

# “A rose, by any other name ...”

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Sometimes the jargon used by insiders can make church-planting seem very confusing. Jargon, however, should not prevent us from pursuing this important challenge. In this article we try to explain church planting terminology in the hope that increasing understanding will be met with increasing passion to see the body of Christ extended.

The first point of distinction differentiates between models and strategies.

## **Church Planting Models**

“A model is a preliminary representation of something, serving as a plan from which the final, usually larger object is to be constructed.”<sup>1</sup> Thus, in the context of church planting, a model describes the type of church being considered.

Most of our churches follow the “community church” model. That is, they aim to serve residents in the same geographical area as the church. By contrast, about 16% of our churches follow a “special interest” model in the sense that they aim to reach out to a certain sub-set of the society. The sub-sets currently served by the Presbyterian Church are all linguistically, culturally or ethnically determined, so that congregations are formed around the common language of the people (e.g. Arabic, Cantonese, Cook Islands, Indonesian, Korean, Mandarin, Samoan) or a common racial background. Congregations could also be formed around a focused mission to reach people within a particular part of the society such as the arts or the media. Examples of this congregational model are increasing in Sydney but not yet within the Presbyterian Church.

Intentional thought about the model to be followed will help to clarify questions such as these: what sort of language will be used in this church; what “feel” will the worship service have; what sort of music will be used; what place will children have in the church; what ministry involvement will be expected of members; what place will be given to corporate Bible Study; and how open will the church be to newcomers?

One of the limitations of older church planting manuals and mindsets is the commitment to a single model for church plants. This model presents a very conservative and stereotypical picture of what church looks like: prayer and preaching packaged with four hymns. A single-model approach, however, fails to recognise that our society is increasingly diversified. A single church model will only work for some people while leaving other communities and sub-groups unreached. Could this explain – even in part – why our ministry to young people is often ineffective?

## **Church Planting Strategies**

If church planting models relate to the pattern to be followed, church planting strategies relate to the launch method to be used. The strategy answers the question, “What do we have to do in order to get this church operating?” It includes issues of planning, organization, finance, staffing, location, governance, etc.

Sydney Anglican author, Stuart Robinson, presents church plant launch strategies very simply as conforming to one of three approaches.<sup>2</sup>

1. **Multi-congregational church plant:** commencing a new congregation within an existing church framework, e.g. by adding an evening service for a different target group. This is a cheap way to reach more people and involves minimal administrative burdens since existing structures will provide oversight and support for the new congregations.

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<sup>1</sup> T.J. Keller & J.A Thompson *Church Planter Manual* (New York: Redeemer Church Planter Centre, 2002), 53. Tim Keller is the founding minister of Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York, a major influence in church planting in North America.

<sup>2</sup> S.P. Robinson, *Starting Mission Shaped Churches* 27.

2. **Local start up:** a new congregation in a distinct geographical or social setting where the church will be or become a separate entity with its own oversight and leadership. This approach requires a strong commitment to mission and a high level of intentionality.
3. **Repotting:** engaging new leaders (often a team) to assist an ailing congregation to start again either by (a) commencing a new congregation whilst maintaining the existing work, or (b) adopting a new direction with the existing members. (A variation on repotting is “transplanting” where congregational activity is moved to a different geographic region in order to become more effective.)

Another analysis by Steve Addison, Director of Church Resources Ministry Australia, draws on earlier work in America by Bob Logan, and defines launch strategies for church planting as follows:

1. **Pioneering:** starting a new church from scratch (e.g. Ashtonfield, Cornerstone)
2. **Branching:** hiving off a group from a mother church (e.g. Tamworth Community, Southern Cross)
3. **Colonizing:** physically relocating a core group from a mother church to a new community *[This need not involve just one “mother” church, but may see people from several churches relocate their homes in order to be part of a church planting or repotting exercise. To some degree, this has happened at Kogarah.]*
4. **Seeding:** capitalizing on earlier moves of key lay leaders from whom core groups may be formed in the new community
5. **Revitalizing:** taking over and restarting at the same site. *[This definition is probably unhelpful in PCNSW where we understand revitalization as restoring an existing church to a healthy condition.]*
6. **Transplanting:** selling and relocating a church, potentially allocating its resources to several new congregations
7. **Propagating:** multiplying a network of cell groups through evangelism or theological education by extension
8. **Catalyzing:** prominent leadership by a person or church that sparks a multitude of new churches
9. **Adopting:** embracing core groups and or churches that seek help (e.g. some of our NESB churches)
10. **Partnering:** cooperative venture between several churches and or denominations to get a new church started (e.g. Ashtonfield)

The last two strategies in Addison’s list relate more to funding and support than they do to the type of church plant, but their inclusion opens the window on the important issue of broader support of church plants. Among other things, they pose questions like this: should the denomination finance church planting and to what degree; how can established congregations be encouraged to adopt new works and allow those new works to use existing buildings; and how can established congregations be enlisted (individually or collectively) to provide financial support to new congregations?

### **Conclusion**

The good number of launch strategies listed above demonstrates the great variety of ways by which new churches can be planted. It encourages us to be more creative than simply adopting a one-model approach as suggested by some of the manuals. Flexibility is a vitally important characteristic of effective church planting efforts and should be reflected in a range of models and strategies.

### **And some questions**

If you were to be involved in planting a new church in your area, what goals might you have in view; who would you try to reach; what model/s might be most appropriate; and what strategies would be required?

*This article presents material contained in John Macintyre’s report to the Committee received in August 2008*