streets and place of public gathering asking the Lord to give them His eyes and heart for the people,” Kermit Wilson said. “I think God needs to break us before we will break the spiritual DNA of a culture.”
 - **Listen.** Bob Logan said this was one of the most important practices taught in his CP Training.

- **Learn about the leaders.** “One thing that was a huge help to me in engaging the culture,” David Limiero said, “was to join the local Chamber of Commerce’s leadership program. We spent one day a month for ten months learning about the major areas of our community and interacting with key community leaders.”
- **Don’t forget the mission.** Fight the temptation to live in our own bubble and miss opportunities, Tom Herrick said. “As for how far is too far,” he said, “that’s where we can’t forget what we’re about. If we remember we’re on a search and rescue mission, then we won’t forget that we’ve got to come back and bring folks with us!”
- **Be authentic.** Community takes work and most of us are lazy, Stetzer said. “Honestly, most people who say they want authentic community really just want a group of people to shout “Norm” when they walk in the room.”
- **Find a “man of peace.”** “It seems as if getting to know these people provides you not just with the keys to understanding a local culture, but a personal guide,” David Limiero said.
- Stetzer’s steps for engaging culture.
 - **Understand yourself.** That includes confirming God’s call, falling in love with the people, dying to self and examining one’s readiness to lead.
 - **Seek to understand the community.** Study census and demographic information, review the community’s history, talk to local experts and make friends with area residents who can serve as interpreters of the community.
 - **Understand other churches in the area,** including non-Christian religious groups. Study what successful churches are doing, he suggested. “Who’s growing and why?”
 - **Understand the people.** Study how typical residents dress, how they learn, what music they like.

Insights from participants’ experience

- Obstacles to planting “missional” church in North America
 - **Ourselves.** “When we go outside our culture,” Patrick Furgerson said, “it’s easy to admit we don’t know the best ways/practices. But in our own culture we assume we do know but really are still blind. Prayer has got to be huge for us as church planters.
 - **Tradition and Technique.** “Tradition tells you to do it the way you always have. Technique tells you to do it the way that the nifty church in another place did it,” Stetzer said.
- Evangelism and community
 - **Misunderstanding and rejection.** The conversion process is taking longer in North America, Stetzer said, because “People are more skeptical and less aware of the gospel than in generations past. So, I see two ways people turn away from the gospel- a misunderstand or a rejection: both are often best addressed in a community.”
 - **Christian versus covenant communities.** Stetzer says two types of communities are important in a “missional” church, Christian and covenant: “Christian community: where unbelievers can and do partake... and while there they consider the truth claims of Christ. Covenant Community: the community of committed believers in church covenant... that is something that non-Christians cannot be a part of.”
 - **Be authentic,** form genuine relationships, and remember that you’re paid to pray, participants said.
 - **Discover existing networks.** “It is amazing to me that there are a lot of contexts where people already know and trust each other,” Stetzer said, “so the gospel can naturally flow along those relational lines.”

- Questions to ask. Stetzer had several questions to ask people in a culture:
 - **What are the 3 best kept secrets about this community?**
 - **Who are three people that love this community and understand the people who live here?**
 - **What changes do you see on the horizon for this community?**
 - **What are some of the most significant events that have taken place in this community's history?**
 - **Can you tell me any community needs that are going unmet in this area?**
- Assessments
 - Several participants conducted needs assessments in their communities: Patrick Furgerson said he conducted a community needs assessment, and David Limiero said he got an assessment from the local United Way.

Final Reflections

- Suggested future topics/hosts
 - Potential topic: "Why has North America been the last place on earth to see true church multiplication, i.e., church planting movements? And, what can be done to unleash the power of God through church planting multiplication?"
 - Encourage more resourcing and post these as a follow-up on CoachNet.
 - How about a dream session where we look into the future of church planting and ask "What if...?"
 - Bob Roberts as a host

Suggested Resources

Several resources were suggested during the forum:

- The writings of Roland Allen
- *The Church of Irresistible Influence* by Robert Lewis and Mr. Rob Wilkins
- *Shaped by God's Heart* by Milfred Minatrea
- *Perimeters of Light* by Elmer L. Towns and Ed Stetzer
- *Beyond Church Planting* by Robert E. Logan and Neil Cole
- The writings of Randy Frazee and Neil Cole