

CHURCH PLANTING: *“If I ever did it again, what would I want up from this time?”*

Recently here in North Alabama, I met with 7 successful church planters who are now 5- 10 years or more outside their initial launch. We were designing a training strategy for our annual conference. We are committed to starting 26 or more new faith communities a year, so we wanted a dynamic and relevant track for raising up and training future planters.

So we started with this big question and it led to a flurry of discussion and ideas. Here were the nuggets that came from our discussion:

First, I would want to understand how to build disciple-making communities. Not just new believers but strong followers living out their faith and into their spiritual gift.

Second, this time I would start early on with a professional coach that's a good fit for me. Not someone the conference has assigned but someone who I choose and get approved by our conference office.

Third, I would want to be a part of an ongoing academy for Congregational Development. I learn best from experienced pastors, passionate laypeople and my peers. I need to gather regularly to learn new ideas, share what is working in my setting and what is not working.

Fourth, I would start with clear lines of accountability and have a group of peers where I could be transparent and called out when I neglect my spiritual life, my spouse or family or are letting my ego lead me.

Next, I would want to start with a full, healthy team. This is more important than my location, the building where we worship or my marketing plan. The team assures success, makes my life better and keeps me in check.

And then, I would develop a vision plan, written and approved by the office of church development, and stick with it! Everyone in the launch team would have to buy into the vision!! This vision would include written strategies and measurable goals.

Very important - I would want a strong relationship with a sponsoring, partnering or mother church. They could share leadership, resources and a staff I could call on.

I would be intentional to be a networker among churches, social organizations, local churches, other pastors, community developers and local media.

I would learn to be an ongoing, entrepreneurial fundraiser. I would see the big picture of raising money as so much wider than just the offering plate. It could include foundations, other churches, & business ventures like a coffeehouse, cafe, and rentals.

This is not all-encompassing for starters. Yet it is where we would start. Looks like we need to use the first 12-18 months to simply prepare well for the launch. Amen!

Dr. Richard A. Hunter
Executive Director for New Church Development
The North Alabama Conference of the
United Methodist Church