

SBC Baptist Press - FIRST-PERSON: Iconoclastic church planting

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By Paige Patterson

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FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Both friends and detractors have sometimes alleged that I am a bit of an iconoclast. I plead perfectly guilty to the charge and add that my own observation of "conventional wisdom" on almost any subject is that it often suffers from little cogent thinking. The area of church planting is no different.

Initially, one must know that a new era has dawned in Southern Baptist life. More than 1,000 churches a year are being planted. This is exactly as it ought to be, heralding a magnificent new day for reaching people for Christ in those areas of our country where we have not done well in the past. But, I also believe that many of the popular myths about church planting are simply not so.

Below I have listed "Patterson's iconoclastic rules for church planting." To be sure, there is much more to it than this, but what I have seen proven all over the United States is that these 10 rules, if followed, make a remarkable impact on any area.

-- Get a field on your heart. Pray over that choice until God has spoken beyond any shadow of a doubt. If you are supposed to be in Las Vegas or in Tacoma or in Boston, once you know that God has placed that area on your heart, make every preparation to move there. Know all that you possibly can about the area, and get there as soon as you can after graduation! Regardless of counsel to the contrary, unless God tells you with certainty to abandon your covenant to prepare in school, do not begin your work until you complete your preparation.

-- Go to the field, if necessary, as a tentmaker. This noble approach to church planting was pioneered by none other than the Apostle Paul. He made it work by the grace of God, and so can you. If one needs the support of the North America Mission Board or of individual churches, there is nothing ignoble about such. Those organizations exist to assist, and every one of them that can be brought to bear is all together acceptable. But do not put yourself in a position, if you can help it, where you become too dependent upon anybody other than the Lord, and do not put yourself in a position where you have to fill out so many forms that an enormous amount of your time is consumed with record keeping and report making. This is one of the major mistakes made by church planters today.

-- When you get to the field, make a thousand friends -- many will ultimately become converts. Friend-making is not always easy, but it is always necessary. Spending the time to find people who will talk with you and become your friend is a worthy investment. They will lead you to others who will also become converts -- even sometimes when the original contact refuses to listen. Friend-making should constitute a serious part of each day, even if that is in connection with other activities.

-- Become chaplain of something -- the high school football team, the police department, the fire department or even a large industry or business in the town. All of these have people who are going through difficulties, and all of them welcome someone who can counsel their personnel and walk with them through difficulties. Just riding in a police cruiser as a chaplain one night a week will open the entire police force to you, to say nothing of those with whom they come in contact. Maybe a chaplaincy of some kind is not open, but you can develop a coffee house ministry to college students. In Fayetteville, Ark., where I served as pastor, I became the de facto chaplain for all of the bars up and down the main street. I never went in them by myself, since I wanted a witness to what I was doing, but I did develop a relationship with those men that enabled me to lead many of them, including one bartender, to Christ.

-- Determine in your heart that you will witness to at least 10 people everyday. The real reason church plants do not succeed is quite simple and nothing like as complicated as many would lead you to believe. They fail because we fail to pray fervently and to witness adequately. If you witness to 10 people a day, it only takes you ten days to witness to 100 people. If you witness to 100 people, you will inevitably lead somebody to faith in Christ, and the chances are that the number you win to Christ will begin to approximate 10 percent of those to whom you witness. Getting discouraged at the point of sharing the Gospel is the second biggest single failure of church planters.

-- So, what is the most devastating failure of church planters? Most devastating is the failure to pray. Remember that we serve a God who loves to hear from His children. My two granddaughters, Abigail and Rebekah, never hesitate to come to Papa and say "Papa, can you help me do this?" Guess what? I love them so much that no matter what I am doing, I turn from it almost immediately and devote myself to whatever they ask. They love me, depend upon me, and I love them. Your Heavenly Father is far more devoted to you. He welcomes you, and your prayers are described in the Old Testament as a sweet smelling savor in the nostrils of the Lord God. There is nothing that you do in a church planting situation that is more important than to appear frequently and stay importunately before the throne of God. When God hears His children pleading for His intervention in the growing of a church, He will not leave you to your own. He will

intervene.

-- Be a romantic with your wife and a disciplined lover of your children. Many a church planter becomes so busy doing what God has called him to do that he forgets that his first church and his first obligation is his family. Take time every week to spend happy fellowship time with your wife, and be the epitome and example of what it means to be a good father to your children. Love them, have time for them, be interested in them, and most of all, keep a good sense of humor about everything involving the entire family.

-- Teach the Bible and its answers to life's problems to your people. Many advocate different approaches, but remember that the pastor is supposed to be "apt to teach." What your people need is not psychological wisdom, 10 things to do when your neighbor refuses to mow his lawn, or moralistic little ditties. What they desperately need to hear is the Word of the Lord. Teach the Bible interestingly, even scintillatingly, illustrated in every way you can, and show how Jesus makes all the difference in the world in the task of dealing with people's problems. In a short time, your community will know that you are quite different from the average pastor; since biblical days, people have responded to one who teaches "with authority and not as the Pharisees do."

-- Never believe the lie that people are exclusively different in different sections of the countries. As my football coach, and maybe yours used to say, "those boys put on their britches one leg at a time just like you do." How very true. I have been in 85 countries of the world and have preached in all 50 states in the United States. One thing I have discovered is that people are people wherever you will go. They are sinners who need to be loved and who need to be saved. Some do not accept you readily, and to be sure, there are cultural differences. But I need only to remind you that everywhere the Gospel went in the first century, even if within the bounds of the Roman Empire, it encountered different cultures, where people did things differently, but the people themselves were exactly the same. And, they still are. So, simply do not accept the lie that people are different and that approaches have to differ radically. Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever.

-- From day one when you arrive on the field, begin looking and praying for a special helper who will work in music. Music is, in fact, the universal language, and the church that does not do well with its music in worship will be a church that struggles to reach the hearts of the people. So, as soon as you arrive on the field, begin searching for those persons that will assist you in this area.

On almost every point I realize that there is a certain iconoclasm, a

certain rejection of practiced ideas of church planting. But, we have seen these principles work again and again. Success lies in resolution, faith, prayer and the witness of the church planter and his family. Whatever you do, do not attempt such a thing unless you know beyond any shadow of a doubt that God has called you to do it; but if God has called, whatever you may think, do not make the mistake of believing the myths. Just follow your heart in the leadership of the Holy Spirit of God and give it everything you have. God will bless, and you will see a church spring up.

Church planting is not about administrative reports, monetary support or preconceived methods. It is about a Savior, a cross, an empty tomb, lost men and women, a compassionate heart, knees that evidence the march of prayer and a quiet determination to do something new and significant in gratitude to our Lord, who saved us. Do not buy into Willow Creek, the Purpose Driven Church or Paige Patterson's 10 rules. Learn from anyone who is godly, scriptural and not in a grand business with you as the customer. Be God's man. Elisha was a stark contrast to Elijah, and Isaiah was distinct from Daniel. Be God's servant and prophet in your context. Plant your church on biblical truth and methods and not on someone's program.

This will be the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary plan of church planting. Many of our students will go under the Nehemiah Project of the North American Mission Board. We are excited about that. Many will go with the help of local churches, including home churches, to assignments in church planting. We rejoice in that. But, I am also grateful that God is going to raise up many who have a heart to let those means of assistance help others while they themselves follow a prescription that is something like the one that I have herein promoted. May God bless them all as we attempt to reach our nation for Christ.

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