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# THE STORY

**E**very church planter has a story. Mine was, essentially, *“Here are one hundred people, go plant a church.”*

With those words, my church planting adventure began, changing the course of my life forever. Let’s not get ahead of ourselves, however. God called me to be a church planter in 1992, proving by the fact that He called me and the way He called me that He does have a sense of humor. Who in their right mind would say to a recently graduated, wet-behind-the-ears pastor, *“We want to start a church, and you are the one to lead it.”*

## **So here is my story.**

I had just graduated college, and the conference where I was hired had assigned me to a large church (about 500 attending) in Washington, DC. Since it was my first pastorate, I fully expected the usual four-step pattern to follow:

- Two years learning with a senior pastor who would baby-step me and mentor me
- Two years at seminary, where I could solidify my theological education
- Start with a small district with established churches, where I could learn how to lead on my own
- Two years after that, ordination

### **God had other plans. Doesn't He always?**

My senior pastor told me (didn't ask, just said) that the way to grow the kingdom was not through addition by baptism but through multiplication by planting. He said we were going to plant a church further down in the city.

The system he used to select the prospective members was simple. He passed out cards one Sabbath morning, asking for volunteers to join the plant. Around a hundred people said Yes. Some of the best leaders, the most committed disciples in the congregation, said they were willing. He did not try to talk any of them out of it. At the next church board meeting, he confronted board members who lamented the fact that some of the best leaders would be leaving. This is how we grow the kingdom, he said.

We had a goodbye ceremony at the big church, where they prayed for those of us who were leaving, and we embarked on this great adventure.

It all started with one phrase. *"Here are one hundred people, go plant a church."*

We found a Unitarian Universalistic church that rented to us, had a couple of meetings to elect officers, and off we went. It was 1992, and all the processes of team development like having a core group for a year and other launch strategies had not been perfected then.

I was in over my head. I knew it, God knew it, and most important, the people knew it. But most of them decided to follow me anyway. God forgot to tell one of my elders that I was in charge, and that story is coming up here soon.

## THE STORY

That first year we grew by a hundred people. It only took a while until I became fantastically attached to this new experience. As a leader group, we sat down and developed a strategic plan for four years, bonded as a young group of leaders, and saw new people come every weekend. We were growing!

Even though I was the lead pastor of this group, I was still a part of a district, which meant I had a senior pastor over me. I had close to free reign to lead as God led me to, except in one area, and that was expansion.

Eighteen months into this wonderful adventure, the senior pastor called me into a meeting and said, *"We are going to plant another church in Silver Spring, and you will leave the new church, take thirty from yours and thirty from mine, and plant church number two."*

Wait, what?

I was discouraged and disappointed, but I reluctantly obeyed. Sometimes we believe that God only honors willing obedience. I also believe He honors reluctant obedience. I identify with the disciples when they told Jesus, in a semi-sarcastic tone only a fisherman can perfect, *"Lord, we have been fishing all night, and nothing, but if you say so . . ."* Reluctantly and obediently I went.

We started on day one with sixty people. Six months later, we lost twenty because of some worship service "improvements" we made. In the leader group we had a core belief that worship should be enjoyed, not just endured, and some were not feeling that. We are not talking crazy stuff. No one was dancing in the aisles. We just raised the level of excellence in that blended service to make sure we were intentional, spiritual, and excellent. That year we grew by a hundred new people.

I led that church until I went to seminary two years later. After seminary, we planted a church again, and I have either planted, led church planting, or supported the planting of congregations throughout my pastoral life.

I want to make a confession. I am biased. I am biased for church planting because I have seen what a blessing it can be, although many times the road to the blessings goes through a town called pain.

Church planting is not for the faint of heart. It is pain, gain, worry,

elation, deep disappointment, extreme joy, hurtful comments, and satisfaction all wrapped up in one.

One of the realities of planting a church is the lifelong leadership lessons it teaches you. Over the years I have shared some of these lessons with other church planters and have seen them avoid some of the same mistakes I made. That has brought joy to my heart and probably to the people they led.

The reason I wrote this book is to put on paper what I have learned about church planting after being involved in it for more than 25 years. I pray these lessons are a blessing to you. This book is not so much about the nuts and bolts of church planting—it comes from a different place. If any one of the principles explained herewith is helpful and makes you a better planter, parent, pastor, or leader, it will be worth it.

The book is meant to show you that even though at times it is painful, church planting is the best, most rewarding, awesome, difficult ministry you'll ever do for the kingdom of God.

Every church planter has a story. Mine was, *“Here are hundred people, go plant a church.”*  
What's yours?