

ON BEING A CHURCH PLANTER

by Daniel R. Hyde

WHAT DOES it mean to be a church planter of a confessionally Reformed church? How can a seminary student or experienced pastor who is interested in the work of church planting prepare himself for being a church planter? As one who is a church planter and has been since before I graduated seminary in 2000, I can say that there is not much guidance in the literature on being a church planter from a confessionally Reformed persuasion. Instead, those like me have been left all too often with sifting through the haystacks for the needle of applicable truth in the modern church growth movement's literature,¹ Pentecostal church planting material,² or at best, the Emerging Church movement such as the Acts 29 Network.³

While a seminary student and now as a minister, what has benefited me most given this situation has been reading and applying the Word of God in my context and using the Reformed confessions and classic Reformed theological principles all in concert with other Reformed experienced ministers and church planters in brainstorming sessions. In the past several years, though, several helpful materials have been published. In 1999 Westminster Seminary California held its "Second Biennial Missions Conference" on the theme of church planting at home and abroad.⁴ In 2002 the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) published a manual entitled *Planting an Orthodox Presbyterian Church*.⁵ Finally, Mid-

¹ For examples see G. A. Pritchard, *Willow Creek Seeker Services: Evaluating a New Way of Doing Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), Nelson Searcy and Kerrick Thomas, *Launch: Starting a New Church from Scratch* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2006), and Rick Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message & Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995).

² For examples see C. Peter Wagner, *Strategies for Church Growth: Tools for Effective Mission and Evangelism* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1987), Elmer L. Towns, C. Peter Wagner, and Thom S. Rainer, *The Everychurch Guide to Growth: How Any Plateaued Church Can Grow* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), and C. Peter Wagner, *Church Growth and the Whole Gospel: A Biblical Mandate* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1998).

³ For examples see Ed Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches: Planting a Church That's Biblically Sound and Reaching People in Culture* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), Ed Stetzer and David Putman, *Breaking the Missional Code: Your Church Can Become a Missionary in Your Community* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), or the website of the Acts 29 Network, which is "a network of pastors from around the nation and world whose dream is to help qualified leaders called by God plant new churches and replant declining churches." <http://www.acts29network.org/>.

⁴ The eighteen audio lectures are available from Westminster Seminary California: <http://wscal.edu/>.

⁵ *Planting an Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (Willow Grove, PA: The Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2002). As found online

America Reformed Seminary held a “Church Planting Workshop” in 2008 and the four lectures were published in that year’s issue of the *Mid-America Journal of Theology*.⁶ These resources have made a small beginning of remedying this situation for the confessionally Reformed church planter.

Since we are living in a time in which even the American media recognizes the interest in and spread of what it calls “The New Calvinism,”⁷ as seminaries and churches we need to equip our potential church planters to minister in these exciting times. As the King James Version translated Ephesians 5:16, we must “redeem the time.” My purpose in this article, then, is to give those who seek to minister among confessionally Reformed churches as church planters as well as the churches that will call these men to that particular ministry, some practical material from which to develop a passion for spreading the Reformed faith in our generation. As a result, what I say will not be merely a discussion of the principles (*principia*) of church planting but how those principles should be applied to the practices (*practica*) of the person and character of the confessionally Reformed church planter.⁸ The necessity of such a practical approach is not only found in the fact that our theology is practical, as William Ames (1576–1633) said, “Theology is the doctrine or teaching of living to God,”⁹ but is found in the fact that church planting is extremely difficult and trying work physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually.¹⁰

1. Foundational Principles

In beginning our thoughts about being a church planter, let us first address what are the necessary foundational principles for a church planter. These principles (*principia*) are *foundational principles* in that they are the beginning ideas, presuppositions, and commitments that a church planter must be committed to in doing the work of church plant-

at <http://www.opc.org/chm/chplant/planting.pdf>. Accessed April 3, 2009. Cf. *Manual for Presbytery/CHMCE Partnership* (Second edition; Willow Grove, PA: The Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1997). As found at http://www.opc.org/chm/HM_Manual_97.pdf. Accessed April 3, 2009.

⁶ Paul Murphy, “Session One: Heart Preparation,” *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 19 (2008): 223–232; Phil Grotenhuis, “Session Two: The Romance and the Reality,” *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 19 (2008): 233–241; Phil Grotenhuis, “Session Three: Extreme Makeover—A Kingdom Approach to Mission,” *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 19 (2008): 243–250; Paul Murphy, “Session Four: A Covenantal and Organic Approach,” *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 19 (2008): 251–264.

⁷ David Van Biema, “10 Ideas Changing the World Right Now: The New Calvinism,” *Time* 173:11 (March 23, 2009); cf. Colin Young, *Restless, Reformed: A Journalist’s Journey with the New Calvinists* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008).

⁸ For some introductory thoughts on the principles of church planting from a Reformed perspective see Daniel R. Hyde, “On Being a Church Planter,” *Christian Renewal* 23:16 (May 11, 2005): 20–22; “Church Planting Principles from the Book of Acts,” *Christian Renewal* 22:9 (January 26, 2004): 20–22; “The Recipe for Church Planting from the Book of Acts,” *Christian Renewal* 25:12 (March 14, 2007): 24–25.

⁹ William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, trans. John Dykstra Eusen (1968; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), 77.

¹⁰ For a practical article on this see Grotenhuis, “Session Two: The Romance and the Reality,” 233–241.

ing and that lay the groundwork for everything else a church planter does in his ministry.¹¹

These foundational principles are found in a text such as Acts 2:42: “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (ESV). The importance of Acts 2:42 as a programmatic text for the life of the New Covenant Church was expressed by Francis Turretin (1623–1687) who spoke of this text as giving us three particular things (*praecipua*) for the foundation of the church.¹² In his commentary upon this text, John Calvin (1509–1564) also spoke of the foundational principles in this text: “Luke is recording those things which constitute the form of the church visible to the public eye. Indeed, he defines four marks by which the true and genuine appearance of the Church may be distinguished. Do we seek the true Church of Christ? The picture of it is here lively painted to the life.”¹³

Here we see that the church is firmly based upon three principles: the church is a theological, liturgical, and communal institution and organism. Luke’s words are not only an historical description of what the earliest new covenant community was like, but they also apply to so many areas of what we do as church planting pastors. For example, our corporate worship is based on these principles, as it is to be doctrinal, liturgical, and communal. As well, our Christian life is found in these principles as we “devote” (*proskartereō*) ourselves to theology, liturgy, and community as Christians. Finally, in membership classes what we are doing is to initiate new believers and new members in these three principles.¹⁴ As those who may be sent out as church planters in areas with no confessionally Reformed churches, we must keep these three principles always before us as the first things, the foundational principles of our life and ministry.

1.1. The Church Planter Must be Devoted to Theology

The church planter must be devoted to “the apostles’ teaching,” that is, their doctrine, their theology. As such, he confesses all that is taught in the Word of God: “We believe that these Holy Scriptures fully contain the will of God, and that whatsoever man ought to believe unto salvation, is sufficiently taught therein” (Belgic Confession, art. 7).¹⁵ Yet, the Re-

¹¹ For a definition of *principia theologiae* see Richard Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 245–246.

¹² Francisco Turretino, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae* (Genevae: Samuelem de Tournes, 1690), 3:100. For the English text see Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr., 3 vols. (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1997), 3:89.

¹³ John Calvin, *The Acts of the Apostles: Vol. 1*, trans. W. J. G. McDonald, Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries, 12 vols., ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance (1965; repr., Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 6:85; cf. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 4.17.44.

¹⁴ For example, see how I relate this text to catechizing new members in “Teaching Membership Classes,” *Ordained Servant* 14:1 (March 2005): 11–14. For a full new members’ course see Daniel R. Hyde, *The Good Confession: An Exploration of the Christian Faith* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2006).

¹⁵ *The Creeds of Christendom*, ed. Philip Schaff, rev. David S. Schaff, 3 vols. (1931; repr.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 3:387–388.

formed church planter does not confess the teaching of the Word of God as if he were on an island, according to his “own interpretation” (*idias epiluseōs*; 2 Peter 1:20; ESV). The church planter confesses the Word of God according to the Spirit of the ascended Christ’s leading of the church into all truth (John 14:26, 15:26). While the church planter is starting something new in a church plant, what he starts is not new. This is why he needs a deep-rooted appreciation for the catholicity of “the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3; ESV) as expressed in the ancient church’s ecumenical creeds. This is why church planters must be absolutely convinced and confident in the Reformed confessions and catechisms because they agree with the Word of God.¹⁶ As he promises in the *Form of Subscription* from the Synod of Dort:

We, the undersigned, Ministers of the Gospel ...do hereby, sincerely and in good conscience before the Lord, declare by this our subscription that we heartily believe and are persuaded that all the articles and points of doctrine contained in the Belgic Confession and Heidelberg Catechism of the Reformed Churches, together with the explanation of some points of the aforesaid doctrine made by the National Synod of Dordrecht, 1618-’19, do fully agree with the Word of God.¹⁷

One of the things a young church planter will learn and experience is that everything is theological and that theology gives stability in everything. One example that no doubt can be multiplied many times over by the ministers reading this article was a Lord’s Day evening early in my ministry. The evening service was finished and I had returned home only to be greeted by four phone calls within five minutes telling me that four of my parishioners had each gone into the hospital. Needless to say, it was overwhelming. It was so overwhelming that it caused mental as well as physical stress. The only thing that gave me confidence—and sanity—was that I was rooted in the Reformed doctrine of God’s fatherly providence. The Heidelberg Catechism (1563) beautifully expresses this doctrine in its exposition of the first article of the Apostles’ Creed, “I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth.” The answer is that “the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” not only created everything “of nothing” but also “upholds and governs the same by his eternal counsel and providence.” Because of this “I so trust as to have no doubt that . . . whatever evil he sends upon me in this vale of tears, he will turn to my good; for he is able to do it, being Almighty God, and willing also, being a faithful Father” (Q&A 26). The Catechism goes on to teach on the providence of God, which is his “almighty and every where present power of God, whereby, as it were by his hand, he still upholds heaven and earth, with all creatures” and that therefore “all things, come not by

¹⁶ For a standard discussion of confessional subscription see *The Practice of Confessional Subscription*, ed. David W. Hall (Oak Ridge, TN: The Covenant Foundation, 1997), especially W. Robert Godfrey, “Subscription in the Dutch Reformed Tradition,” 67–75.

¹⁷ This is the Form of Subscription used in the United Reformed Churches in North America, which may be found at www.urncna.org. Cf. *Psalter Hymnal* (Grand Rapids: Board of Publications of the Christian Reformed Church, 1976), 117; *The Practice of Confessional Subscription*, 69.

chance, but by his fatherly hand” (Q&A 27). The benefits of knowing this are three: “That we may be patient in adversity, thankful in prosperity, and for what is future have good confidence in our faithful God and Father that no creature shall separate us from his love, since all creatures are so in his hand that without his will they can not so much as move” (Q&A 28).¹⁸

God used these questions and answers to impress upon me that even in my anxiety as a young church planter I was *coram Deo*, before the face of my Almighty God and Father; and I was so not only in theory, but in reality.

Another aspect of being devoted to the theology of the apostles as a church planter is how this commitment is applied in preaching. A church planter must view himself as God views him as a minister. Meditate upon how the metaphor of the prophetic herald is so prevalent for the pastor in Scripture (E.g., Isa. 40; 2 Tim. 4). The prophetic pastor is to stand as a voice in the wilderness, as a herald on the mountaintop and earnestly speak this gospel, this good news to the worst of sinners.¹⁹ Church planters need to recapture that consciousness as they go out to minister in a post-everything world. We are prophets who proclaim a message of law and gospel to the world around us—a law that no one can obey (Rom. 8:7–8) and a Gospel that no one is willing to believe (Ps. 2:1–3; Rom. 8:5–8; 1 Cor. 2:14). The church planter is to minister the *message* of Christ according to the *method* of Christ.

This means that the message must be conveyed in the way God has instituted and intended. What we must realize is that God has not called us ministers for nothing. We are ministers of the Word, his Word. The ministry is no place for ingenuity. We are not to create new measures, relevant, visual and experiential methods of “translating” the gospel to a modern culture. Many churches in America believe the Gospel can be communicated just as well through drama, skateboard exhibitions, or by having a large playground for children on the church’s “campus.” Yet the New Testament is so clear that this is contrary to the way of the Word. We are called to speak what Christ says and how Christ says to speak it! The message and method are inseparably linked and intertwined—you cannot separate them.²⁰ The method of Scripture is oral, verbal proclamation, for “faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:17). This proclamation of the glorious gospel has a multi-faceted vocabulary in 1 Timothy: “charge” (1:3, 6:17), “put these things before” (4:6), “command” (4:11), “teach” (4:11, 6:2), “public reading” (4:13), “exhortation” (4:13), “teaching” (4:13, 5:17, 6:1), “preaching” (5:17), “urge” (6:2). We are called to use our God-given abilities to bring the Word of the gospel to a world that needs to *hear*.²¹

¹⁸ Schaff, *Creeds*, 3:316–17.

¹⁹ See John Angell James, *An Earnest Ministry* (1847; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1993).

²⁰ See Michael Horton, “Is Style Neutral?” *Modern Reformation* 5:1 (Jan/Feb 1996).

²¹ See Daniel R. Hyde, “The Principle and Practice of Preaching in the Heidelberg Catechism,” *Puritan Reformed Journal* 1:1 (January 2009): 97–117; “Portrait of a Pastor,” *Covenanter Review* 16:2 (Fall 2007): 5–12.

Especially as church planters, there must have a sense of urgency in preaching for many reasons, including the fact that no one may show up next week! A church planter is, as Paul called Timothy, an “evangelist” (*euangelistēs*; 2 Tim. 4:5; ESV), that is, one who spreads the evangel, the Gospel. As a church planter I have preached to a congregation of ten people; yes, it was depressing to see so few show up, but I was still called to preach the gospel to those ten as if they were the last ten souls on earth. As Richard Baxter (1615–1691) said, “I preached, as never sure to preach again, and as a dying man to dying men.” A church planter will be an evangelist, announcing the news of the King and his kingdom. A church planter will be a missionary, going some place near or far with the mission and purpose of speaking that Word. A church planter will be a pioneer, trailblazing a path for the coming of Christ’s kingdom of grace among the kingdom of Satan, who is “the god of this world” (2 Cor. 4:4; ESV). A church planter does not start a social club or try merely to draw a crowd; instead, what he does is theological, confronting “this present evil age” (Gal. 1:4; ESV). This last point is important to remember, given how “*a*-theological” the church in our culture has become. The temptation is to tone it down to attract people; and you will be tempted and you will give in, at least in your thoughts if not in your actions. While this strategy may attract tourists, it will not attract those “the Father is seeking ... to worship him” (John 4:23; ESV).²² The great thing about being a Reformed church planter is that you may be the only preacher in town with any theological acumen.

If a Reformed church planter is not committed to a Reformed view of preaching he will be tempted to capitulate on all sides. On one side he will be tempted to make the church look like the culture. On another side he will be tempted to replace preaching with High Church liturgy. On yet another side he will be tempted to give into the sinful desires of himself and his people.

1.2. The Church Planter Must be Devoted to Liturgy

The church planter must also be devoted to liturgy, that is, the public services of the people of God. This is what Luke called “the breaking of [the] bread and the prayers.”²³ A church planter must be devoted to the public worship of the Triune God and pass on that devotion to his young parish. As one who is presumably beginning a Reformed congregation in an area where there is not another, this devotion must be palpable. What does that devotion look like? Let me give several areas.

First, from the outset of a church plant, make it a non-negotiable principle to emphasize Lord’s Day worship. This is who we are as Christians and this is what we do—called to ascend the heavenly mountain of God (Ps. 24; Heb. 12:18–25) so that we can fall before the throne of God

²² This language of “tourists” and “seekers” comes from Michael S. Horton, “Seekers or Tourists?: Or the Difference Between Pilgrimage and Vacation,” *Modern Reformation* 10:4 (July/August 2001): 12–18; cf. “How the Kingdom Comes,” *Christianity Today* 50:1 (January 2006): 42.

²³ For some practical advice on liturgy in the church plant see *Planting an Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, 42.

in confession and to be welcomed around the table of the Lord in thanksgiving as we receive his grace. This “rest one day” and “work six days” pattern needs to be a pattern of a church planter’s life as the life of his congregation. As with theology, the surrounding church and culture will downplay Sunday as the Lord’s Day and more and more churches around the confessionally Reformed church plant will have services on Saturday night as an alternative. The sabbatical pattern will certainly not be attractive to the culture. Once *the church planter* is committed to this, though, and the congregation follows his lead, then maybe, just maybe, he ought to add a mid-week Bible study or activity for members and their children.²⁴

Second, let me give a strong exhortation to the potential Reformed church planter to be confident in Reformed worship. Not only is Reformed theology different to most people who come to our churches, our worship is strikingly different. The reason it is different is our theology. Our worship is a result of our theology, not in spite of our theology.²⁵ The content of our theology drives both the content and form of worship, and these cannot be divorced.²⁶ We worship the way we worship because we believe the way we believe, not vice versa. Pastorally speaking this means that the church planter needs to be patient with non-Reformed evangelical Christians who are not used to our worship. Work with them. Meet with them. Talk to them. Even train your congregation through a catechism class, mid-week class, or writing to know what they do and why they do it in worship and to be patient with those who do not understand.²⁷

Third, as a church planter the study of the history of Christian worship and the forms of historic worship needs to be a favorite subject in our time. I would encourage all interested in church planting to devote themselves to the writings of contemporary scholars such as Hughes Oliphant Old as well as to the writings of the Reformers themselves on worship. In my studies I have found that we as a Reformed people have always been a self-consciously liturgical people, even more so than we are

²⁴ On the Lord’s Day see John Owen, “Concerning a Sacred Day of Rest,” *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, ed. W. H. Goold, 7 vols. (1855; repr.; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 2:265–546; R. Scott Clark, “Whatever Happened to the Second Service?” *Recovering the Reformed Confession: Our Theology, Piety, and Practice* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2008), 293–342.

²⁵ Cf. Daniel R. Hyde, “Liturgy as Catechism,” *The Journal of the Church Music National Conference* (2005): 17–20. For a principled and practical explanation of Reformed worship for those new to Reformed worship see Daniel R. Hyde, *What to Expect in Reformed Worship: A Visitors’ Guide* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2007).

²⁶ See Michael Horton, “Is Style Neutral?” *Modern Reformation* 5:1 (Jan/Feb 1996): 5–10.

²⁷ For an example of short, basic articles through key aspects of Reformed worship that I wrote for my congregation, see Daniel R. Hyde, “What is Reformed Worship? (I): It Is Biblical,” *The Outlook* 57:5 (May 2007): 5–9, “What is Reformed Worship? (II): It Is Historical,” *The Outlook* 57:6 (June 2007): 6–9, “What is Reformed Worship? (III): It Is Covenantal,” *The Outlook* 57:7 (July/August 2007): 5–9, “What is Reformed Worship? (IV): It Is Evangelical,” *The Outlook* 57:8 (September 2007): 4–7, “What is Reformed Worship? (V): It Is Reverential,” *The Outlook* 57:9 (October 2007): 5–8, “What is Reformed Worship? (VI): It Is Joyful,” *The Outlook* 57:10 (November 2007): 5–8, “What is Reformed Worship? (VII): It Is Liturgical,” *The Outlook* 57:11 (December 2007): 6–9.

today.²⁸ All the churches of the Reformation had common worship, meaning they had set liturgies, forms, and prayers. What has been amazing to me is that in using these historic forms of worship to my setting we have drawn the exact same people that the “Emerging Church” movement is seeking to draw. Those young twentysomethings who yearn for community, transcendence, and stability are drawn—not repelled—by liturgical worship. As an illustration of the power of history, transcendence, and structure upon our post-modern culture, a recent article in *The Christian Science Monitor* described why European women are converting to Islam. They are leaving behind their nominal “Christianity” for Islam’s transcendent worship, structured prayers, and rigorous life of morality. As one convert said, “Islam demands a closeness to God. Islam is simpler, more rigorous, and it’s easier because it is explicit. I was looking for a framework; man needs rules and behavior to follow. Christianity did not give me the same reference points.” A Muslim scholar went on to reflect on these reasons in these words: “A lot of women are reacting to the moral uncertainties of Western society.... They like the sense of belonging and caring and sharing that Islam offers.”²⁹

1.3. The Church Planter Must be Devoted to Community

The third principle to which the church planter must be devoted is the community, the church plant parish. As the early church was “devoted” and steadfast in their love of “the fellowship,” so the church planter must be committed to his church community. This means that church planters must be tireless in visiting their parishioners, getting to know them, counseling, catechizing them from the world’s ways to the Word’s ways, and living among them in their highs and lows. While we as Reformed people are intimately acquainted with the idea of family or home visitation (*huisbezoek*) as an aspect of what the elders do on an annual basis, church planters must take that concept and make it their own.³⁰ As shepherds, church planters must know their sheep by name intimately, just as our Chief Shepherd does (John 10:3): “You must know who they are and where they are both physically and spiritually. Know what they do for a living and the location of their workplaces. Know the

²⁸ For a discussion of one aspect of historic Reformed worship in the area of the evangelical feast days (i.e., church calendar), see Daniel R. Hyde, “Lutheran Puritanism? *Adiaphora* in Lutheran Orthodoxy and Possible Commonalities in Reformed Orthodoxy,” *American Theological Inquiry* 2:1 (January 2009): 61–83.

²⁹ Peter Ford, “Why European Women are Turning to Islam,” *The Christian Science Monitor* (December 27, 2005). As found at <http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/1227/p01s04-woeu.html>. Accessed April 2, 2009.

³⁰ The Church Order of the Synod of Dort says, “The office of elder is . . . to conduct family visiting for the edification of the congregation insofar as this can be done before and after the Lord’s Supper, especially to comfort the members of the congregation, to teach, and also to exhort others to profess the Christian religion” (art. 23). P. Biesterveld and H. H. Kuyper, *Ecclesiastical Manual Including Decisions of the Netherlands Synods and Other Significant Matters Relating to the Government of the Churches*, trans. Richard R. De Ridder (Grand Rapids: Richard R. De Ridder, 1982), 165. Cf. Idzerd Van Dellen and Martin Monsma, *The Church Order Commentary* (1941; repr.: Wyoming, MI: Credo Books, 2003), 108–111; Peter Y. De Jong, *Taking Heed to the Flock: A Study of the Principles and Practice of Family Visitation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1948).

condition of their marriages and their family relationships. Know what provokes them and what encourages them. Know the needs of the little ones and the elderly ones in the church.”³¹

As teachers, church planters must be tireless in going “house to house” (*kat’oikous*; Acts 20:20; ESV). There are no elders; the church planter is preacher, teacher, spiritual counselor, and functioning elder. Visiting the members of a church plant regularly, meaning, several times a year, is a means of instruction, prayer for particular and congregational needs, as well as building the trust and openness needed in a shepherd-sheep relationship.

Another way we see the community of the saints illustrated in the New Testament is through the hospitality of the saints. As Paul said, “Seek to show hospitality” (Rom. 12:13; ESV). Among the apostles’ many exhortations in Romans 12 none may be more powerful for the life of the Christian and the Christian’s local church. It is one thing for Paul to say “love one another with brotherly affection” (Rom. 12:10; ESV) but quite another to say “seek to show hospitality.” The former is an attitude while the latter is an action; one is a creed and the other is a deed. Hospitality is love in action. It is Paul’s way of saying what James says: “I will show you my faith by my works” (James 2:18; ESV). Hospitality shows love. It breaks down walls. It opens the way of fellowship. It says to its recipient: “You are welcome here; I am privileged to have *you* in my home, at my table.” It does this because the New Testament word translated “hospitality” is *philoxenia*—the love of strangers. Church planters need to set the example of hospitality by being hospitable to their parish as well as to their neighbors. With those who are saved Peter exhorted the body of Christ: “Show hospitality to one another *without grumbling*” (1 Peter 4:9; ESV). With those who are strangers Hebrews exhorts us: “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares” (Heb. 13:2; ESV). By doing this church planters will live transparent lives in community with their parishioners; they will build community, build trust, and build a godly atmosphere in which to labor and pray.³² You will be surprised when you invite members, visitors to church, and neighbors to your home, how few people have ever been invited to a pastor’s home. This is a powerful way of showing that you are not untouchable in your ivory tower, but that you care for souls and desire to be open to them as well.

All of the three points above are an extended way of saying that the confessionally Reformed church planter must be the most convicted and principled man among our churches. He must be as one out there virtually on his own with temptations at every corner. He must be devoted to his biblical and confessional theology, to his biblical and historic liturgy, and to his church and broader community. He is not a man that will represent his Lord and King if he caves in time after time to religious and

³¹ *Planting an Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, 37 cf. 38.

³² For two excellent books on this and similar themes, see Mary Beeke with Joel Beeke, *The Law of Kindness: Serving with Heart and Hands* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2007) and Marva J. Dawn, *Truly the Community: Romans 12 and How to Be the Church* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992).

social pressure let alone the persecution of those with whom he speaks such serious words.

2. Aptitude Principles

Besides the three foundational principles of who the church planter must be as stated above, the church planter must have certain aptitude principles, that is, certain skills, gifts, and personality traits. In thinking of this, recall that Paul exhorted young pastor Timothy to lay before the congregation those men who not only desired to be overseers, but also were “able to teach” (*didaktikon*; 1 Tim. 3:2; ESV). He also said the same thing to Timothy: “And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach” (*didaktikon*; 2 Tim. 2:24; ESV). The overseer and the minister must not only have the desire to teach the Word, but must also have the ability to apply that Word to their hearers. The distinction is between knowledge and wisdom. Whereas knowledge is mastery of content, wisdom is the skillful application of that content. We might say that wisdom in the area of teaching is mastery of context. What follows are several aptitudes that a church planter must have.

2.1. Passion for Planting (Rom. 10:1)

A church planter must have a passion to be in the church-planting ministry. This means that he must be passionate about spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ to people and areas where it is not prominent. As I said above, the church planter must understand that he is a prophet, bringing a foreign, yet needed, message to the world. He must be “so intensely gripped with the significance of the doctrine of the church that, at the bidding of his presbytery, he is willing to move to a place where he is needed.”³³ From the vantage point of Reformation history, the church planter must have the evangelistic and church planting fervor of our Reformed forefathers, including John Calvin himself.³⁴ It was the example of Geneva that led to the modern missions movement, under the leadership of pioneers like David Brainerd (1718–1747) among the American Indians³⁵, William Carey (1761–1834) in India,³⁶ Henry Martyn (1781–1812) in India and Persia,³⁷ Adoniram Judson (1788–1850) in Burma,³⁸

³³ *Planting an Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, 35.

³⁴ On the mission emphasis of John Calvin see Frank A. James, III, “Calvin the Evangelist,” *Reformed Quarterly* 19:2 (Fall 2001). As found at <http://rq.rts.edu/fall01/james.html>. Accessed April 2, 2009. Keith Coleman, “Calvin and Missions,” *Western Reformed Seminary Journal* 16:1 (February 2009): 28–33. As found at http://www.wrs.edu/Materials_for_Web_Site/Journals/16-1_Feb-2009/Coleman--Calvin_Missions.pdf. Accessed April 2, 2009. Joel R. Beeke, “Calvin’s Evangelism,” in *Living for God’s Glory: An Introduction to Calvinism* (Orlando: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2008), 275–288.

³⁵ John Thornbury, *David Brainerd: Pioneer Missionary to the American Indians* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 1996).

³⁶ Vishal and Ruth Mangalwadi, *The Legacy of William Carey: A Model for the Transformation of a Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1999).

³⁷ David Bentley-Taylor, *My Love Must Wait: The Story of Henry Martyn* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1975).

John Patton (1824–1907) in the New Hebrides,³⁹ and Jonathan Goforth (1859–1936) in China.⁴⁰ As William Carey said after chronicling the state of the nations of the world in his day: “All these things are loud calls to Christians, and especially to ministers, to exert themselves to the utmost in their several spheres of action, and to try to enlarge them as much as possible.”⁴¹

This passion must be evidenced in fervent prayer that non-believers would come into contact with his church members as well as his church services and be converted by the Holy Spirit. He must pray passionately that evangelicals who wallow in works-righteousness churches would find “the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free” (Gal. 5:1; KJV) in his parish.

This passion must be evidenced in the church planter training and motivating his parishioners to do the work of witnessing as well.⁴² Hyper-Calvinists and preachers who are concerned merely with “maintenance ministry,” that is, keeping those he already has, need not and must not apply. The OPC’s church planting book gives some excellent advice in that vein:

Reaching out to the unsaved is not just the responsibility of a pastor or a Christian leader. It is the responsibility of every believer to bear witness to the grace of Jesus Christ. So let your example serve to encourage others to do the same. Make clear to your people that not everyone in the church is called or gifted to be an evangelist, but that is not what this is about. Show them through your example the significance of being salt and light, and stress the importance of faithfulness rather than success.⁴³

In light of the above, this means that a candidate for the ministry in a Reformed church must not take a call to church planting merely because it is his only option. Further, if you are a seminary graduate and a candidate for the ministry and your desire is to be a pastor in a large, more established congregation, or even to be an associate pastor who

³⁸ Courtney Anderson, *To the Golden Shore: The Life of Adoniram Judson* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1987).

³⁹ John G. Paton, *Missionary to the New Hebrides, An Autobiography Edited by His Brother* (1889; repr.; Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1965).

⁴⁰ Rosalind Goforth, *Goforth of China* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1937).

⁴¹ William Carey, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens* (Leicester, England: Ann Ireland, 1792). As found at http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/world/readfile?fk_files=51264&pageno=21. Accessed April 2, 2009.

⁴² Cf. Murphy, “Session One: Heart Preparation,” 226–230.

⁴³ *Planting an Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, 41. For some helpful books on witnessing and evangelism from a Reformed perspective, see *Reformed Evangelism: A Manual on Principles and Methods of Evangelization* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1948); Calvin Knox Cummings and John Murray, *Biblical Evangelism Today: A Symposium* (Philadelphia: The Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1954); R. B. Kuiper, *God Centered Evangelism* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1966); Will Metzger, *Tell the Truth: The Whole Gospel to the Whole Person by Whole People* (Rev. ed., Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002); Joel R. Beeke, *Puritan Evangelism: A Biblical Approach* (Second edition, Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2007).

does a lot of counseling, for example, you must not take a call to be a church planter. I have seen this situation. Not only does the church planter end up unhappy but his church—at least what is left of it—is unhappy as well. Being a church planter is not just another job, but it is a calling and a passion. I say this not as one who is always on fire for church planting either. Feelings come and go; my God-given passion remains the same. We see this in the example of Paul, who told the Romans that his “heart’s desire and prayer to God” was for unbelieving Israel to be saved (Rom. 10:1; ESV). His passion for establishing new churches is seen when he says, “I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named” (Rom. 15:20; ESV). His final goal was to pass through Rome and go to Spain, the outmost edge of the Roman Empire and the known western world (Rom. 15:24). If this is not your passion this is nothing to be ashamed of. There are many congregations that can use you, and in which God can use you.

2.2. Ability to be Personable

It is also important to note that a church planter must be personable. With all the interaction with unbelievers, visitors to church, visitation with potential new members, getting recognized in the community, as well as all the meetings with the church plant members, the church planter needs to be “normal.” He must be able to communicate to all sorts and conditions of men. As the OPC’s book on church planting says, “If you do not care deeply for people, if you do not get along well with them generally, and if you find yourself not liking them nearly so much as you like your books and your study, then the work of church planting will not go well for you. Nothing else in Reformed ministry works very well, including preaching, if you do not care deeply for people.”⁴⁴

Towards those outside this church this means that the church planter needs to get out into the community. The community in which a Reformed church plant is begun needs a man who is fine with spending a lot of social time with people and not merely a man who spends all his time in isolation in his study. Leave the house; leave the study. Study at coffee houses and small community restaurants. Join the neighborhood watch, join the PTA, and the list goes on of places to go to begin building relationships. As the story goes, Dr. Cornelius Van Til went to a pub every week in Philadelphia as a means of getting to know people, to answer their questions, and evangelize them.

Towards those in the church, remember the example of the apostle Paul: “I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house” (Acts 20:20; ESV). We see Paul preaching in traditional settings like in the synagogues (e.g., Acts 13:5) as well as in untraditional situations such as on Mars Hill, where he preached to philosophers (Acts 17), yet he also testified while imprisoned (Acts 16:25–34).

This does not mean that church planting is personality-driven. Church planters must be known as personable, not personalities. In his

⁴⁴ *Planting an Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, 37.

classic work on Reformed liturgy, *Onze Eeredienst*, Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) critiqued what he saw in American Christianity, when he said,

Only in America and in some of our own small independent churches is there such a free-reigning spirit. It is quite common in America, especially in the larger cities, for a minister to start his own church, attract whoever will come, and maintain his church from the contributions that come in. Such a church is thus literally an independent business run by the minister, without any confessional forms and without connections to other churches. It is nothing other than a circle gathering around a talented speaker.⁴⁵

The situation is still the same today, even among the aforementioned “New Calvinism.” For the confessionally Reformed church planter, though, it is not about personality. As John the Baptist said: “He must increase, but I must decrease.” (John 3:30).

2.3. Ability to Handle Disappointment

Because the church planter will be starting from scratch he must not only be passionate about what he is doing but he must also be able to handle the many disappointments that will come his way in church planting.⁴⁶ For example, church planters must be able to handle the disappointment of members falling into gross public sin. In the first couple of years of my ministry, just as my congregation was being planted, watered, and seeing some stable growth, twice I came back from vacation to the news of serious sin within the church that came to the surface while I was gone. And these were not fringe members but core members who helped to start our church. Was this disappointing? Absolutely. Was this impossible to deal with? Absolutely not in the strength of Christ, although practically it was as difficult as anything I had done up to that point in my life.

Another area in which the ability to handle disappointment is crucial to the Reformed church planter is being able to handle the many visitors and seemingly serious inquirers who will never return. Whether they call Reformed services “Catholic,” whether they cannot stand the message of guilt, grace, and gratitude that is preached from the pulpit, or whether they complain that the church is too small for their families’ needs, you will be disappointed. In their excellent and encouraging book, *Preaching and Worship in the Small Church*, William Willimon and Robert Wilson contrast the mentality of the mega-church Christian world with that of the small church. While some people

have a gnawing feeling that the small church is somehow second-rate and does not quite measure up to what it ought to be in today’s world.

⁴⁵ Abraham Kuyper, *Our Worship*, ed. Harry Boonstra, trans. Harry Boonstra, Henry Baron, Gerrit Sheeres, and Leonard Sweetman, The Calvin Institute of Christian Worship Liturgical Studies, ed. John D. Witvliet (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 6–7.

⁴⁶ *Planting an Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, 35.

Other persons ... view the small church as an anachronism, kept alive by stubborn people who are holding on to an institution that should be allowed or even encouraged to die. They see such churches as impediments to the development of the kind of congregation needed today. In the meantime the small congregation continues to exist, doing what it and the Christian Church have always done, albeit imperfectly: winning adherents, nurturing them in the Christian way of life, gathering them each week for worship and preaching, and in many rural communities, finally burying them in the adjacent cemetery, confident that they have successfully run the race and received the reward of the faithful.⁴⁷

If you are called to church planting, you are called to small church ministry initially, if not forever. Because of this there are two practical ways to deal with disappointment. The first is one of the most important pieces of wisdom I learned from a colleague and friend in the infancy of my ministry. He related to me that when he was church planting he had to learn that he was not the Holy Spirit. I needed to learn that also. This is part of what Paul said in writing to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 3:5–7: “What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters in anything, but only God who gives the growth” (ESV).

Church planting is God’s work. The church planter is just a servant who sows and waters seeds. As such, he must have a long-term mindset. Week-by-week people will come and go, but if his eyes are on the goal of planting, watering, and establishing a solid, confessionally Reformed church he will be able to handle the ups and downs of the work. It is not about the church planter anyway, it is about Christ: “For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord” (2 Cor. 4:5; ESV).

The second practical means of dealing with the struggles and sadness of disappointment is to develop close relationships with seminary classmates who go out into the ministry with you as well as finding an experienced ministerial colleague, whether nearby or who is willing to encourage you over the phone. Do not discount human contact and conversation as means the Holy Spirit uses to lift you up “out of the miry bog” (Ps. 40:2; ESV). The church planter must rely on his fathers and brothers in the Lord for counsel: “Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another” (Prov. 27:17; ESV). These brothers must be used as sounding boards when down and desperate. Practically, the church planter should make it a habit to call other pastors he is close with who can both hold him accountable since some church plants do not have mature saints. These weekly phone calls or meetings should also be for the purpose of encouragement, prayer, and help.

2.4. Ability to be a Self-Motivator

Church planters are pioneers—those who go out to begin a work that no one else has done so that others may follow. One aspect of having a

⁴⁷ William H. Willimon and Robert L. Wilson, *Preaching and Worship in the Small Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1980), 14.

pioneering spirit is to be self-motivated. Basically it boils down to this: if you are not a hard worker in your ordinary life as an employee, husband, father, etc., then do not think you are called to be a church planter—let alone a pastor! If you skidded by in college and seminary, finishing average work at the last minute, or if you do not work well with a set routine that is often interrupted, you will not be able to handle planting a church. Starting a church plant is not the way to learn self-discipline. It is not the place for on-the-job training. If you do not have self-motivation and self-discipline, for the church's sake, do not become a church planter! The motto of the Marines ought to be that of the fraternity of church planters, "The few; the proud." Few will heed the call and be able to meet the challenge, while others will be needed in the important task of pastoring larger, established congregations that will serve as overseeing and supporting churches of Reformed church planting.

Church planters have to be able to wake up on Monday morning and get back to work. They have to do this despite the fact that Monday is the normal "day off" for the pastor, his Sabbath rest. He needs to wake up after preaching two average sermons at best so that he can get back to work in his church that is in the red financially, despite the fact that he has two very sick kids, a throbbing headache himself, and that his most dedicated elder just died from brain cancer. With two sermons to preach, Bible studies to teach, phone calls to make, visitors to follow-up with, counseling to do, fellowship to facilitate, meetings to chair, plus everything else that he must do as a normal human being, there is no time to spare. In many respects, a church planter is on an island. He has no pastoral "staff" and does not have the luxury of having an office mentality, where he can take breaks and chat it up with people. Most often than not it is just the church planter in his study or on the road doing what needs to be done.⁴⁸ Because of this, church planters need to have the attitude of the apostle Paul and apply it to church planting: "forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:13–14; ESV).

2.5. Ability to Lead by Delegation

In line with being a self-motivator is the ability to lead a church plant by delegation.⁴⁹ Yes, the church planter has a ton of ordinary work to do

⁴⁸ "The rigors of pastoral ministry are doubled for the organizing pastor. Not only do you have all the responsibilities of a pastor, but you must also care for all the necessary details of the initial structure and operation of a new church. As the organizing pastor of a mission work, the demand on your time will be significant. It will be imperative for you to keep a calendar and operate with a schedule. But being a wise manager of your time also means allowing for interruptions to alter that schedule, since it is not actually your time that you are managing, but the conduct of your ministry. Furthermore, it will be important for you to keep some form of a list of tasks and responsibilities and to incorporate them into the scheduling of your time. And finally, it will be vital for you to learn to distinguish between the things that are urgent and those that are really important as you budget the 168 hours in your ministry week." *Planting an Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, 49.

⁴⁹ Two excellent books on leadership that may be adapted for pastoral use are by John C. Maxwell, *The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader: Becoming a Person Other Will Want to*

but also must pay the church's facility rental, call the A/C repairman because it is too hot on Sundays, and take meals to a family that just had their first baby. There is no one else to do these things initially. This is why he must learn to give over things that are non-essential to his calling and delegate them to other responsible people in the congregation according to the pattern of the apostles in Acts 6:1–7. If it is possible, organize a steering committee as soon as possible under the oversight of the local consistory to be an advisory council and to take many mundane tasks off of his hands. As well, he must find and develop helpful parishioners in everyday tasks.⁵⁰

Church planters are a “one-man show” in many respects, but they cannot get comfortable in being the one man. We are not micro-managers or tyrants, but pastors. Others can do things like change the font of the bulletin, organize snacks and nursery workers, and deal with church banking. Although he may have to do many of these things initially, making a commitment to turn things over little by little, as God brings people to the congregation, is essential for your growth as a pastor and their growth as servants.

2.6. Ability to Handle Stress

Finally, the confessionally Reformed church planter in the twenty-first century must—and I emphasize *must*—be able to handle all the stress of being a pastor, husband, and father, but especially being a church planter. He must learn to be even-keel, to be patient, to be calm-headed. This is not easy. If he does not have any hobbies, he needs to get one. Classical music, its genres, composers, and history, is a wonderful hobby that relieves stress. Gardening, learning about the mental and psychological development of your children, and even how to raise a dog can be effective stress relievers as well. With all that the church planter does he needs to learn to get away from time to time that way he does not lose his mind or lead his church into the ground. Most especially, the church planter must pray in times of stress as the Lord has called him to do: “casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7).

Conclusion

The confessionally Reformed church planter must have foundational principles concerning theology, liturgy, and community as well as aptitude abilities such as a passion for church planting, a decent personality to relate to others, handling disappointment, being a self-motivator, lead-

Follow (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1999) and *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership: Follow Them and People Will Follow You* (1998; rev. ed., Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2007).

⁵⁰ “With the availability of today's computer technology, there is no excuse for poorly printed materials. But choosing the right words is still a difficult process, and creating an attractive format to blend with those words takes time. In a larger, more mature church, there are often gifted people who are assigned the task of ensuring that the congregation's printed materials are produced with quality and effectiveness. But in a mission work, the job of ensuring excellence in printed materials often falls to the organizing pastor.” *Planting an Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, 42–43.

ing by delegation, and dealing with stress. This means that a prospective church planter either has these or he does not. Church planting, then, is not a stepping-stone to the bigger church in your denomination.⁵¹ It is a calling. Willimon and Wilson's conclusion of their book on ministry in the small church is apropos to church planting when they said,

If you measure the success of your ministry by the size of the crowd, the prestige of the church you serve, or the praise of denominational authorities, you are in deep trouble in the small church.... But if you sense that you are called of God—if you know that your ultimate authority and final validation of your ministry come from the faithful service and celebration of the Word and its confrontation by God's people, your servanthood will continue to be blessed. You will have the joy of knowing that you are faithfully proclaiming the Word, and that you are an instrument of God's grace for the people who worship in a church of small membership.⁵²

It ought to be a source of great encouragement to us as Reformed church planters that our forefathers also pastored small churches. For example, the church John Owen (1616–1683) pastored from 1673 to the end of his life in 1683 began with about 40 members. Over those last ten years of his ministry the church received 111 new members.⁵³ That means John Owen, the “prince of Puritans,”⁵⁴ “the Calvin of England,”⁵⁵ whose epitaph describes him as “worthy to be enrolled among the first Divines of the age”⁵⁶ pastored a church that grew by 11 souls a year. That is the kind of slow, steady growth that the small church planting ministry should pray for.

What I have outlined above are only some of the things that we as Reformed churches must begin to discuss and to think about if we are going to train and send church planters into our culture. May this outline cause us all to examine ourselves—our principles, our gifts, our abilities, and our personalities so that our great missionary God may raise up a generation of zealous, confessionally Reformed church planters as well as established pastors to go into church planting so that the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ may come and that it may be “from shore to shore, till moons shall wax and wane no more!”

⁵¹ Cf. the words of Willimon and Wilson against the capitalistic influence in the church that emphasizes that “bigger is better” so that pastors of small churches are viewed as less important than pastors of big churches since a pastor has not “arrived” until he’s the senior pastor of a large church. As they say, “If the figures are going up, the congregation and its pastor are presumed to be succeeding. If they are remaining the same or decreasing, something is obviously wrong.” *Preaching and Worship in the Small Church*, 30.

⁵² Willimon and Wilson, *Preaching and Worship in the Small Church*, 123.

⁵³ Peter Toon, *God's Statesman: The Life and Work of John Owen* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1971), 151, 154–155.

⁵⁴ Andrew Thomson, *John Owen: Prince of Puritans* (1850; repr.; Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2004).

⁵⁵ Toon, *God's Statesman*, 173.

⁵⁶ Toon, *God's Statesman*, 182.

