

# What If Churches Started Churches?

Jim Elliff

I've been in some churches that should not take the advice I'm about to give. They are much too weak, or sinful, or distorted in their beliefs and practices to be in the business of starting *anything*. It would be better for them to concentrate on the simple things, like breathing good spiritual air or eating good biblical food.

But good churches should add "church starting" to the list of ingredients that define their health. In the same way that healthy families delight in having babies, healthy churches expect and relish birthing other churches.

Seven ways your church might start churches:

- New churches may be started from scratch through the work of a church planter. This is the way it happened through Paul, the consummate church planter. Hopefully, each church will either raise up missionary church planters modeled after Paul, or at least support such people through their gifts. That's number one.
- We may also start churches by cell division. As a healthy church grows to a certain size, the church may pre-arrange a new church start in another part of town. Sending 50 or 100 people, or even several hundred, if the church is larger, can be a wise way to begin a new work.
- Churches may also be started by training church planting teams within the local congregation who will then be sent to another location to begin a work starting with their own families. This team could be raised up from within the church, or the church could bring in interested leaders who would like to comprise the team.
- A church may extend itself through house churches into neighboring towns or sections of a larger town. Often people drive long distances to attend a good church. At some point, these people could be involved in starting a remote congregation, meeting in a home or rented building. The pastor(s) of this new work may be on the pastoral team of the mother church permanently, or temporarily, depending on what God makes clear. The new work could participate with the larger work in some of its activities. If the new church is a house church network, it



may begin cell-division as it grows, creating many house churches in the new area over the years.

- Churches may be started through a multi-campus approach. Shared leadership and resources may either be a permanent or temporary part of the work. The new work may remain a part of the whole in a variety of ways, or may become an independent work when God directs.
- Families may be asked to move to another town, changing jobs, in order to begin a new work. This is not a new idea, but has been done at various times in the history of the church.
- You may renew a church that has become, for all practical purposes, unviable without outside help. People from the healthy church may be sent into the struggling assembly for its renewal.

Well, you get the idea. You must consider all the options you can think of, ask God for leadership, pay attention to the circumstances, and search the Scriptures to see what is the most biblical plan (there are strengths and weaknesses to each of the plans above) . . . but above all, you *must* plan and act. Get church planting into your church's bloodstream.

From the start of every new work, develop a kingdom mindset that causes the new fellowship to prepare, from the beginning, to replicate itself rather than building a little kingdom of its own.

Christ said, "I will build my church." Ultimately, this is all about His will. If you ask Him, however, I'm sure you will find that He is quite happy to include *you* in carrying out His master plan.

I once knew a couple who determined not to have babies. They did not have to make this decision for any physical reason, but just because they did not find babies very convenient. Now they are older. No one takes care of them, no one greets them at holidays, no one calls to share the various stages of life, no one is there to love and to be an object of love. They have not added to the number of believing families in the world through their offspring, nor demonstrated what physically normal families should do for others to emulate. Don't let your church be like them.