

Starting Missional Churches: Life with God in the Neighborhood
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In *Starting Missional Churches*, Mark Lau Branson and Nicholas Warnes introduce us to seven missional churches while examining common challenges regarding their genesis. Curated by a pastor and a professor, this work highlights diverse modern examples of congregations focused on reaching their communities with a missional mindset. These stories show how to build a vibrant, engaging church—one that generates redemptive witness in our neighborhoods and in our world.

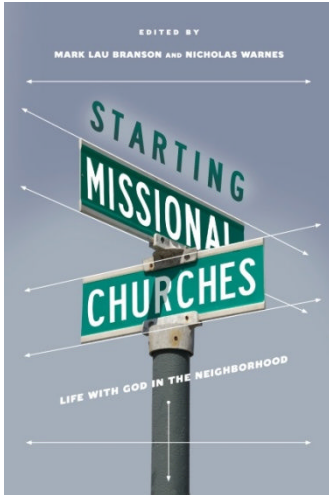
Why Plant More Churches?

With every week that passes, a smaller percentage of people are connected to the American church. This is the primary ecclesiological issue for us in America as we move through the first quarter of the twenty-first century.

In his book *An American Church in Crisis*, Dave Olson points out that 17.5 percent of people on any given weekend attended a worship service in 2005. This is down from 20.4 percent in 1990 and 18.7 percent in 2000. This trend is notable for those that care about the church and the church's role within the kingdom of God. While attendance in numbers has largely remained the same over that time, approximately fifty-one million people per weekend, America has also grown by approximately fifty-one million people during the same period. This is an important factor that is often forgotten, and it explains why the percentage of people connected to a church on any given weekend is shrinking. Regardless of the stats, the bottom line is clear: a significant percentage of the population is not connected with the church.

We believe that an important and effective way for churches to not only keep up with population growth in America but hopefully extend beyond population growth is to plant more churches. It is estimated that this year in America, 3,700 churches will stop functioning. In the same year it is estimated that 4,000 churches will be planted. This net gain of approximately 300 churches simply cannot keep up with the population growth in America. According to the 2010 census, the population in America grows by approximately three million people per year. In order to keep up with population growth the church needs to plant one church for every fifty already-existing churches. To grow beyond population growth the church will have to plant two or more churches for every fifty already-existing churches.

— Taken from chapter one, *"Shifting Perceptions on How We Plant Churches"*



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How Church Planting Has Changed

Starting Missional Churches is a collection of stories of new and diverse churches in the United States. The stories are preceded by two opening chapters that frame key issues, and followed by a final chapter that reflects on the stories in light of a set of priorities that we are advancing.

In the opening chapter, Nick Warnes describes some of the social, practical and theological challenges that we face regarding the need for an increased pace of planting. He notes how earlier priorities and methods do not provide opportunities for enough new churches, especially when compared to growth in population densities in the United States. He particularly notes the emphasis on suburban locations, the problems created when new churches come primarily from splits, the misplaced dependence on expert strategies, and assumptions that charismatic leaders are needed to attract new congregations. In chapter two, Mark Lau Branson brings the missional church conversation into an engagement with this church-planting conversation. He focuses on the centrality of discerning God's initiatives in a particular context, a priority on engaging the neighbor as a subject rather than as an object, the need to cross ethnic and economic boundaries, and the importance of plural leadership. These missional priorities are matters of theology and cultural context, with significant implications for how leadership teams begin their work.

The seven stories, told by pastors who lead local teams, provide geographical and denominational diversity. These are not new models to be packaged and transplanted; rather, they give readers insights into the processes and lessons of each specific, concrete, local initiative. Those of us who wrote these chapters—the stories, the frameworks and the reflections—hope that we have provided encouraging, enlightening narratives for others who want to be reflective and active in starting missional churches.

— Taken from the foreword

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