From Planting to Movements: The Role of City Networks
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Description: The purpose of this presentation is to explain and narrate the role of city networks in facilitating gospel renewal through movemental church planting. Relying on theory and practice, we will do our best to explain why church planting networks are critical to urban church planting movements.

Caveat: We are not movement experts or church planting professionals. We won’t offer you the last word on church planting, urban ministry, or CPMs today. However, what we hope to do is clarify what a movement is, how we are working towards it in Austin, and underscore the critical role of kingdom-minded networks in transforming the spiritual, social, and cultural fabric of a city. To that end we will cover four main areas: 1) Why a Network 2) The Vision of our CP Network, PlantR 3) PlantR Story and 4) Things Learned that contribute and Detract from Movement.

I. Why a Network?
A. Practical Reasons for a Network
1. Kingdom of God
   a. Bigger: It is bigger than we think. Bigger than our denominations, bigger than our theology, bigger than our methodology, bigger than our associations. If it is this big, then it behooves us to network with others in the kingdom for the kingdom.
   b. Stetzer: In his I3 address regarding churches that will be effective in 2025, Ed Stetzer outlined what will be the marks of the dangerous, successful church.
      i. "Dangerous" churches will learn to network together
      ii. “I believe the dangerous church will be networked--but I am hopeful it will not network with people who just do church like they do.” – Stetzer, “The Dangerous Church”
2. Relationship: Planters Need to Know and Be Known
3. Strategic Partnership: shared best practices
4. Resources: financial, coaching, etc.

B. Planting focused and Movement oriented – Church planters are typically church planting focused and rightly so. The highest calling on earth is to shepherd eternal souls, to preach, teach, share, and live the gospel among the people of God on the mission of Christ. Most of you have a vision statement that will never be fulfilled by your church alone. That’s okay but if we are to truly deliver on the largess of our visions and see God deliver on it, then we will need one another, other churches. If we want to transform entire cities and towns, then it will be necessary for planters to look beyond their churches to movements. An intermediate step between church planting and movement is a network

C. Theoretical Reasons for a Network
1. **Stetzer On Networks**: “At this point the most "successful church planting seems to be moving quickly from denominational structures to hands-on local churches and networks." This does not mean Denominations are uninvolved. In fact church planting is on the rise within denominations. But the majority of successful church plants are plugged into networks, and even denominations are partnering with networks as they seek to establish new churches.” – “Dangerous Church”

2. **Conversion and Community**: Rodney Stark
   a. Early Christian Movement
      i. “Within twenty years of the crucifixion, Christianity was transformed from a faith based in rural Galilee to an urban movement reaching far beyond Palestine.” Stark, *Cities of God*, 25
      iii. Stark is an agnostic professor of Social Sciences at Baylor University who has studied historic Xty from a sociological perspective to shed new light on the movement.
      iv. Dr. Kim and Moonies
      v. Stark calculates an arrhythmic that accounts for rapid growth by using the Mormon rate (40% per decade) to show that moving from 100 to 7 million is possible. - Stark, *Acts of Faith*, 116.
   b. Social Networks and Conversion
      i. **Relationships not Doctrines**: “It is important to realize several important things about doctrine and conversion. After conversion has occurred is when most people get more deeply involved in the doctrines of their new group...conversion is primarily about bringing one’s religious behavior into alignment with that of one’s friends and relatives, not about encountering attractive doctrines.” – Stark, *Cities of God*, 12
      ii. Now, we can debate Stark by saying that the people that nonXs were encountering were people who embodied an attractive doctrine, the doctrine of Christ, the person-renewing work of the gospel. But his point still stands in that it was not theological arguments that led to the rapid growth of early Christianity but caring relationships.
      iii. **Strong social ties** are what contributed to the rapid growth of Early Christianity: “By now dozens of close-up studies of conversion have been conducted. All of them show that social networks are the basic mechanism through which conversion takes place.” P. 13
We need churches with strong social ties that extend well beyond the boundaries of their buildings and families into neighborhoods and the city. In short, we need more Missional Communities not Programmed Sunday Events.

3. Social Capital and Networks of Networks: Robert Putnam
   a. *Bowling Alone* has traced the decline of community in the United States—stating that over the past 25 years, attendance at club meetings has fallen 58 percent, family dinners are down 33 percent, and having friends visit has fallen 45 percent.
   b. Social Capital – refers to the creation of “social networks, norms of reciprocity, mutual assistance, and trustworthiness.”¹ In other words, it creates communities built on trust that seek the common good. The strength of social capital is that social networks that result benefit those involved and those not involved. For instance, criminologists have shown that crime declines in a neighborhood when neighbors get to know one another well, which benefits both the residents who participate in connecting and those who don’t.
   c. *Better Together* Putnam’s follow up study of successful communities with high social capital. He notes six common factors: 1) Time 2) Local Focus 3) Networks w/in networks 4) Storytelling 5) Goal besides Social Capital
      i. “Social capital is necessarily a local phenomenon because it is defined by connections among people how know one another.” ⁹
      ii. Smaller is better. “creating networks of networks, that is, by nesting smaller groups within larger, more encompassing ones.” ¹⁰

Creating a Church Planting Network facilitates a network of networks, tying Christians more closely into mission and community that, in turn, renew the city.

4. Ed Stetzer: 10 Characteristics of a Movement
   a. “One must approach the task with the recognition that God is already at work in this community, and my task as a networker is to discover how He is at work.”²
   b. Prayer Prayer must be a conviction that establishes its priority. Before we see movemental Christianity, we will have to be praying, asking God to change us.

c. **Intentionality**: We will also need to show the intention of being movemental (see the next 8 elements). As of now, I believe our focus is primarily defensive and incremental, not intentional and exponential.

d. **Sacrifice**: Change will not come without giving something up.

e. **Reproducibility**: Movements do not occur through large things (big budgets, big plans, big teams). They occur through small units that are readily reproducible.

f. **Theological Integrity**: Churches wanting to be involved in transformative, movemental Christianity hold firm and passionate positions on biblical views.

g. **Incarnation**: Movemental Christianity recognizes that the gospel is unchanging, but the expressions and results of the gospel will vary from culture to culture.

h. **Empowerment**: Movements only occur when the disempowered are given the freedom, and then take up the responsibility, to lead.

i. **Charitability**: A movement of God cannot be contained in a single movement or theological tradition. Therefore, movemental Christianity requires charity to maintain our firmly held convictions while rejoicing for and speaking well about those with whom we differ but are being greatly blessed by God.

j. **Scalability**: When God begins to move, and believers allow movement Christianity to begin to grow, structures must be able to rapidly re-size to not stifle such movements.

k. **Wholism**: Movemental Christianity will practice wholistic ministry much in the way of Jesus.

5. **Driscoll on Movements**: Here he *describes* not *prescribes* movements.

a. Lasting movements can only ultimately be attributed to a unique work of God.

b. Movements are fueled by a passion to increase the number of people worshipping Jesus Christ as God."

c. Lasting movements are typically started by a movement leader who faces controversy and criticism.

d. Lasting movements are characterized by lives transformed in larger than typical numbers not unlike a revival..."

e. Lasting movements are frequently started among young people.

f. Lasting movements plant churches.

g. Lasting movements use new technology to communicate the gospel

h. Something in the culture has changed and a new model ministry is leading the pioneering of a solution.

i. Lasting movements exert an external influence that is beyond measure.
j. Heretics are good for lasting movements; they help clarify what is central to the movement and develop theological precision
k. Lasting movements produce auxiliary organizations to manage growth.
l. Lasting movements inevitably leave behind doctrinal and practical clean-up.

6. **David Garrison** on Movements
a. Strategic, reproducible
b. Over-emphasizes “rapid” reproduction.

*Reproducibility is HUGE. We will come back to that.*

D. **Benefit of Partnership**
   1. Offering Planter Assessment
   2. Networking
   3. Shared cultural, demographic knowledge of the city
   4. Shared Best practices
   5. Knowing the church planting landscape in Austin
   6. Pastors in Covenant Groups
   7. Kingdom Cooperation
   8. Connecting established missional leaders with new planters
   9. Directing visitors to other church plants
   10. Catalyzing a cross-denominational churchplanting movement

E. **What PlantR Isn’t**
   1. Not a Residency
   2. Not a Church
   3. Not a Counseling Center
   4. Not a Denomination
   5. Not a Resource Ministry

II. **PlantR Vision** ([www.plantr.org](http://www.plantr.org))
   A. “Catalyzing a Christ-centered, context-sensitive church planting movement for social and spiritual renewal of Austin and beyond.”
   B. Christ-centered churches
      1. Jesus is Lord not Methods
      2. Identity as God and The Mission of God. (functional Lordship)
   C. Context-sensitive Churches
      1. Are we asking the right questions?
      2. Understand the methods and understand the context.
   D. Church Planting Movement: (how we are catalyzing) JD
      1. Reproducible
         a. Small vs. Big
         b. Multiplying vs. Adding
      2. Contextual
a. Contextual vs. Programmatic
b. Multiethnic vs. Monoethnic

3. Empowering
   a. Strengthening and empowering leaders to plant reproducing, Christ-centered, missional churches
   b. Focus on Leaders not Projects

E. Networked
   1. Connecting Planters to the Right Resources
   2. Promoting shared learning
   3. Engaging in shared, strategic mission

F. Urban Renewal
   1. Church partnerships for social and spiritual renewal
   2. Knowing Austin’s Needs

III. PlantR Story

A. History
   1. The AACPN began as a grassroots movement of planters helping planters in July 2007. During this time planters built relationships, shared stories, swapped best practices, heard from city church leaders, discussed partnership and vision, and unanimously agreed upon the benefit and potential of a formal Austin Area Church Planters Network. The initial monthly meetings were hosted by First Evangelical Free Church of Austin, where Rob Harrell and Jonathan Dodson took turns facilitating the meetings. Over the course of eight months, we gathered a diverse base of 40-50 planters from the Austin Area and compiled a provisional Church Planters Directory. We have also surveyed these planters for “areas they would be most interested in discussing.” The top areas included Partnership/Cooperation, Church Planting Issues, and Post Launch growth. A board was appointed in March of 2008. An attempt was made to appoint a board that sacrificed neither wisdom nor representation of the diversity of Austin.
   2. A true work of the Spirit through relationships, not a program or website.

B. What We Do
   1. Monthly Meetings
      a. Talk – 30-40 minute talk by a practioner
      b. Discuss – public Q&A
      c. Group – small group prayer for one another
   2. Board Selection
      a. Theologically diverse but evangelical
      b. Ethnically diverse
      c. Planter/Established Pastor diversity
   3. Website
      a. All things planting
b. Networking location
c. Not the end all be all

4. People are Contacting Us
   a. HCBC
   b. Stone Conference
   c. City Wide Assessment
   d. Web

IV. **What has Worked and What Hasn’t**

A. Strengths
   1. Started with 4 planters, now over 40
   2. Fostered Kingdom Unity
   3. Encouraged Planters to Continue
   4. Shared Best Practices
   5. Offered Planting Wisdom
   6. Facilitated Planter Relationships
   7. Pockets of Prayer

B. Weaknesses
   1. Decentralized to Centralized
   2. Project driven, not Leader focused
   3. Loose planter Participation, Little Ownership
   4. Not very Strategic
   5. Planters need Coaching, Mentoring (spin out)

**Bibliography**

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Stetzer, Ed. "The Dangerous Church," Innovation 3 Address, 2009

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