

RESEARCH REFLECTION

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10 Factors for Higher Attendance in Church Plants

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10 Factors for Higher Attendance in Church Plants
(Part 3 of the Church Planting Survivability and Health Study)
(see [parts 1](#) and [2 here](#))

Why do some church plants experience higher attendance while others struggle to attract people? Are there commonalities among those with higher than average attendance that can be replicated in different settings? A recent study by the Center for Missional Research of twelve denominations or networks provides the answer as a resounding “yes.” With over 1,000 church plants contacted and more than 500 completed interviews, the study indicates that vibrant, growing church plants share certain characteristics.

These factors associated with higher attendance in church plants are based on the combined four-year mean (average) attendance of church plants. Many of the churches did the same things—“shared Christ,” had worship services; but when more than 100 factors were analyzed, the following ten categories proved to be the best predictors for higher worship attendance when compared to church plants at or below the average church plant attendance.

The Location Factor

Where the church plant began has an impact on its ability to grow. Church plants that begin in school facilities have some obvious benefits, such as visibility, access, parking, and classroom/worship space. Add to these the relatively low costs usually incurred, and schools can be a distinct advantage.

Longer-term—after the first year—church plants meeting in both schools and movie theaters exhibit higher attendance. They find these locations conducive to reaching people and accommodating continued growth.

The Ministry Factor

Special children’s events such as a fall festival or Easter egg hunt help church plants gain and sustain attendance. New churches with high attendance know that reaching children is one effective way to reach families. These church plants also conduct block parties as an evangelistic outreach. They use holidays or other opportunities to attract people and to be attractive to those who are already attending.

The Promotion Factor

An effective way to build attendance is to let others in the community know what’s going on in your church, what you offer, and why you’re there. Though this is important for any church, it’s critical for church plants. It helps establish your presence and purpose from the start.

High attendance church plants mail invitations to services, programs, and events. They keep community awareness high, which keeps their visitors, attendees, and members involved and informed.

The Training Factor

Church plants that experience the best attendance results provide training for new members and communicate clearly the expectation that they participate. They use this time to help new members better understand the Christian faith, know the organization and culture of the church, and learn how they can identify and use their gifts and find a place to serve.

The Expectations Factor

These church plants also require new members to sign a church covenant. They know that it’s imperative for new members to take their commitment to the church seriously as soon as they’ve committed their lives to Christ. Though some elements of the covenant may differ from one church plant to another, core beliefs, character, and conduct would not differ.

The Financial Factor

Those who attract more people are very intentional about financial stewardship. They see it as an integral part of the Christian life and necessary for personal growth. As these churches develop stewards, they also develop their church and become self-sufficient.

The planters in churches with higher attendance receive financial compensation, allowing them to focus on the church's growth, not their own basic needs. They also receive health insurance and most of the premiums are paid for by the church plant, the sponsoring church, or the denomination.

The Staff Factor

Higher attendance churches have planters who've been assessed for their suitability. They also have multiple staff, facilitating steady and more sustainable growth. These staff members are part of the church plant from the beginning. Though other staff may be (and usually are) added as growth requires it, the most successful church plants do not start out under-staffed.

Another characteristic of higher attendance church plants underscores the need for adequate staffing. Their planters are full-time, not part- or half-time. All of this indicates that limiting staff limits potential for numeric growth.

The Missions Factor

It's interesting to note that higher attendance church plants don't just consider their own needs. They look for missional opportunities and start at least one church within three years of their own plant. This mindset generally permeates both the church plants and their daughter churches. Although it is often a step of faith to release church members to start a new church, our study seems to demonstrate that God replaces those sent out and even adds more to the number.

The Leadership Factor

Leadership is taken seriously. Church plants that experience higher attendance conduct leadership training, build their leadership base, and delegate leadership roles to church members. This is an ongoing process from the time of the plant throughout its lifetime. It's not left to chance or to personal initiative.

The Achievement Factor

Finally, the church planters' expectations are realized to a large degree. They have a vision of what God wants to do, and they don't get distracted from the accomplishment of that vision. Because of this focus, they achieve greater results and find greater satisfaction.

Conclusion

Although the spiritual growth of the individual and the new church is extremely important to the Lord, numbers also matter (see 2 Peter 3:9). Most church growth texts would conclude that the preceding factors will not only grow the church numerically but spiritually as well.

Church plants—even effective ones—aren't all the same. Some of those that were surveyed are stronger in particular factors than others. But the majority of church plants with higher than average attendance showed these ten factors in common. And what they revealed should help other church planters avoid mistakes, keep a clear focus, and build churches that make an impact on the lives of those around them.

Next, in part 4, Factors Associated with Higher Baptisms

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