

REFORMED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
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A CHURCH PLANTING PROPOSAL

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The Call to Church Planting: *The reason for starting this new church*

My Call to Church Planting

A Short Historical Background

My call to church planting came before I truly understood the gospel. The strangeness of this statement points to the unusual perspective I bring to the planting of a church. I was commissioned to start a new church in Findlay, Ohio by the United Pentecostal Church, of which I was a minister. I went to Findlay with my family and began the church-plant. Over the course of ten years, as our church plant grew to a young church, God opened my eyes to the errors in my understanding and preaching of the gospel. I had neither understood the wonderful sovereign grace of God, the meaning of justification by faith, nor did I realize the nature of Christ's imputed righteousness to me by faith. Through a variety of providential means, God unfolded the Scripture to our church in many stunning ways. Every area of my theology and ministry was challenged.

After a long process of working with my church through the implications of our fresh understanding of the gospel, I and my congregation chose to leave our denomination. This decision has sent us on a journey to discern the way to live and minister from the foundation of understanding, trusting, and applying the biblical gospel of Jesus Christ.

We began as a church plant of a sectarian group with cultic characteristics. God has transformed our understanding of the gospel, and with it, our vision of church and ministry. Because of the unique nature of our church life we have chosen to view our situation as a church re-plant. This proposal is for a church re-plant of Grace and Truth Community Church in

Findlay, Ohio. We believe that many of the same issues of church planting apply to our situation.

Our proposal will take the form of a church planting proposals, with necessary modifications.

Confirmation of My Call

I identify with Os Guinness' definition of calling:

Calling is the truth that God calls us to himself so decisively that everything we are, everything we do, and everything we have is invested with a special devotion and dynamism lived out as a response to his summons and service.¹

I cannot remember a time, since I was a child, that I did not believe that God had a calling for my life. While I have not always discerned the scope of my purpose, I have always had a sense of being called to God and a calling to dedicate my life to his service. As a teenager I sense both a gifted-ness and passion for a pastoral teaching ministry.

Greater than my experience, I believe Scripture when it declares that I am called from the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4) to be God's holy, blameless, predestined, adopted son through Jesus Christ. I believe, that as a sinner, Christ called me by grace (Gal. 1:15), to repentance (Matthew 9:13). I am assured that those he predestinates, he calls and justifies (Romans 8:30). As his justified child (Romans 9:25,26), I am called into the fellowship of God's Son (1 Cor. 1:9), to be Christ's disciple (Luke 16:13) and a laborer in the Lord's "vineyard" (Matthew 20:8). I am called to liberty through the Gospel to serve others (Gal. 5:13). I am called unto holiness (1 Thess. 4:7) and to "live in a way worthy of God who calls you to his own kingdom and his glory." (1 Thess. 2:12 NIV). God has called me to obtain the glory of Christ (2 Thess. 2:14) and to fight the good fight of faith to obtain eternal life (1 Tim. 6:12).

¹Os Guinness, *The Call*, (Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, 1998), p. 4

Almost twenty years ago, God brought the needs of the city of Findlay to my attention. That began a long journey of deliberation, relocation and acclimation to the city of Findlay. Little did I know at that time the ways he would deepen and intensify that calling. I was originally called to this city, and not to a church. Today, I am renewed in that conviction and believe that God intends for me to play a part in a movement of gospel-centered ministry for Findlay and Hancock County. I can say that God has “sent” me to where I already am.

My Vision for Church Re-Planting in Findlay, Ohio

The work of church replanting in Findlay must be built on a compelling theological vision. Seeing and living toward what God not only desires for us to be, but has already *called* us, is central to our faith in the gospel. We are directed to trust what God has said about us, through the gospel, and to live out of that gospel reality in a way that affects cultural change. We must do this believing in God who, “calls things that are not as though they were.” This is how Christ leads his church in his *prophetic* ministry. Capturing God’s vision for the church, and our part in that vision, is essential to “living out of” the gospel:

Theological vision is biblical truth applied by a community of believers to a specific ministry place and time. It becomes clearer as we grow in our understanding of God’s Word, the ministry context, and ourselves. Theological vision is the destination – what we believe God wants us to be and become and to accomplish through us.²

Our Purpose

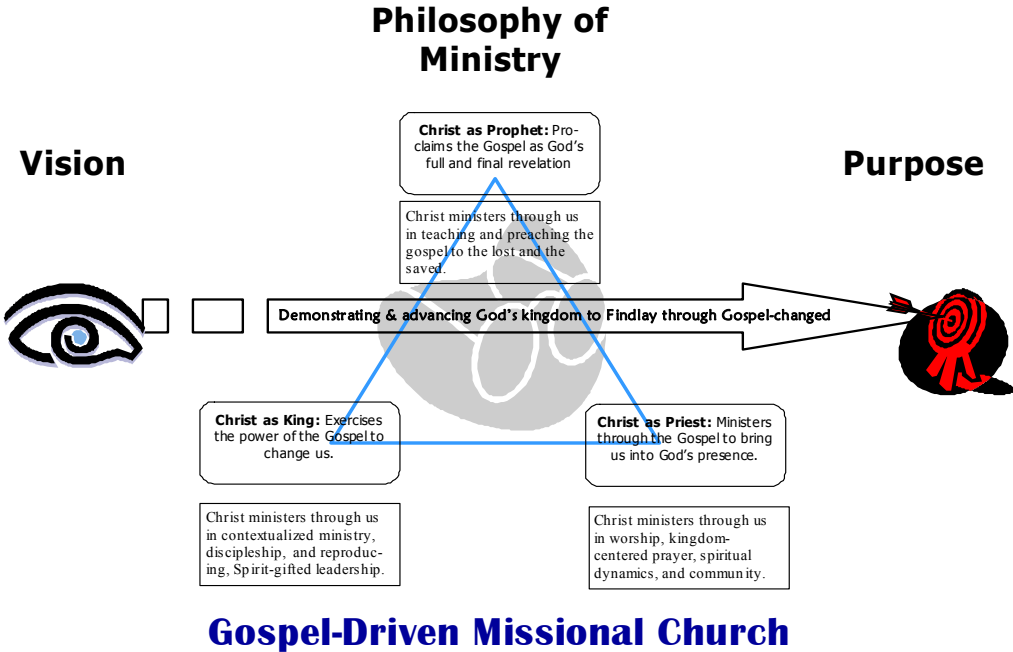
I love Leslie Newbigin’s description of the Church’s mission: “Demonstrating God’s Kingdom to the world through Gospel-changed lives.” I believe our church replant’s purpose is to demonstrate and advance the Kingdom of God in through Gospel-changed lives. This begins

²Timothy J. Keller, J. Allen Thompson, *Church Planter Manual*, (New York, NY: Redeemer Church Planting Center, 2003), p. 13.

with our church and moves outward into the community of Findlay, Hancock county, and into missions beyond our culture.

Philosophy of Ministry

We see the ministry of our church replant as being done by Christ through the His offices of Prophet (proclaiming God’s authority), King (exercising God’s control), and Priest (ministering God’s presence). If the answer to the question, “Who does ministry?” is Christ, then the answer to “How is ministry done?” is through the Gospel of Christ. As Prophet, Christ brings the Gospel, which is God’s final and full revelation (Heb. 1:1). As King, Christ presents the Gospel as the power of God to change us (Rom. 1:16-17). This is only possible through the transforming power of Christ, as he applies the gospel to our hearts, through the Holy Spirit. As Priest, Christ ministers through the Gospel to usher us into God’s presence (Heb. 4:14-16). All of this is vital to a Gospel-driven model of Church ministry.



Our vision for a church replant, and by extension, all the churches in Findlay, is that the meaning and reality of the Gospel would be understood and applied in such a manner as to transform our way of saying and doing. One of the chief results of this transformation would be palpably seen in many non-Christians being brought to faith in Christ, and inspired to live under the Lordship of Christ.

The Biblical Imperative for Church Planting

The church is that chosen people of God (1 Pet. 2:9), being gathered by Christ into his Kingdom from the nations (Matt. 28:19; Mark 13:10; Luke 24:47), to be the spiritual Israel (Rom. 2:29; Gal. 6:16; Eph 2:19), and called to live as a “colony of Heaven” on the earth. Christ has promised that *he will* build (construct by assembling) his church (Matt. 16:18) on the foundation of the apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:20), with *himself* as the “Rock of foundation” (chief Cornerstone - 1 Cor 3:11; Eph. 2:20; 1 Pet. 2:4-6). He also promised that his church will not succumb to the gates of death, but rather, would overpower them through the resurrection of Christ.

Jesus, as the Chief Shepherd, seeks to gather his flock – those to whom the Father delights to give the Kingdom (John 10:11-30):

Jesus, then, summons God’s assembly, gathering the scattered flock that there may be one flock and one Shepherd (Jn. 10:16). The Father has given him this flock (Jn. 10:27-29; 17:2, 6, 9), those upon whom god’s favour rests, as the Christmas angels sang (Lk. 2:14). They are held in the Father’s hand, and also in the grasp of the Son, where they are for ever safe (Jn. 10:29). Because Jesus is one with the Father, his people are God’s chosen people, the true Israel of God.³

³Edmund P. Clowney, *The Church*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), p. 42.

The church, as God’s people, is sent into the world, to announce the *gospel* of the Kingdom. The church is “birthed by the Holy Spirit as the Spirit gives hearing and response to the gospel.”⁴ What is the gospel?:

The gospel is Jesus himself. The New Testament’s Gospels narrate the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus as the action of God that both reveals God’s passion for the world and achieves God’s purpose for that world.⁵

The church, just as Jesus the Great Apostle, was sent from the Father, is also called to be an apostle to the nations. “Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” (ESV John 20:21) Not only is the church to announce the gospel, it is also commissioned to “represent the reign of God”⁶ in its life.

Jesus was the “great Missionary” sent by the Father “to form his disciples as a company of gatherers.”⁷ As the Body of Christ, the church is sent to gather Christ’s flock into the Kingdom. “Jesus calls his disciples to bring in a harvest as field-workers, and to draw in nets as fishermen (Mt. 9:37-38; Lk. 5:1-11). Like Jesus, who embraced the Father’s purpose to gather His “prodigal” sons and daughters with passion, the church is moved by love for the Father to bring His wayward children home by the gospel. “The church not only goes, but it also draws.”⁸

The goal of this drawing or gathering is to fulfill the ‘hallowing’ of the Father’s name, the accomplishment of his “will,” and to show his “Kingdom” and “glory.” This community of

⁴Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), p. 86.

⁵Ibid, p. 87.

⁶Ibid., chapter four, pp. 77-109.

⁷Clowney, Op. Cit., p. 159.

⁸Ibid., p. 162.

gathered children finds at the heart of its existence the privilege of loving, obeying and worshipping the holy, redeeming God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In this worshipping community the church is given grace “to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up” toward “attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:7-13 NIV).

Jesus gave a global vision to his disciples, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.” This means that first and foremost the church is about the “pursuit of lost people.”⁹ Through teaching (Luke 15:1-10) and example (Luke 19:1-9), Jesus expressed the heart of his ministry as seeking and saving that which is lost (Luke 19:10). The pursuit of the lost is for the purpose of “gospelizing” them, or reaching them with the gospel.

In his Great Commission (Matt. 28:19,20), Christ commanded his disciples to make new disciples, baptizing and teaching them to follow his commands. Along with pursuing and reaching the lost with the gospel, Christ commanded us to lead those who believe the gospel into discipleship. They are to be established in the doctrine of Christ and equipped to make disciples themselves. “The goal is to equip them to reproduce themselves.”¹⁰ This equipping takes place in the context of a “gathering” community.

This gathering of God’s people takes the practical form of visible believers *gathered to* and *sent from* local assemblies. As Tim Keller states:

Virtually all the great evangelistic challenges of the New Testament are basically calls to plant churches, not simply to share the faith. The “Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20) is not just a call to “make disciples” but to “baptize.” In Acts

⁹Aubrey Malphurs, *Planting Growing Churches for the 21st Century*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1992), p. 121.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 127.

and elsewhere, it is clear that baptism means incorporation into a worshipping community with accountability and boundaries (cf. Acts 2:41-47).¹¹

These local churches are gathered by the Holy Spirit, or “come together” for prayer (Acts 1:14), worship (Acts 2:46, 47), to receive “the apostle’s teaching,” (Acts 2:42) “the breaking of bread,” (Acts 2:42) the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor. 11), to hear the gospel (Acts 10:27), to serve each other (1 Cor. 11:33), to share hymns and psalms (Eph. 5:19; 1 Cor 14:26), receive words of instruction, exhortation, and comfort (1 Cor 14:26), and to strengthen and enrich each believers’ faith in God. “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” (ESV Galatians 6:2)

Jesus instructed his disciples that they would be his witnesses “in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8). Paul understood this as a call “to carry my name [Christ’s] before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel.” (Acts 9:15). He answered this calling by going to Jerusalem first, and then, throughout the known Gentile world, visiting the major cities and planting new assemblies of believers there. The church today is an continuation and extension of the command of Christ and the practice of the Apostle Paul.

The Practical Imperative for Church Planting

The planting of new churches is the New Testament way of bringing new people into the Kingdom of God, and to renew the body of believers:

The vigorous, continual planting of new congregations is the single most crucial strategy for 1) the numerical growth of the Body of Christ in any city, and 2) the continual corporate renewal and revival of the existing churches in a city.¹²

¹¹Keller, Church Planter Manual, p. 29.

¹²Ibid., p. 29.

There are number of practical reasons why church planting is an imperative for the church today: 1) “North America is an unchurched culture.”¹³ The needs of a post-modernist culture¹⁴ demand new church plants; 2) The loss of the gospel and a gospel-centered ministry in many established churches calls for a movement of new churches; 3) The presence of many unbiblical forms of “church” begs for a movement of new churches centered on the gospel; 4) New churches gain a higher percentage of unchurched people than older congregations; 5) New churches empower new people more readily than established churches; 6) Younger adults are found more in new congregations because older churches reflect the sensibilities of leaders from older generations; 7) Older congregations tend to channel their resources to the needs of their members rather than the needs of non-believers.¹⁵ As churches age they tend, on average, to plateau or decline, and usually fail to keep up with new unchurched people in their area. This principle can only be counterbalanced by new church plants:

Church attendance and adherence overall in the United States is decreasing. This cannot be reversed in any other way than the way it originally had been so remarkably *increasing*.¹⁶

¹³Malphurs, Op. Cit., p. 123.

¹⁴Ed Stetzer, *Planting New Churches in a Postmodern Age*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003). P. 130. Also see chapters ten and eleven.

¹⁵Keller, CPM, p. 30.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 32.

The Ministry Focus Group: *Who we are reaching*

Our Church Planting Mission Statement

Our mission statement is framed within a new way of looking at the church. Before, we thought of the church more as a “where” rather than as a “who”. This has led us to focus on maintaining our physical resources and focusing most on the needs of our congregation. The challenge to us, as a church replant, is to have transformed minds and hearts about the nature of the church and missions. One of our main goals is to reorient our church life and ministry around a missional concept.

One of the premises of the missional church concept is the realization that North American society is not longer ‘Christian,’ at least it no longer holds a favored status with the general populace or society. The church has gradually lost its influence on our culture since World War II. It is increasingly marginalized and is suffering a crisis brought on by the impact of modern culture on Christian faith, ministry and lifestyle. Those who advocate the missional view believe the answer to this problem is not a new method:

We share the conviction of a growing consensus of Christians in North America that the problem is much more deeply rooted. It has to do with who we are and what we are for. The real issues in the current crisis of the Christian church are spiritual and theological.”¹⁷

The answer is to change the way the Church thinks about its identity and purpose. In an indifferent, or even hostile culture, the church must think of itself as living “in mission:”

In order to impact North America with the gospel we cannot just do church as church has always been done and expect traditional/moral people to come in and

¹⁷Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), p. 3.

fill up the seats. . . . We must re-define ourselves and adapt all that we do in order to engage the non-Christian society in which we now live.¹⁸

The church in North America, our church replant included, needs to see itself as existing in a mission field. Hence the term “missional.” A missional church is a church that is sent:

We have come to see that mission is not merely an activity of the church. Rather, mission is the result of God’s initiative, rooted in God’s purposes to restore and heal creation. “Mission” means “sending,” and it is the central biblical theme describing the purpose of God’s action in human history.¹⁹

Leslie Newbigin popularized this concept of “missional” church. On his return from years as a missionary in India, he saw that the West was secularized and needed the Gospel as much as India or other “foreign” missions. During this time he became increasingly aware of the “sent” nature of the Church. He and others are now calling for a “theological revolution in missional thinking that centers the body of Christ on God’s mission rather than post-Christendom’s concern for the church’s institutional maintenance.”²⁰ It is not enough to have a “mission oriented vision statement.” There must be a radical change in way the church thinks about her purpose and identity:

But it has taken us decades to realize that mission is not just a program of the church. It defines the church as God’s sent people. Either we are defined by mission, or we reduce the scope of the gospel and the mandate of the church. Thus our challenge today is to move from church with mission to missional church.²¹

¹⁸“Ministry and the Missional Church,” Reformed Theological Seminary course: Theology of Ministry, July 2003 handout, p. 5.

¹⁹Guder, *Op. Cit.*, p. 4.

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 7.

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 6.

There are a number of ways to contrast most church models today with the missional church. I find that one of the most significant difference is how each answers the question: “What is the purpose of the Church?” The missional church sees its purpose as “demonstrating God’s Kingdom to the world through Gospel-changed lives.” Keller offers these five elements of a missional church: 1) Discourse in the vernacular that avoids tribal language, “we-them” expressions, and ‘spin’ and instead speaks respectfully of all people groups, always imagining we are speaking to all of our neighborhood; 2) Tell the Gospel story through re-telling the culture’s stories. 3) Theologically train lay people for public life and vocation; 4) Create Christian community which is counter-cultural; and, 5) Practice Christian unity as much as possible on the local level.²² Number four jumped out at me, because I am becoming more convinced that the local church must model a counter-culture if any significant impact is going to happen in this and following generations:

In a missional church, however, Christian community must go beyond that to embody a ‘counter-culture,’ showing the world how radically different a Christian society is with regard to sex, money and power.²³

I believe that a change to a missional church concept will entail several transformations in our church. First, as a part of our ministry of Kingdom-centered prayer we will pray for a heart change. This heart change will consist of seeing the Kingdom of God as beyond our walls and efforts. It will also mean a change in the way we view our own fellowship. We must see Jesus Christ as the center of the Kingdom of God and the Church. This means that we are not called to gather people into our building, programs and fellowship in order to bring them to

²²Tim Keller, “The Missional Church,” June 2001, obtained online, July 2003 at: <http://www.redeemer2.com/resources/papers/missional.pdf>

²³Ibid.

Christ. We are called to go and gather to Christ those who live in our community. It is a “come and see” paradigm. Rather than come be like us, or do what we do, it is “come behold the Savior and join with us as we follow Him.”

Second, we must reorient all that we do as a church to a missional way of doing and living. This involves the way we view our facilities. It means that worship, that child and youth education, discipleship, and all our ministries must be revisited and reformed to a missional approach. For example, our discipleship training should move from emphasis on individualistic practices or behavior that make us personally served. But, instead, the issues of discipleship must have a missional caste, seeing each area of discipleship as equipping us to be sent and to gather the harvest.

There must a culture change in our minds and hearts as to the calling of the church, to prepare us to serve as missionaries who are called into our community to bring people to Christ rather than bringing them to us.

Description of Our Ministry Focus Group

Our focus ministry group is Findlay and the Hancock County area. The official promotional web site for Findlay makes these claims about our area:

Findlay and Hancock County is an area on the move. Buoyed by an influx of corporate relocations and growth, the city is alive with hope, excitement and a great vision of what the future will bring. With corporations such as Cooper Tire & Rubber Company and Marathon Oil making their home here, and other companies like Whirlpool and Microsoft with regional offices here, our economic growth has been astounding - and will continue to be. Many may wonder "Why Findlay?" and we know they've never visited here before. Because just like all those corporations have discovered, you will see that ours is a town that offers many wonderful things all families look for. Our crime rate is almost non existent, our schools are consistently rated excellent and our residents have plenty of great

jobs available to them. That's why we are one of the Ohio's fastest growing cities!²⁴

Based on updated census information, the Findlay area²⁵ is considered highly diverse with a highly dispersed city of average population density. Although the projected population change is projected at 4.4%, it is still rated with a “somewhat high” dynamic level. The Findlay area is made up of middle American families, a low 7.6% non-Anglo population, with Asians as the fastest growing ethnic group. Asians are projected to be the fastest growing group, increasing by 17.2% between 2004 and 2009.

The largest generational representation is the “millenials”[sic] (3-22 years). The family structure is considered “somewhat traditional” because of the above average (59%) presence of married persons and two-parent families. The education level is “somewhat high” against national averages because 88.4% of the population aged 25 or older have graduated from high school and 24.3% are graduated college.

In relation to community issues, people in the Findlay area list “hopes and dreams” as their primary concerns. While my experience says that the stress level may be higher in this area, the research suggests that the overall RISC stress level is “somewhat low”. This is based on characteristics known to contribute to community problems such as households below the poverty line, adults without a high school diploma, households with single mothers and concerns for basic necessity such as food, housing and jobs. On the other hand, as in most conservative

²⁴Online, Accessed October 27, 2004, Available at: <http://www.visitfindlay.com/findlay/default.asp>

²⁵*First View 2004*, Percept Group, Inc., prepared for Zip Code 45840, Findlay, Ohio, February 13, 2004.. We chose to use the zip code 45840 as our study area. There are several towns in the county which are not included in this study area, but could be considered additional areas of ministry.

towns such as Findlay, the overall resistance to change is somewhat high. I have found this to be very true during my years in Findlay.

Findlay area's faith preferences show an "average" level in both faith receptivity²⁶ and financial support, based on an average household income of \$60,025 per year. The church style, relative to worship, music and architectural style, is a blend of both traditional and contemporary, in keeping with the national preferences. When it comes to the general church programs or services, most people in our area "most likely" preferred recreation, which was interesting, but not so surprising, given the interest in sports in our community.²⁷ The religious preference of 85% of the households was for "historic Christian" groups, which is the same as the national average.

The Needs of the Ministry Focus Group

Fortunately Jesus didn't commute from heaven and the spirit world, but moved in with us (John 1:14) [Tim Keller, *Church Planting Manual*]

As we seek to obtain a better grasp of the nature of our ministry in Findlay, we need to ask three very important questions: 1) Who are we here to serve? 2) What are their greatest needs? 3) How is our church replant planning to help meet these needs? We always need to ask these questions. The answers, we continue to learn, are multi-perspectival and layered. When we ask "who?" we look at the area demographics and obtain one perspective.

There is a sense in which Findlay is a microcosm of America. It is divided between two different socio-economic groups. It is more conservative on average because it has a high ratio of

²⁶The likely faith involvement level and preference for historic Christian religious affiliations compared to the national average.

²⁷Compared to spiritual, personal development and community and social services.

affluent, two-parent, Anglo-Saxon, “historic” Christian households. These families tend to make up networks of tightly-knit families and social groupings within our city. There is a shared pride in their level of civic standing, financial ability, education, religious sentiments and family well-being. There are many benefits to this, yet there are a number of critical spiritual detriments.

At the same, the statistics show that there are two Findlays and not one homogenous, conservative, middle-American town. The area in which our church facilities are located is one of the more densely populated, with a high percentage of families in their early thirties, who do not own homes, are of lower income average and are more ethnically diverse.²⁸ We are less than one mile from the University of Findlay, which shapes the demographics of our part of the city. This area and population of Findlay is mixture of the “two Findlays” but tends to represent the “second” Findlay. While 32% of the population of the Findlay area has “hopes and dreams” as its primary concern, this “second” Findlay is concerned about the basics of survival, child care, family and marriage problems, parenting skills and other personal needs. The statistics of how Findlay breaks down along these lines nearly mirror the national percentages.

In my experience and study of this city, there is a social tension between the haves and have-nots. They both share many of the same values, but their identity is significantly shaped by their level of affluence and its concomitant social empowerment. These two groups have distinct needs which impact their spiritual needs, and they each will have somewhat different obstacles to hearing the gospel. We need to probe the similarities and differences as a church to more effectively speak the gospel in effective ways to all of the Findlay area.

²⁸American FactFinder, U.S. Census Bureau, Zip Code Tabulation Area 45840, Online, Obtained Oct.20, 2004, Available at: <http://factfinder.census.gov>.

As we try to answer “What are their greatest needs?,” we find there are layers to the answer. One of the resources for our church replant is Sunshine Child Care Center. It is the oldest continuous child care center in Findlay and has served many families over thirty plus years. One of the needs of our community is quality child care. We have a good report in our town because of the quality of care that we have provided over the years. Sunshine is a landmark on our end of town. Through the ministry of Sunshine a number of families have come to our services and some have come to Christ and become members. Through the ministry of child care we have bridged to people in our community.

Another area of concern listed by Percept is “time for recreation and leisure.” One of the ways we have served the community is by leading in Findlay Youth Baseball as a coach, commissioner and board member. There is a high interest by families that their children have access to quality sports recreation. We have not directly bridged this involvement to our mission as a church plant. It is an area of consideration in our church replant for bridging to the community.

A third example of an area of “primary concern” is “parenting skills” and help with tutoring their children in school. We have a couple of people in our church who tutor children. We have not bridged this service to the mission of the church replant. But, we are considering ways that we could approach this community need in a way that would lead families to the gospel.

The three previous areas address community felt needs on one level. But to meet the substantial needs of our city we must go below this surface level. We need to diagnose the cultural idols of Findlay. There are a series of question which are helpful here. First, we can ask,

“What do the people of Findlay look to for true happiness?” After sorting through a profile of a number of people in my relationship network, I have concluded that nearly all of them have sought for power or control over their lives as the means to happiness. I could list some of the ways that people in Findlay value pleasure and comfort like the rest of America. I think Schaeffer’s descriptive of the chief value of American secularized society fits Findlay - “personal peace and affluence.”

Just like most of America, Findlay is caught up in the consumerism that derives from a culture based on materialism. The conservatism of Findlay is not only because of the influence of traditional conservative moral and religious values in the cities heritage. It is also because a good number of people in Findlay are well-off in material things, and they wish to see that continue. Pride is certainly an issue, because Findlay places a great deal of importance on its reputation. It calls itself “Flag City.” Percept identified a high resistance to change in this area, which may be rooted in its social pride and reputation.

Nevertheless, I think there is a common thread that is woven between even the haves and the have-nots in our community. I believe this commonality is one of their central hindrances to hearing the gospel. Their primary value is having the power or control over their own lives. All the other idols or values are a sub-set of this chief idol. They believe that they alone should have the power to control their lives. Through control they can obtain pleasure, comfort, self-fulfillment, reputation, material things (and ability to consume them), fulfilled marriages, happy homes and well performing children.

As I travel around the city day by day, I observe people racing in traffic, and moving hurriedly through shopping centers, or rushing to school, they try to drive, while talking on cell

phones and adjusting their hair in the mirror or perform other multi-tasks. There seems to be a common impulse, they are driven to gain or maintain control of their world. They believe the American truth that hard work or more and better performance will empower them. I may not have the proper perspective on this, but I am led to believe that a common theme for the culture of Findlay is empowerment and control over one's personal life. It is because they are not willing to give up the control to their hopes and dreams that they either reject the gospel or mishear it. By the same turn, it is because many of them have failed to gain control, and have seen their hopes and dreams crushed, that they have hardened their hearts to that same gospel.

Other questions could further our cultural diagnosis: "What aspects of the gospel are most pertinent to the culture of Findlay?" That is, "What dimension of the gospel is most urgently needed?" I would say that nearly everyone I know in Findlay needs to hear that they don't have the power to be their own savior. They need to know that they cannot gain enough control to achieve their hopes and dreams. Also, they need to realize that their failed attempts to reach their hopes and dreams is proof that they need a power from outside themselves.

The Findlay area needs to hear that through the gospel God has empowered them to reach beyond their hopes and dreams. Our ministry must move in outreach on several fronts. First, we can show the love of Christ through our various bridges of social ministry. In giving care to children, helping with parenting skills, showing mercy through social service, and being present in recreational pursuits, we can speak the gospel on one level. On a much deeper level we need to do at least two things. First, we need to speak and show the gospel in ways that "tap" and break their idols of power and control. As Tim Keller so aptly states, "Every culture hostile to Christianity holds to a set of 'common-sense' consensus beliefs that automatically make

Christianity seem implausible to people.”²⁹ He states that Christianity is rejected in different cultures for different reasons. As a culture develops combinations of defeater beliefs they are formed into a “cultural ‘implausibility-structure’” that unconsciously rejects Christianity.

It engenders a worldview that assumes that Christianity can’t be true since they “know” that their defeater beliefs are true.

Tim Keller suggests a “sandwich” or three pronged approach to sharing the gospel with such a culture. First, the church must present to people in this culture a brief attractive summary of the gospel. Second, the church must deconstruct the culture’s implausibility structure. That is, we “have to show on the culture’s own terms (that is, by its own definitions of justice, rationality, meaning) that its objections to Christianity don’t hold up.”³⁰ Third, the church needs to show the connection between the gospel and a peoples’ baseline cultural narratives. This means, show them that their own story, their hopes and their dreams, cannot be fulfilled by anything except the gospel.

In summary I believe that we must shape our ministry to Findlay to captivate the imagination of our neighbors with the gospel. God is redemptively sovereign. Only Christ has the power to control their lives. Their idols cannot complete their story. Only the gospel can fulfill their hopes and their dreams.

²⁹Tim Keller, “Deconstructing Defeater Beliefs: Leading the Secular to Christ,” *The Movement*, October 2004, an e-newsletter of the Redeemer Church Planting Center, New York, NY, received by email October 9, 2004.

³⁰Ibid.

The Demographic Imperative

There are several imperatives that are dictated by the demographics of our area. The location of church places us in the middle of a dense population area, with many younger families and college students, with middle to lower income resources. I believe we must work to better understand and relate to the people near us. This is not a control imperative, since the people are the church, not one geographic location. The people is our base group are from all over the area. But, we need to be even more sensitive and discerning to the ways, felt needs and gospel needs of people who are physical closest to us.

The Church Planting Model: *What kind of church are we planting*

Our Ministry Purposes

At the outset, I believe that the focus of our church replant should be on building a *healthy* church and not simply a larger or busier church. Base upon Acts 2:42-47 we can draw a pattern of purposes for all churches: 1) Corporate ministry of worship and prayer; as Tim Keller points out, verse 42 speaks of “the” breaking of bread and “the” prayers, which may indicate some form of liturgy; 2) A ministry of learning and enrichment out of a specific content; 3) A ministry to build Christian community. Verse 42 states they were devoted to “the fellowship.” “They had regular meetings where this same set of ministries – learning, loving, worshipping – was conducted at the mini-level. So as to supplement what was happening at the “maxi” large

group level.”³¹ 4) A ministry of outreach and evangelism that demonstrates the gospel in our community; 5) a Ministry of Mercy that fulfills the apostolic directive to “do good to all, especially the household of faith.”³² (Gal. 6:10)

Our Ministry Style

Our ministry style the form of a “teaching-worship” church. Our worship style is a blended form of traditional and contemporary. Our learning style focuses on expository preaching and teaching that is combined conceptual learning with relational learning. We believe this a strength for our particular community. Our fellowship style would be best described as Cell or (house church), moving to a celebration-cell structure. The outreach style of our replant is a combination of front door, through Sunday morning worship and side door through mercy ministry and personal evangelistic studies.

My leadership style is a combination of telling and participating. One of the weakness of my style is that I am too hands-on and do not delegate well. I can say that this is improving, but I believe that for our church replant to be healthy I must be more intentional and determined to delegate effectively. This is why we are building a ministry team concept and stressing a lay mobilized ministry.

Our Core Values

The Gospel creates a new community of people who accepted by God, called to be holy people, to tell and demonstrate the Gospel both to the world, to make disciples from the lost and

³¹Tim Keller, *Evangelism: Equipping Believers in Mission and Outreach*, Version 2, 1998, quoted by Steven L. Childers in *Church Planter Basic Training*, (Altamonte Springs, FL: Global Church Development, 2004), p. 1-36.

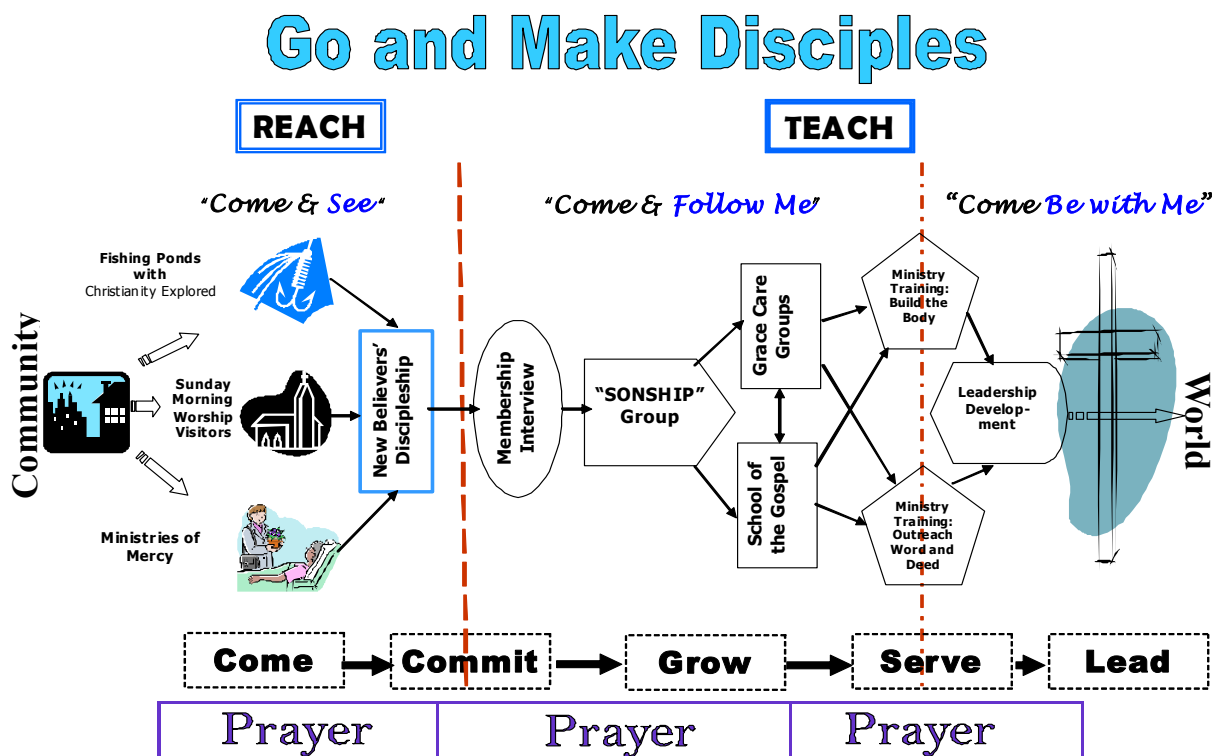
³² Steven L. Childers, *Church Planter Basic Training*, (Altamonte Springs, FL: Global Church Development, 2004), p. 1-36.

to fellow believers to build them up in Christ, and to lead and serve them in the fulfillment of the imperatives of the Gospel.

Therefore our church replant values:

1. A Gospel-centered view of life and ministry with goal of advancing the Kingdom of God
2. Worship that brings all glory to God
3. Prayer that is Kingdom-centered.
4. A passion for the lost.
5. A view of the church as missional.
6. Exegeting the culture of Findlay for contextualizing the gospel.
7. Ministries of mercy that demonstrate the gospel in deed.
8. Sense of community nurtured in a small-group network.
9. A shared ministry where every member serves out of their spiritual giftedness.
10. Healthy Renewal dynamics for developing leaders
11. Developing reproducing leaders,
 - a. Nurtured in the gospel
 - b. Who have a biblical vision for ministry
 - c. Who serve on the frontline of ministry.

Our Ministry Flow Chart³³



Our Discipleship Strategy

The goal of our discipleship strategy is to 1) “make disciples” who are baptized and taught the commands of Christ; 2) “prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up”; 3) and to “present all believers as mature in Christ” on that Final Day.

The specific steps of action for our strategy follows the calls of Christ for his disciples: 1) Come and See; 2) Come and Follow Me; and 3) Come and be with me. The “come and see” step is the conversion and entrance into the church. We plan to use several “front door” entries. First

³³Adapted from Tim Keller’s, *Church Planter Manual*, p. 146 and Dick Kaufmann’s Harbor Presbyterian Church, San Diego, CA, 2001, found in Steven L. Childer’s *Church Planter Basic Training*, p. 1-80.

is our Sunday morning worship. Second is through personal home studies, (gained through several kinds of “fishing pond” groups). The studies are of several types, such as *Christianity Explored*. A third is through ministries of mercy as we work with a cross section of needy people in our city. The fourth is through our internet ministry called In Christ Alone!.

As people are led to faith in Christ, they are welcomed into a New Believer’s group and receive personal care, prayer and instruction in the mission and faith of our church and in the basics of living out of the Gospel through the “Living in Light” (World Harvest Mission). After this study is completed a membership interview will be offered.

Those who answer the call to commitment and membership will be welcomed into a Sonship Group which is a small group that will provide, a meal, a study from the Sonship course, and a time of sharing. The purpose of the Sonship group is to ground the younger believers in both the fellowship of the church and in the essential principles for applying the Gospel to everyday life.

Those who complete the Sonship course, will be invited into a Grace Care Group, a weekly meeting of 8-12 believers in their area of the city. They will meet for a meal, a study in Christian living guide by Jeff Harkin called “Grace Plus Nothing,” discussion and prayer. At the same time the church will provide a School of the Gospel on Sunday morning which will provide further Christian living care and instruction for all ages. The curriculum will be an adaptation of World Harvest Mission’s “Gospel Transformation.” This ministry is a supplement to the Grace Care Groups and a side door entry into the church.

For those in the Grace Care Groups the church will provide ministry training to lead them in discovering their call, giftedness, and area of passion and need. It will also guide and prepare

them for a particular area of ministry either to build the body of believers or in outreach in word and deed. From those who covenant to enter ministry training will be formed a leadership development core to train future leaders for the ministries of the church.

The Church Planting Plan: *How we will start this church*

Your Church Planting Action Plan

Our Church Replant Action Plan will be based upon single church support model. Since we presently exist as fellowship and receive financial support from present members and our child care center we have a financial base from which to work.

Our leadership start up model will be a solo church replanter with a volunteer staff. Our leadership development model will borrow from features of a church planter and a builder. Since we wish to restart with an existing core group both models apply.

We are presently meeting for “Vision and Prayer” which is planning and prayer for launching the replant. We have some elements of the “come and see” strategy in place. Others like the ministries of mercy and still in the development stages. We have a Sonship group in progress now and from that will come the core ministry and leadership group.

We are also presently meeting for Sunday Morning Worship and ministering to visitors. Are plan is to reform this service when our ministry group is established.

Your Church Planting Milestones

Several of our milestones are: 1) to complete our first Sonship group and prepare them for ministry training; 2) to identify specific leaders for each ministry in our strategy; 3) to form our first fully functioning Grace Care group; 3) have at least one Christianity Explored study

group in the major cities (10) of our county; 4) When the School of the Gospel is fully functioning; 5) when our leadership team completes the first phase of training for a new group of equipped and ordained church leaders.

Your Church Planting Objectives & Timeline (one to three years)

1. Complete our first Sonship group and prepare them for ministry training;
 - a. Three meetings remain
 - b. This group will form one or two Grace groups
 - c. January of 2005
2. Identify specific leaders for each ministry in our strategy;
 - a. A special Sunday service will launch a series of meetings for ministry discovery.
 - b. February of 2005
3. Form our first fully functioning Grace Care group;
 - a.
4. Gather at least one Christianity Explored study group in the major cities (10) of our county;
 - a. Need to identify study group leaders
 - b. Need to train new leaders
 - c. Leaders will come from our ministry and leadership discovery beginning in February 2005.
 - d. Our goal is to have these study groups by October-December of 2005
5. Launch fully functioning School of the Gospel;

- a. Training for this will begin in the Spring of 2005
 - b. Plan to begin first session in September of 2005
6. Leadership team completes the first phase of training for a new group of equipped and ordained church leaders.
- a. Complete ministry training phase one by January 2006
 - b. Complete second phase with class produced by graduates from phase one by January 2007.

The Church Planting Personnel:
Who will be starting this church

The Church Planter's Bio (qualifications, gifts, passions, experience)

Bernie L. Gillespie II was born in Fairmont, WV on January 29, 1953. Born in a family of ministers, Bernard's grandfathers were Christian ministers, as is his father. Attending Fairmont State College (Fairmont, WV) as a student majoring in psychology, he answered the call to the ministry and entered the Apostolic Bible Institute, St. Paul, MN. Graduating as an honor student, he spent three years with his wife Cheryl (Kirkendall) as an evangelist and seminar speaker. In 1978 he became an instructor at Apostolic Bible Institute. While teaching at ABI, he was an associate minister of the Apostolic Bible Church.

In 1984 Bernie served as an instructor in the Groveport Christian Academy and associate minister and youth pastor of Groveport Apostolic Church, Groveport, OH. In 1985 Bernard and his family moved to Findlay, OH and began a new church plant. He is now pastor of this congregation, Grace and Truth Community Church.

In 1990 he developed a video series for the Kent Christian College (Dover, DE) External Studies Program on the Person and Work of Christ. He has enjoyed writing a variety of articles for several periodicals. Bernie has been and is a featured speaker at various conferences. He has presented at several symposiums, and preached for over 200 churches across the USA. In 1995 Bernie taught an adjunct course in Christian Spirituality at St. Petersburg, Russia. He has authored ten books.

In 1996 he completed a Master of Divinity degree at Winebrenner Theological Seminary, Findlay, OH. That same year, he founded In Christ Alone! Ministries, a teaching ministry, with a internet based ministry that has reached thousands of people. In 1997-8 he was adjunct professor at Winebrenner Theological Seminary teaching Old Testament Survey and Ministerial Person.

Bernie is now a candidate for the Doctor of Ministry degree at Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando, FL. Closest to his heart, Bernie is proud to be the father of three children, Jennifer, Ethan, and Madison, and the husband of his wife of thirty years, Cheryl.

The Church Planter's Family

Bernie's wife Cheryl Gillespie has shared significantly in many of his ministry experiences. Throughout their Findlay church planting and growing experiences she has been fully active in meeting new people, counseling, teaching evangelistic studies, leading various services and planning ministries. She has been the director of the church's successful child care center for over fifteen years. Cheryl is a registered nurse working in the critical care unit at St. Rita's Hospital. Several of the key attributes Cheryl brings to church replanting are: 1) the ability to meet new people and work with people of all backgrounds, 2) a clear understanding and

conviction of the nature of the gospel, 3) highly supportive of Bernie's ministry and is faithfully committed to their marriage and family.

Jennifer Gillespie, the daughter of Bernie and Cheryl, is twenty five years old. She is finishing internship at the University of Findlay for a degree in sociology. She is working in a community program called SmartWorks, under the juvenile justice department, for guiding troubled youth. She is regularly on the dean's list. Jennifer has a vibrant, open personality that naturally attracts people. She makes friendships easily and knows the ministry area very well. She is a leader at school and in our church. Jennifer has brought a number of visitors to our worship service and other outreach ministries. She also has lead or worked in several church ministries and is a very talented musician.

Bernie and Cheryl's oldest son, Ethan Gillespie, is twenty years old. He is a junior at the University of Findlay. He is studying to be an architect and is on the dean's list. He works for a local new home contractor. He was the valedictorian of his high school class and is on scholarship at the University. Ethan is a committed Christian who has an excellent grasp of biblical theology. He has an excellent understanding of the gospel and shares it. He is always willing to engage people about religious and spiritual issues. Ethan has helped lead in several ministries and assist Bernie in leader worship.

The youngest child, Madison Gillespie, is eighteen, and is a senior in high school. Madison is an outgoing person, who makes friends easily. He is a committed Christian who serves our church as an audio-visual technician. Madison also has a strong faith in the gospel. He often engages students at school on a number of religious issues. He has a heart to lead prayer and

is conscientious about people personal needs. He is nearly a scratch golfer and plans to enter college to prepare for a career in golf as a course manager and instructor.

Bernie's family is committed to the gospel and very supportive of his ministry and calling. They not only support the ministry, but are the core of the Launch Team.

The Ideal Launch Team Description

An ideal launch team for our church replant would covenant with me in the following areas³⁴ for a church replant:

1. The would be chosen by me by invitation only.
2. Attend weekly team meetings for under six months
3. Prayer for present and emerging leaders
4. Agree with my core values and strategy.
5. Serve on a ministry team.
6. Give a tithe and offering to the church replant.
7. Gather: as a commitment to ongoing networking and evangelism.

The ideal launch team would be composed of people with abilities to serve in the following ministry areas:

1. Worship Team
2. Outreach and Assimilation Team
3. Care Groups and Discipleship
4. Ministry Leadership training/Mobilization Team
5. Children and Youth Ministry Team

³⁴From Childer's *Church Planters Basic Training*, p. 2:21.

6. Administration/Finance Team

The Profile of Confirmed Ministry Partners

1. Sheila Umbs, Ethan Gillespie and Bernie Gillespie for the Worship Team
2. Todd Janes, Phil and Ilene Mills, Mike Umbs for Outreach and Assimilation
3. Phil & Ilene Mills, Bernie & Cheryl Gillespie for Ministry Leadership
4. Martha Weigman & Madison Gillespie for Children and Youth Ministry
5. Lena Hayes for Administration/Finance Team
6. Jennifer Gillespie, Phil Mills, Ethan Gillespie and Bernie Gillespie for Care Groups and Discipleship

The Church Planting Support System: *How this plan will be supported*

Networking Contacts

“Networking is intentionally building authentic relationships with people as a way of life in order to understand them and assist them in the spiritual journey.”³⁵ Our approach to networking will be (and is) a combination of personal networking and circle of influence networking. Our strategy is to incorporate into our Vision and Prayer groups a seminar on identifying and developing our circles of influence. Since we are identifying 100 personal prayer partners for the church replant we will begin with approaching these contacts to visit/join our Christianity Explored studies, or to visit our Worship service, or to provide them with personal ministry care.

³⁵Childers, CPBT, p. 2-4.

Prayer Support Plan

We have already started two small groups, each meeting once per week for “Vision and Prayer.” This is to establish training in Kingdom-centered prayer and to develop and coordinate a network of intercession for our church replant. It is our goal to have each member of our prayer team to have 100 people praying for them and their commitment to our church replant

Coaching Support Plan

I have partnered with Jeff Harkin, a veteran church planter, to coach me, pray with me and for our replant, and to guide and counsel me over the next year. He will make trips to visit and advise us every quarter as well as constant communication by phone and email through this year.

Financial Support Plan (Financial Support Model)

This has not be established. We plan to schedule several business meetings to develop a new budget for our church replant. We will be discussing and determining how to redirect our present resources in new ways or discontinue old ways in order to carry out our ministry strategy. I cannot state specifics at this time with any authority. But, we do have financial support from the present members and our child care center.