

Crucial Parent Church Questions

By Steve Pike

I am frequently asked about “how to” resources for parent churches. It’s a challenging question to answer because there are so many different approaches for parenting- **the “how to” differs depending on the parenting strategy...multi-site, satellite, house church, pioneer and all sorts of hybrid styles of planting make it difficult to point a prospective parent church leader to a one size fits all resource.** My advice is always to figure out the methodology that God has called you to use and then find the “best-practice” practitioners and learn everything you can from them.

However, there is at least one step that is universal to every parent church project regardless of methodology or style. **It is what I call the “Clarification of Assumptions and Expectations” step.** Churches that multiply without pausing to process through this crucial step are treading on perilous ground and too often end up experiencing serious problems down line. **So whatever your plans for multiplication, I urge you to make sure you include this valuable step in your process.**

The reason the “Clarification of Assumptions and Expectations” step is so important is that **at least 90% of problems that occur in multiplication efforts can be traced back to unclarified expectations and assumptions.** For example, a planter/satellite pastor assumes that the parent church is going to pay for all the advertising costs associated with the project. The parent church, on the other hand, assumes that it is reasonable to expect the new site/plant to pay for the expenses out of the income received from those who attend the new location. **However, neither party has communicated these assumptions and expectations to the other.** It is easy to see the problems that this scenario might create for both the planter/site leader and the parent. Both leaders will end up disappointed that the other would assume what they did and the level of trust begins to erode. Once trust begins to slip, it becomes increasingly difficult to walk together in confidence and, at best, the relationship between the planter/site and parent is threatened. At worst, this simple misunderstanding can be a small crack that eventually leads to the failure of the project. All of this could be prevented by simply having a “Clarification of Assumptions and Expectations” meeting.

Here is how such a meeting might look. The participants should consist of the senior leader from the sending church, the senior leader of the site/church plant and an informed third party facilitator who can help the sender and the sent clarify their expectations and assumptions. **A “scribe” or recording device should be utilized to capture the points of agreement as the expectations and assumptions are clarified.** This meeting should take place very early on in the process...after the decision to move forward with the project has been made, but before any substantive actions have been taken to make the new plant/site a reality.

There are at least four crucial categories of assumptions/expectations that should be explored. The facilitator can guide the participants through these categories and make sure that each category is thoroughly clarified.

- **Money-** Some issues to be clarified in this category might be: How much money is the parent church prepared to invest in the project? How will the money be dispersed? How will the site/plant be accountable to the parent church?

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- **Style-** What will the ministry style of the new church/site be? What forms of worship style are not acceptable to the sending church? What about music styles? Does the sending church expect the new church/site to be a clone or something very different?
- **Governance-** What will the relationship of the new church/site be to the sending church? How will decisions be made? How often should the leadership of the site/new church be in touch with the leadership of the sending church?
- **Ethics-** How may the leader of the new site/church interact with the members of the existing church? Whom may the new site/church leader invite to be part of the launch team? How should the site/plant leader communicate with the parent church regarding guests who show up at the new location who typically attend the sending church? How can the site/plant leader appeal for money and prayer from members of the sending church?

These categories are probably not exhaustive nor are the questions adequate to cover everything that needs to be explored in this crucial meeting. **Nevertheless, the meeting needs to take place and questions like this need to be answered and recorded.** The results of the meeting should be captured in a written document that both leaders sign. The leadership teams of both entities should be fully informed of the terms of relationship that have been agreed to.

Multiplying the Kingdom is too important to be sabotaged by sloppy communication. Following the suggestions in this document will go a long way toward helping brothers to walk together in unity!