

# No Church Planting Family Alone

## Leading Voices Weigh in on Top Challenges Facing Today's Church Planters<sup>1</sup>

Each year, an estimated 4,000 new churches start, equating to upwards of 20,000 planters working in the trenches of church planting over a given five year period. Thousands of these planters are struggling, not just with the logistics and dynamics of birthing a new church but with loneliness and discouragement. The challenging reality is that regardless of the church model, approach or heritage, most church planters face challenges and difficulties that at some point lead them to question if they should quit.

This study was done in partnership with Exponential, Todd Wilson, and Ed Stetzer. The sample came from two places: church planters who took a brief online survey and church planting experts who were willing to share their insights. Almost all of those who responded were connected to Exponential, which in many ways describes the sample: most (though not all) were planting contemporary churches in the way that is often described at the Exponential Conference.

Although it is not a scientific study, it is a helpful one—filled with advice that every church planter should consider. As you see the names quoted in the report, you will see hundreds of years of church planting experience represented. Such wisdom is worth considering.

Ed Stetzer planted his first church in Buffalo, New York in 1988. The world has changed since then and so has church planting. Without a doubt, Mike Rowe would likely classify church planting as a "dirty job," both then and now.

When he started, he did not have much support back then. "I was young and confident at a delusional level" Stetzer wrote when unpacking this report on his blog, [www.edstetzer.com](http://www.edstetzer.com), "I had little to read and no significant experiences or research from which to draw. Seemingly alone, I was left alone to figure it out." Stetzer confessed, "God was there and blessed beyond what I knew or deserved. Yet I can't help to wonder how things could have been different." With the significant upswing in resources, church planters should be better prepared for their "Buffalo" than ever before.

Help (coaching, websites, books, networks, training, etc.) is freely available for a motivated church planter. Conferences like Exponential continue to provide environments for God to shape a new breed of planter-- equipped and prepared to make a difference for His Kingdom without losing family and sanity in the process.

The church planter's job is still dirty -- very dirty. Leadership, finances, volunteers, systems, vision, evangelism, discipleship, and health of the planter and his family are jugular issues. The church plant graveyard remains ominously over crowded. Yet things are changing for the better.

Like any entrepreneurial, risks-requiring endeavor, church planting comes with a wide arrange of emotions, challenges and opportunities. You'll often hear veteran planters saying that planting a church is the most difficult feat they've ever undertaken. The flip side: Those who survive (and many who don't) also count it as the most rewarding experience they've had and a time of great learning and growth.

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<sup>1</sup> The following article is an adapted and expanded version of a blog series from Ed Stetzer, Todd Wilson, and the Exponential staff and published on Ed Stetzer's blog, [www.edstetzer.com](http://www.edstetzer.com).

“Planting a church is like having children. There is nothing more difficult or more rewarding than raising kids,” says Mark Batterson, founding and lead pastor of National Community Church in Washington, D.C. Batterson planted his first church while in seminary—a “complete bust,” he says. “We folded up shop after about nine months of trying to get off the runway. It was very embarrassing and disillusioning, but it opened us up to other options. I believe the way you overcome fear of failure is experiencing enough of it in small doses that you build up immunity to it. That failed attempt built up lots of immunity and enabled us to try again in Washington, D.C.”

Launched in January 1996, Batterson’s second church planting venture struggled at first, taking five years to grow from 19 people to 250.

“There was nothing glamorous or easy about it,” Batterson says. “Church planting and parenting are a parallel universe. Nothing is harder—or more rewarding. And the harder it is, the more rewarding it will probably be.”

Saddleback Church founding and Senior Pastor Rick Warren echoes Batterson: “Planting a church is possibly the loneliest, hardest thing on the planet.” Warren now makes it a personal passion to be a pastor to pastors, knowing how extremely lonely and difficult the journey can be. “No pastor should be alone and we need to do all we can to support and love on these heroes.” Warren asked the Exponential coordinators if he could serve planters in a different way at Exponential 2011. Instead of teaching, Warren felt moved to lead morning Bible Studies and devotions. “These planters get their fill of methodology and information. In some small way, I’d like to help encourage them.”

This study, undertaken to help identify the top issues church planters struggle will be used to shape the programming for the 2012 Exponential Conference. The findings are based on responses and interviews with numerous church planters and 40-plus national planting leaders throughout America. Representing over 600 years of cumulative experience planting and working with hundreds of planters, these leaders also reflect numerous denominations and regional/national church planting networks.

“We looked at responses from some of the best-known church planting practitioners in America and the seven challenges we identified flow from their observations,” Stetzer says. “We hoped to discover the top issues in the ministries of planters that work with these leaders. I believe this information will help planters and those leaders train planters.”

The national leaders involved with this study have worked with 100's of planters and spent countless hours in study of church planting. Individual planter interviews, online surveys, and volumes of real world experience were also included in the discovery process. This information will help you plant or help you help others plant a church focused on the advancement of God’s Kingdom.

The seven findings are not surprising nor are they unique to planters, applying in part to other ministry leaders. In fact, the research affirms what we have thought and experienced in church planting contexts for years. In fact, our panel of experts featured several planters who have been at it for the better part of two decades.

The 7 Issues are not the “be all to end all” of church planting challenges. We continue to learn as our culture changes. The information is not true for everyone everywhere. Different models of church planting face different issues. Nevertheless the principles are invaluable. Implementing strategies, systems, and process that address these issues will not guarantee viability but in most situations the probably of success will be greater.

While the report seeks to focus national attention on improving the support systems and

encouragement for church planters and their families, the report highlights the need for similar emphasis in the broader church community.

## Top 7 Challenges Facing Church Planters

1. Leadership development and reproducing culture
2. Financial self-sufficiency and viability
3. Team development and volunteer mobilization
4. Systems, processes and cultures
5. Vision casting and avoiding mission drift
6. Evangelism and discipleship
7. Spiritual, physical and mental health of planter and family

### *Challenge 1*

**Leadership development and reproducing culture.** Leadership development was the most frequently cited challenge of planters with the category encompassing a broad range of topics, including: recruiting and developing leaders; implementing teams; creating a reproducible leadership development approach; developing an elder board; hiring and leading staff; discerning changes required to facilitate growth; healthy decision making; and learning to delegate to and empower volunteers. Break it into sub-categories and overwhelmingly, the leaders surveyed agreed that identifying, training, developing and reproducing leaders are the top concerns in church leadership.

Consider that many planters come from a previous church role where a more established leadership development and volunteer mobilization process was in place. The planter is now responsible for implementing a new process from scratch and with little help. The planter is responsible for creating momentum where none exists versus maintaining existing momentum. Leadership development is viewed by most planters as a non-negotiable obstacle to becoming financially viable and growing the church.

“We know the average church is under 100 people,” Exponential Director Todd Wilson says. “—If you assume that a pastor can minister to 100 people in our current paradigms, the average pastor and church is at capacity.” Average-size churches then struggle with adding staff to grow, with most waiting until they can afford a second staff position. But as they wait, the church loses momentum and stagnates in part due to the senior pastor working at capacity. Then leadership barriers prevent them growing and in turn, hiring more staff. In *Viral Churches*, Warren Bird and Ed Stetzer showed that the average new church births with about 40 people, placing a huge financial strain on the planter and delaying additional staff hires.

In this “scarcity environment,” it’s easy for a planter to “take just any willing person,” Wilson observes, and prematurely puts leaders in place where more established churches would be slower to act and get to know the leader before delegating responsibility. Moreover, planters often lack the experience to fully understand the pitfalls of hiring family members and friends, and lack experience in hiring in general. As a result, some planters end up dealing with bad hires, which creates additional strain and discouragement.

Stetzer comments on the second part of this challenge—the struggle to cultivate a reproducing culture. “Planters know that if a church does not plant another church in their first three years, they likely never will,” Stetzer says. “They have a vision for being a reproducing church and developing a reproducing culture, but the realities of implementation are discouraging. The same barriers (experience,

budget, leadership shortage, spiritual maturity, momentum, etc.) can cause the reproduction vision to move from vision to pipe dream.”

## *Challenge 2*

***Financial Self-Sufficiency and Viability.*** The financial strains of planting represent one of the most significant challenges for planters. Ongoing concerns over finances include money management in the church, and personal finances for church planters; internal giving (and the lack thereof); and external fundraising.

“Often these issues are not confronted but avoided, which can lead to all sorts of personal and ecclesial disasters for the planter,” Stetzer says. “And on top of all that, for most planters the administrative and financial parts of ministry are what they enjoy least.”

Ron Johnson, director of the church planting network Accelerate Alliance, has spent the last five months researching new church plants in the Washington, D.C./Baltimore, Md. corridor to identify the areas the network needs to address. Based on his conversations with planters, he concludes that the two external needs expressed the most were funding and team support from sponsoring churches. Many planters go from a relatively stable job (including pay) into an entrepreneurial, risk-taking endeavor with an uncertain future. Fundraising is a new challenge, with numerous planters going into it with little or no training.

Research (again, from *Viral Churches*) shows that the average church plant takes three or more years to become financially self-sufficient, relying on other churches and donors. Survey respondents reported that the journey to becoming financially self-sufficient often places a heavy burden on the church planting family. One of the most common—and impacting—financial pitfalls of church planting comes when planters drain their savings and retirement accounts to pursue their dreams. Actions like this can be primary catalysts for stress in a marriage and for the family.

Stetzer points out that the financial realities of planting are leading to an increasing number of planters to consider bivocational ministry—which, while it has its advantages, is generally not the goal of most church planters. “For many bivocational planters, fulfilling the work for their full-time position becomes the necessary priority,” Stetzer says. “As a result, outreach, ministry and service can become a challenge. It can be overwhelming to juggle so much.”

Another financial reality is that many planter feel awkward regarding the subject of money and giving. Tom Nebel and Gary Rohrmayer tagged this as “Church Planting Landmine #7” in their helpful book, *Church Planting Landmines*. Often with good intentions, they overreact to the perceptions of unchurched people. No doubt, money issues need to be handled differently in church. Too many planters avoid talking about money at all (which robs people of the giving experience). Conventional wisdom is that people new to church do not give much during the early years but you have to wonder if one reason they are so slow is because church planters overreact on this issue.

“Most of the church planters I know lack some of the training they need in financial matters, particularly when this is the first staff position, as it is for many planters. Most have never made a church or ministry budget,” Wilson explained. Some planters become paralyzed while others blindly move forward without a budget. For planters who do raise considerable funds for a large launch, they can fall into the common trap of misunderstanding the difference between cash flow forecast (i.e. having the right funds at the right time) versus total cash commitments not limited to a specific schedule. The confusion

results in over-committing funds at specific times even though they've raised enough total funds.

### *Challenge 3*

***Launch team development and volunteer mobilization.*** Church planters frequently cite building a launch team and mobilizing volunteers as major challenges. Indeed, research indicates that a launch team is integral to a thriving plant. In his book, *Planting Fast-Growing Churches*, church planting leader Stephen Grey identified 21 differences between fast-growing churches and struggling ones. Among these was the importance of healthy launch teams. Grey found that 88 percent of fast-growing churches had a launch team in place before launch compared with only 12 percent of struggling churches.

Launch team size becomes more important in larger, well-funded launches where more defined ministries are offered at inception. However, mobilizing volunteers is an issue regardless of launch size. Both the well-funded, full-time planter and the part-time, bivocational planter expand their ministry impact through volunteers.

Respondents to the Exponential survey reported that they spend a disproportionate amount of time in the pre-launch phase focused on administrative details (facilities, marketing, equipment, legal issues, etc.). These issues compete with the time needed to build relationships and teams, resulting in a paradox: Strong teams could help with the seemingly endless details of planting, but the administrative details divert a planter's attention from building relationships.

"Church planting is challenging work," says Doug Foltz, director of project management for Stadia New Church Strategies. When talking about church plants that start with teams and large outreach strategies, the challenge grows.

Foltz likens the scope of planting a large church to an inexperienced general contractor building a house faced with a list of well over 300 tasks. "The result is frustration and discouragement, as well as being consumed with tasks that no one has equipped them to handle," he explains. "So the church planter has less time to develop the relationships needed to start the church."

And though a launch team is essential, having a team of volunteers in place before the planter arrives can be detrimental. "It can actually create conflict, rather than provide momentum," Wilson notes. Often, the team expects the planter to adapt to their vision rather than submitting to the planter.

Attached to the difficulties of developing a launch team are the personal feelings that often accompany a start-up. Many planters report discouragement resulting from the loss of good friends from their team. Unfortunately, it's not uncommon for planters to lose more than half their launch team within a few years of starting the church.

John Worcester, veteran planter and director of San Diego Church Planting Alliance relates a story of hurt and betrayal in one of his first church plants: "A key leader in our church turned against me. He had been my greatest fan at first and was one of the few that came into the new church with a strong Christian background. I mistakenly let him lead a small group with some of our young Christians. He had a secret cocaine habit that not even his wife knew about. We found out about it, and I made him step down from leadership. He repented and in a couple of months wanted back into leadership. But I felt it was too fast and told him he needed more time to regain the trust required for leadership. He became angry and began looking for a way to get even."

Bob Harrington, veteran planter and leader at Relational Discipleship Network, also struggled

firsthand with the pain of lost friendship when, at the encouragement of their closest friends, he and his wife left their church to plant another. The friends had pledged their help, encouragement and significant financial support for the first two years of the new church.

“Just as we were launching the church, they turned their backs on us and left,” Harrington says. “It’s impossible to describe the personal and emotional devastation my wife and I felt. At that point, I faced the reality that church planting takes more courage and personal fortitude than most church leaders realize.”

#### *Challenge 4*

***Systems, Processes and Cultures*** The overall theme of the comments in this category involved systems and planning with many respondents asking specific questions: How do we put systems in place that create and sustain growth and develop specific cultures (generosity, discipleship, etc.)? We’re not growing; how do we reach more people? Planters feel the need to create momentum, but how?

They’re good questions to ask but asking them can also lead planters down a narrow path, searching for the “silver bullet” (“If we just fix this, then we will grow”), “There is just not a magic formula,” Wilson notes. The reality is that healthy systems, processes and cultures enable and facilitate growth, but they don’t *cause* a church to grow. The Apostle Paul explained that we cooperate with God in the planting and watering of the seeds, but that it’s God who makes the seeds grow. “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth” (I Cor. 3:6 HCSB). Establishing healthy processes, systems and cultures is part of that cooperation.

North Coast Church founding/Senior Pastor Larry Osborne, a coach and mentor to numerous church planters, adds that most pastors (not just planters) start out with big dreams of what *they* are going to do for God.

“It’s pretty common for God to allow some major trials and failures to bring us to the point of recognizing reality--the simple fact that it’s our role to faithfully prepare the horse for battle,” Osborne says. “But it’s God’s role to decide which battles we win and which ones are lost.”

Still, planters are responsible for establishing healthy processes, systems and cultures that help move the church forward.

Brett Andrews, founding/Senior Minister of New Life Christian Church in Centreville, Va., and director of Passion for Planting, points out that planters are not trained or even competent to start new businesses, yet planting a church demands those competencies. He knows those struggles personally.

“When I planted, I felt like a blind, armless and legless man groping his way through the Everglades,” Andrews recalls. “I groped to develop a plan, and then I groped to fill in the details of my plan, all the time knowing that there were enough holes in the plan to sink the project. Yet I wasn’t experienced enough to identify what or where the holes might be. My mind was preoccupied with problem-detecting and problem-solving nearly every waking hour.”

Andrews’ personal experience and the experience of others led him to champion a project management aspect of the church planter training New Life provides (this training is discussed in greater detail in the “Planters Support” section below).

Wilson notes, “You have to have systems—and you will.” Systems, processes and cultures *will* emerge from the pre-launch phase. But the question is will they be healthy or unhealthy? Will they

facilitate growth and momentum or will they create barriers and obstacles, adding to a planter's stress level?

Often, time constraints, sparse financial resources and lack of manpower contribute to the creation of unhealthy systems. Soon they're living with unhealthy systems, which in turn, contribute to the planter's workload burden. Says Stetzer: "I've seen the cycle. Planters get stuck and then discouraged, which means they are living with more stress... and then that discourages more. It is a vicious cycle that hurts planters and their churches."

### *Challenge 5*

***Vision casting and avoiding mission drift.*** Casting vision and avoiding mission drift were expressed in several different ways, including navigating pressure from "churched" people; avoiding distractions created by "good ideas" that get in the way of allocating limited resources and energy to the critical growth path; having disciplined decision-making consistent with mission; failing to establish clearly defined priorities for getting "unstuck" and growing; and overcoming the challenges of finding the right balance between evangelism and discipleship.

To avoid mission drift, National Community Church's pastor Mark Batterson encourages planters to focus on the big picture and refrain from getting caught up in the minutia. "Nine times out of 10 when I've been discouraged, it was because I zoomed in," he says. "Planters need to zoom out and look at the big picture. Most planters dream big, but they don't think long. And that's a recipe for frustration. The key is thinking long. I want to pastor one church for life, and I've always believed that if I invest 40 or 50 years into the church plant that God can do big things! We overestimate what we can accomplish in two years. We underestimate what we can accomplish in 10 years. Zoom out!"

Veteran planters like Batterson would agree that the pre-launch and early post-launch phases are vital to establishing core values that create a strong foundation for the new church's future. Although respondents did not specifically articulate it in the survey, respondents indicate planters tend to confuse or interchange the concepts of vision, mission and values.

Stetzer identifies several factors contributing to vision casting and mission drift challenges:

a) Planters assume that because their vision is clear and compelling in their minds, the rest of the team understands it when in actuality they don't.

b) Most planters have a strong sense of mission and vision that drives them. These same planters often have less clarity about their core values that shape what they do and how they do it (the compass that guides their north direction). Will Mancini described the task of what he called "High Definition Leadership" as "constantly bringing the most important things to light." [Will Mancini, *Church Unique: How Missional Leaders Cast Vision, Capture Culture, and Create Movement*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008, p. 52].

c) Ideally, a planter's ministry philosophy is clearly defined before starting. However, for many planters, it is a work in progress. As a consequence, the philosophy of ministry can be more influenced by negative shaping factors such as a culture of scarcity (lack of resources, people, space), "church people" on the team, and peer comparisons. In *Planting Missional Churches*, Ed Stetzer called this danger "vision hijacking."

North Coast Church's Osborne points out that initially, planters start out with a very sharp and clear vision of where they want to end up but have a much softer and blurrier vision of what it will take to

get there.

“We all envision the results of an Apostle Paul or a Barnabas,” he says. “But few of us notice the beatings, imprisonments and personal betrayals these spiritual stalwarts experienced along the way.” Clearly defined values will give a planter the fortitude to endure the process to witness the results.

Most planters don’t have the capacity, financial resources or team for a comprehensive integrated strategy. Instead, Wilson noted, “Planters need to focus on a handful of priorities that they hold as essential—things that make them ‘bang the table’ and be ‘mean’ about those priorities.” Having clarity on these three to five priorities and being disciplined to use them as a primary filter for saying “yes” and “no” are vital for avoiding drift. Similar to the philosophy of ministry that becomes a work in progress and can be more influenced by negative factors, the same holds true for strategy or priorities.

## *Challenge 6*

### ***Evangelism and Discipleship***

Most planters start new churches to reach lost people and to grow disciples. In citing this as a top challenge, maintaining momentum and drifting away from evangelism and mission were the overriding responses. The other few comments related to ministering in different cultures, communities and urban settings.

Evangelism and discipleship do not automatically happen in a new church. That is unfortunate for some aspiring planters. All of us struggle with our view of lostness no matter how long we have been in the faith. Too many planters think that the reason lost people have not come to Christ is because they have not found the right church yet. Thus, a mythological equation is formed: lost culture + relevant church plant service = instant harvest.

So, they (sincerely for the most part) set out with a new formula that will fill the local middle school gymnasium or movie theater with lost people. They have a vision of lost people streaming in mass through the doors on launch Sunday shouting, “I found it!” No wonder that planter is going to spend the majority of the week getting the “production” ready. God can use the band, slides, movie clips, coffee and donuts. But at the end of the day the incredibly demanding grind of the attractive church takes away from the pursuit of those far from God. Simply put, when you have an attractive plant it can end up solely with an attractional strategy. The end result will be that you “sell” a new and better church (product) to consumers of religious goods and services.

It is possible (and even common) to spend too much energy focused on only one aspect of the church plant: the Sunday morning crowds. One solution is to personally invest significant time in relationships with lost people and new believers. The sermons may need to be simpler with less “special effects.” The band may need less programmatic direction and more relational investment with you. At the end of the day, the core team and lead planter must personally invest heavily in the harvest. Not only is that great for the moment (for those lost people, etc.) but it creates the culture for the future of every person who connects with your church. The long-term future of the new church is in the harvest, not a Disneyfied Sunday morning experience.

Planters highlighted several specific evangelism-related challenges:

- (1) Multiple time demands detracted from time needed for evangelism and discipleship.
- (2) Discerning how to practice faith (James 1:27) in a way that represents all God is doing in world not limited to direct evangelism only. Examples include hunger relief, assistance and adoption efforts.



- (3) Living incarnationally and engaging in today's culture.
- (4) Implementing a deliberate evangelistic and disciple-making strategy.
- (5) Making small groups work.

The challenges cited by planters in this category appear to be examples and outcomes of the other key issues discussed in this report. Specifically, weaknesses and challenges in numerous areas (developing leaders, mobilizing volunteers, building teams, having adequate financial resources, and building healthy systems, processes and cultures) all tend to divert the planter's focus and time to things other than evangelism and discipleship. The desire to engage people incarnationally and build relationships is often met with the reality of other issues that tug on the planter's time, energy and focus.

A nagging sense of falling short of the dream in the area of evangelism and discipleship can significantly contribute to a planter's discouragement. And, both evangelism and discipleship require a process. George Klippenes, director of church planting for the Evangelical Free Church of America, stresses that discipleship requires a process—a process many planters don't develop until much later in their ministry. That's why his denomination has declared 2011 as "The Year of Disciple Making."

"Our planters have individual strengths, but many of them do not have a clear disciple-making process where they move people from consumer to missionary," he explains. "Whether you're talking about John Wesley or Rick Warren, they had a process of moving people from unbeliever to new convert to leader to planter-missionary. You don't need a baseball diamond, but you do need a process."

### *Challenge 7*

#### ***Spiritual, Physical and Mental Health of Planter and Family***

The six key issues listed above create a heavy burden for the planter and family. Brian Bloye found himself trudging through these issues 14 years ago when he planted Westridge Church in Dallas, Ga., now known for its on-site church planting residency. "These were the same questions I was asking back then," he says, noting that he believes spiritual, physical and mental health is the area most neglected today.

"I personally believe there are a lot of unhealthy people out there planting churches," Bloye says. "Unfortunately, unhealthiness just produces more unhealthiness. So many of the other issues seem to fall in place when your overall health is a priority. I don't hear a lot of people talking about this."

Respondents to the Exponential survey stressed how discouraging and lonely church planting can be. Many responses related to how to respond when things don't go as planned, whether dealing with lack of growth, unmet expectations or disappointment. Others related to the need for personal relationships and the balance of personal and ministry life.

Planters cited the following specific struggles: 1) the internal battle to overcome pride, self-reliance, drivenness and an uncoachable attitude; 2) loneliness and isolation; 3) mistrust; 4) lack of rest; and 5) maintaining joy.

Although most planters understand the importance of making personal development, soul care and family nurturing top priorities, these values often get lost in the busyness of planting the church. The result is a fragile foundation for dealing with the discouragement and loneliness of planting. Eventually,

any unresolved family of origin issues or weaknesses in the marriage will surface, often in the midst of a planter's other struggles.

The integration of the six key issues listed above paint a good picture of the environment in which planters pursue their calling and dream--an environment that takes the planter on a journey through discouragement and loneliness and is guaranteed to challenge their faith. These six issues give way to a downward trajectory:

- The leader accepts God's call to plant a church, and a dream emerges. Excitement builds and plans formulate.
- Pursuing the dream requires an expanding team of people to join the planter in the journey. Team members are harder to recruit than anticipated, and the team develops much slower than intended. Often, the new church births with a smaller team than planned. Additionally, leading a team of "messy" people takes more time and energy than the planter ever conceived.
- With a smaller team, more responsibilities fall to the planter and their spouse with fewer people to delegate tasks to. The burden of responsibility intensifies when the planter comes to grips with the fact that the planter's commitment to the cause is higher than anyone else's.
- Finances seem to always be short, limiting ministry opportunities. The average planter wakes up wondering whether the funds will be available for the next paycheck. At the same time, guilt emerges that things are "stuck" and not growing. Fundraising can take significant time, competing with the other ministry demands that seem to be vital to growth.
- The tyranny of the urgent with so many responsibilities falling to the planter makes it difficult to invest measurable time in building capacity. As a result, systems, processes and cultures tend to reactively define themselves rather than the planter proactively shaping them. The result is inefficiency and ineffectiveness built on unhealthy processes. This further adds to the burden of responsibility for getting everything done because weak processes require more hours to accomplish the same results.
- A crisis of belief emerges. The planter's dream seems extremely distant from reality. Comparison with other leaders becomes frequent; discouragement and loneliness set in. The church seems to be shaped more by circumstances and other people than by the planter's dream.
- Adding further fuel to the fire, the planter continually questions the new church's effectiveness at reaching people far from God (versus transfer memberships) and senses the discipleship process isn't really changing the scorecard of those calling themselves Christ followers. Life transformation is not as prevalent as they envisioned.
- Planters typically have a big vision and dreams when they are called to plant. The euphoria often gets muted after launch as the planter hits a number of "walls," including the key issues listed above (lack of leaders, lack of volunteers, difficulty building a launch team, lack of funds, etc). The scarcity environment is discouraging and can feel like the "death of a dream," especially when no relief appears in sight. The disconnect between the planter's dream and reality further amplifies the discouragement.
- Spiritual warfare kicks into full swing, including comparisons with other successful planters. Many planters lack fellowship with other peers and coaching. The result is the planter having no one to confide in and share burdens. In many cases, planters avoid confiding in their spouse, attempting to protect them. However, the spouse is often the first to sense something is wrong.

Bottom line, many planters and their families find themselves asking, “Should we quit or should we persevere?”

North Coast Church’s Osborne affirms that for some planters, the unexpected delay or death of a dream is a devastating experience—one that can lead to disillusionment with God.

“Often, this happens because we have an inflated sense of our personal giftedness (what I call the potential trap—the inflated ego that results from naively believing all the encouraging things people say about us or our ministry,” Osborne explains. “Or it’s a failure to remember that we minister in a fallen world, wrapped up in a fierce spiritual battle.

“I also find that some of us enter ministry like some young men used to sign up for the army reserves. They thought they were signing up to be a weekend warrior playing war games in exchange for an occasional lost weekend or a little cash and some government perks—only to be shocked when called to put their life on the line in Iraq or Afghanistan.”

San Diego Planting Alliance’s Worcester can identify with Osborne’s first premise. The first church he planted was a couple years old when he asked for a raise of \$500 a month. The church voted “yes,” but Worcester admits his hurt and disappointment upon learning that it was not a unanimous decision.

“Looking back now, I can see most of my emotional turmoil came from my own arrogance,” Worcester says. “I felt like I *deserved* a raise and that fact should have been clear to everyone. I was focused on all that I had sacrificed for the church like paying for our move across country, working very long hours and using up our savings, all for the sake of the church. Poor me. How dare they question my integrity in this area? My sinfulness caused me to get really discouraged. By God’s grace I was able to repent and I pulled out of it and the church recovered as well.”

Brent Foulke, director of the Church Planting Assessment Center, has studied assessment findings that have helped him identify several contributing factors related to a church’s failure. “Assessment reveals that many planters are dissatisfied with the church culture their parents’ generation has created,” he explains. “Some dissatisfied planters are unaware that even the family culture from which they emerge is so unhealthy that it could endanger their marriage, their parenting and certainly their church leadership potential.”

Family of origin issues are not insurmountable, Foulke says, but when they go unidentified or ignored, the “back story,” they can severely limit leadership capacity. Another current trend is the high and higher debt loads church planters carry. “Six-figure balances on student loans, credit cards and medical bills are not uncommon,” he says. “This can severely limit the generosity of the planter and even the influence the planter can have on others.”

But the result of dashed dreams and unexpected hardship can actually be a positive catalyst, Osborne says. “I find that for many of us this can actually lead to a powerful spiritual awakening—a renewed and deeper spirit of humility, submission and dependence on God that can only come with trials and failure.”

Relational Discipleship Networks’ Harrington can identify with the strain on the planter. “The most important thing I have learned through the disappointment of losing key friendships and the overall challenges of church planting is God’s faithfulness,” he says. “He has always provided, even as I have struggled with despair, anxiety and a wobbly faith. God has always been faithful.”

Critical support environments for planters and their families are key. A fully engaged partner church that cares for the entire family unit is essential. Babysitters, Christmas bonuses, and financial sponsorship for marriage enrichments are a few ways to create a foundation for health. Accountability from partners is also essential. Life coaching for the planter and spouse is also a plus.

Every planter, spouse, and partner church pastor should read *Leading on Empty: Refilling Your Tank and Renewing Your Passion* by Wayne Cordeiro. The book gives the greatest gift a planter needs – permission to be human.

Bottom line, the outcome of personal hardship is difficult to predict. “What breaks one church planter empowers another,” Osborne asserts. “The same sun that melts a wax candle hardens a clay pot. It all depends on what’s in us—not what’s in our trials and hardships.”

## **A Call for Solid Planter Support Systems**

As the Top 7 Challenges Facing Church Planters are identified, discussed and studied, perhaps the greatest outcome of a study like this will be the action it inspires. Planter support providers agree that knowing the problems is only one small part of the battle. The next challenge lies in the answers to the question “What steps will we take to support planters in these challenges, especially, their spiritual, physical and mental health?”

“As interest in church planting continues to increase and more leaders plant churches, we (the church) will need to find more ways to help these individuals and their families stay or become spiritually, mentally and emotionally healthy,” Stetzer says. “A growing number of planting leaders are coming from broken families and are carrying baggage they have yet to deal with effectively.”

While support providers (denominations, networks, coaches, etc.) have come a long way in backing planters, the leaders commenting on Exponential’s survey believe more must be done. From the need for greater accessibility to assessment strategies to one-on-one mentoring and networks focusing more on planters’ health and spousal support, these challenges must be addressed.

“The road to planting a church is filled with tremendous blessings and at the same time, disastrous landmines,” observes Westridge’s Bloye. “I have watched things like loneliness, criticism, stress, misguided priorities, moral failure and even early success derail some very gifted church planters from living out their dream of pasturing a prevailing church. It’s not enough to just have some long-distance advisory board that does nothing more than set a salary. It’s critical that every church planter have a pastor, a mentor or an accountability team in their weekly life to help them navigate through some of these pitfalls on the path. Individual healthiness is so important to making it for the long haul.”

Tom Nebel, director of church planting for Converge Worldwide, sums it up: “No one should plant a church alone.” George Klippenes from the Evangelical Free Church simply has a motto stolen from the military, “no planter left alone.”

## **A Starting Point**

The process of cultivating healthy church planters who plant healthy churches begins when the planter first conceives of a church.

“Church planting is so important that we cannot fund those who are just ‘inspired,’ says the Church Planting Assessment Center’s Foulke. “They must also be inspiring and competent administratively, as leaders, spouses and evangelists. The single most significant factor in raising the survival rate of new churches is the emotional, physical, and spiritual health of the lead planter couple and their eventual staff members. Assessment is essential if we are to make wise investments and avoid devastating mistakes.”

Based on his experience in working with planters, Foulke estimates that only 20 percent of planters who skip the assessment piece develop a successful church plant. But with the tools of an assessment report and development plan, he says, more than 90% can establish a prevailing church.

A comprehensive assessment process aids in the planter’s overall spiritual, physical and mental health, as it investigates health factors from multiple perspectives, including:

- A trained psychologist who is often enlisted to identify pathology.
- Personal references from previous employers, past and present colleagues and those whom a candidate has discipled or supervised are asked about health factors.
- In interviews, specific health areas are probed and, with the spouse present, are often dealt with in honest and open conversation.

“Assessment doesn’t eliminate or seek to disqualify candidates as much as present the couple and their sponsors with an honest and accurate picture of the dynamics,” Foulke explains. “Very few factors are complete ‘show stoppers.’ Most characteristics that are transparently dealt with can become strengths rather than weaknesses.”

### **A Necessary Convergence**

“Coaching and training are vastly the most important needs we have in church planting today.”

That statement from Billy Hornsby, director of church planting organization Association of Related Churches, lays a foundation for the insights that leading voices offered as they answered multiple questions related to church planting support.

Numerous leaders identified coaching as the most important facet of planter support. “The two internal needs expressed the most were relationships with peers and mentor/coach relationships for encouragement and a sense of permission,” says Accelerate Alliance Director Ron Johnson, referring to the surveys he conducted among church planters in Washington, D.C./Baltimore.

Scott Thomas, President of the church planting network Acts 29, also realizes the dire need for effective coaching that both equips planters to plant a church *and* nurtures their spiritual, physical and mental health. One Texas church planter in the network took their life last year and Thomas wrestled with how the network would address the shepherding of souls while also helping them to plant a Gospel proclaiming church. A second pastor died after what was regarded initially to be an accidental overdose. “When the Texas Medical Examiner declared it a suicide, we had to acknowledge that church planters may be struggling terribly and we had to address it with supernatural wisdom,” Thomas said.

“Both of the pastors were seemingly successful in their churches,” Thomas says. “Both were speaking, writing and coaching other pastors. And both were deeply troubled for years. One pastor had marital struggles. The other, we later discovered, was addicted to sleeping pills. Both had friends, families and consultants but it appears neither availed themselves of people who could address their years of chronic pain, layers of marital issues, addictions and their underlying anger and fears.

“I recently spoke to one of the widows. It was sobering. She said that he didn’t just come home one day and explode. Instead, she said, ‘his soul faded out slowly.’ I’m concerned for the souls of church leaders. It was a huge mistake to only focus on the success of the church plant.”

That concern and the tragedies of 2010 gave birth to a new idea. In the middle of training pastors to coach other church planters, Thomas says the Holy Spirit revealed to him: “Shepherding and coaching can be one ministry, not two. The verse Acts 20:28 came to mind: *Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which He obtained with His own blood.*”

“It was clear from this verse and the Holy Spirit’s impression on me that we could develop a way to shepherd the shepherds as they shepherd their flock,” Thomas continues. “And the end result would be a healthy flock reproducing churches and disciples for the glory of God. We want every pastor and church leader to be a qualified, Gospel-empowered, healthy, disciple-making follower of Jesus leading others to the Chief Shepherd. Coaching ministry leaders is a key aspect to their ongoing effectiveness as shepherds of the Lord’s flock.”

Marc Bigelow, president of Stadia New Church Strategies echoes Thomas: “From day one, we should be converging church planting systems with personal support.”

## **A Network of Support**

When veteran church planter and Next Church Planting Director Ron Sylvia and his wife planted their first church, church planting was not popular and training was limited.

“No one knew the answers to the questions I was asking,” he recalls. “We were totally alone—no coach, no mentor and no training. I will never forget the loneliness and discouragement that accompanied our first two years of church planting.”

Those two years became catalysts for Sylvia’s current focus. “I promised God that if He would allow us to survive, I would return what I had learned about church planting to others behind me in the journey.” That promise became Sylvia’s “Learn and Return” covenant with God (modeled after 2 Timothy 2:2). “No church planter stands alone” became Sylvia’s catchphrase; coaching networks became his delivery system.

Sylvia advocates coaching via networks when it a relationship-based learning environment led by a practitioner to take a pastor/church planter from where they are to where they want to be (Next Church Planting’s definition).

“In a Next Network, the church planter gets a coach and a peer-to-peer experience,” Sylvia explains, adding that he believes coaching networks are the “best method to leverage the practitioner’s time and deliver a scalable and reproducible model.”

Sylvia notes that many planters are flying solo without denominational or network support. In 2008, Next Network offered a free weekend to discouraged and burned-out pastors and their spouses—what Sylvia calls a “lifeline to continue in ministry.” Within four hours of dropping the e-mail to a small database of church planters, Sylvia had to close registration.

“We had 12 slots available and 128 applications from discouraged pastors,” he says. “Their e-mails broke my heart and helped me remember exactly how I felt in the early years of our plant. Nobody can fully understand a pastor’s world except a pastor.”

Sylvia has found that church planters' two biggest struggles are loneliness and practical training. Being part of a coaching network, he says, helps planters realize they're not alone and creates a safe place to find answers to questions only church planters ask.

"Church planters are renegades at heart," he says. "They are the pioneers that very few leaders truly understand. Getting together with a network of church planters is very similar to an AA meeting. We all have a lot in common, and we all need each other's strength for the season ahead."

In his work and conversations with numerous church planters, Shawn Lovejoy, co-founder of ChurchPlanters.com, has discovered the same findings as both Sylvia and those in Exponential's report.

"We have seen that many times planters know deep down the decisions they need to make and the growth they need to experience to become everything God wants them to be," Lovejoy says. "They simply need to be encouraged and challenged to pull the trigger. Often, they just need to talk it through with a mentor or coach to make a better decision."

Lovejoy calls it "giving permission." Coaching and mentoring, he notes, are more valuable than conferences alone or leadership training because they provide ongoing encouragement and mentoring as the planter faces specific challenges.

"These findings also affirm once again that our focus should not be only on starting new churches," he says. "We don't need more churches with more discouraged, lonely and frustrated planters. We need more healthy planters planting healthy churches in healthy relationships with other healthy churches and coaches. This is the pathway to true exponential impact in and through the church planting movement in the next decade."

Westridge's Bloye is committed to facilitating and nurturing a strong relational environment that gives planters a network of other planters in their area who are connected to each other in regional hubs.

"One of things we are committed to in the Launch Network is training up healthy leaders," he says. "The stakes are way too high for church planters not to place the highest value on having others in their lives for accountability and support."

## **A Matter of Details**

Support for church planters also comes in extremely practical forms, as well. Details such as enlisting professional accounting services and building a local management team can be huge assets to a planter and contribute to their overall healthiness, says Stadia President Marc Bigelow.

New Life Christian Church's Brett Andrews adds that project management is also essential to planter support, so much so that New Life will not put significant financial resources into any planter who skips project management.

"Starting a church with a project management list and a project manager to shepherd the process is like preparing for a final, confident that you've focused your time on the most important questions," Andrews explains. "This ensures a greater likelihood of starting a healthy church, and it allows average church planters to get into the game because most ministers are not trained or gifted to manage a project with excellence."

Looking back to his early years of planting, Andrews believes having project management

support would have been a blessing to his family and marriage.

“When facing a significant challenge, I can’t simply turn the mental switch on and off,” he says. “When church planting, my mind was occupied with problem detecting and problem solving nearly every waking hour.

“Project management not only brings a sense of urgency to get the right stuff done on time, but for me it would have brought peace of mind knowing that I didn’t have to figure out everything and helped me overcome the haunting specter of thinking *I know I’m overlooking something that really matters*.

Andrews points to three problems project management solves:

- How do we enable church planters to focus more on people and less on administration? Church planters’ giftedness and time priorities should lie in praying, teaching and leading teams, not “waiting on tables” (Romans 6).
- How do we allow planters to spend more time solving the right strategic challenges and not waste time on things that don’t matter?
- Sum of all problems: Wasted resources (time and money), lost opportunities ultimately resulting in lost people not being reached.

“If planting strong, healthy churches is like trying to win a Super Bowl, then assessment, training and coaching are what get your team into the game and set up to start every series of plays from your own 20-yard line,” Andrews concludes. “Add project management, and the team starts farther down the field.”

## **A Great Need**

While assessment and coaching (one-on-one and in networks) have received much focus and attention in the last five years, Exponential’s survey revealed a large gap in planter support—a need that has yet to be widely and effectively addressed by support providers. Church planting spousal support.

Because a spouse is integral in the birth of a church, the Church Planting Assessment Center requires both the planter and spouse to participate in assessment. Director Brent Foulke explains why: “Every church planting leader agrees with the theological conviction that a call to church planting is a call for both spouses. This does not mean that both spouses must engage in the ministry according to any specific arrangement. What it does mean is that both are convinced that God’s call for their marriage and their family is to be involved in the establishment of a new church. A healthy marriage, whether both are visibly involved or not in the new church program, is one of the best gifts a church planter can bring. Lack of clarity on the part of either spouse is dangerous at best and deathly to a marriage and a new church at worst.”

Exponential’s Wilson is passionate about the importance of emotional support for the planter’s spouse and family. “We can’t be all about planting and not be all about planters,” Wilson explained. As leaders were asked to comment on this study, questions related to emotional and spousal support and found that most support providers do not have ongoing spousal support. Some, such as the Church Multiplication Network and the Comb Network, were in process.

Evangelical Free Church of America’s Klippenes was candid about the denomination’s lack in this area: “A number of our districts have pastors and wives retreats, but this is an area we need to address.”

Of the denominations and networks contacted for this report, few have thriving support systems



for spouses. Bloom! is targeted to Stadia's lead planters' spouses. Currently, 120-plus spouses are engaged in the network. Participants connect via retreats, online chat groups, mentoring and other opportunities for candid sharing, says Bloom! Director Debbie Jones.

"Bloom! creates a network of planter spouses who have experienced the journey and are able to encourage those who are newly involved," Jones says, adding that participants are equipped in their position as a lead planter's spouse--*not* equipped for church planting ("There's a big difference," Jones says.). "They have a safe haven to share their joys and challenges and are lifted up in prayer daily!"

"In church planting I believe a spouse plays a major role in the health and growth of every new church," Jones says. "God doesn't call half a couple into church planting."

## **The Prevailing Church**

*On this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it.* Christ's declaration to the Apostle Peter in Matthew 16:18 paints a beautiful picture of Jesus' love for His church. The church is God's plan for saving the world and drawing His people to Himself. As many leaders will tell you, "There is no Plan B."

As we identify and respond to the Top 7 Church Planting Challenges revealed in the Exponential survey, Jesus' lesson about His church provides a necessary and sobering reminder of the urgent need to come behind and alongside leaders in both the pre-launch *and* post-launch phases as these leaders answer the divine call to plant God's church.

Today's reality tells us that planters are struggling. They're discouraged and hurting, with most walking through all seven challenges. But the news isn't entirely discouraging. Challenges almost always create redemptive opportunities for change. Knowing these specific issues opens up endless possibilities for both planters and support providers to seek out and facilitate peer-to-peer fellowship and accountability; develop coaching that both equips the planter and shepherds the soul; redefine the church planting window to extend to the post-launch phase; and one of the greatest potential areas, create spousal support.

How can we plant churches that prevail? As Scripture testifies, building the church is done in community: "As they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work that I have called them to.' Then, after they had fasted, prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them off" (Acts 13:2-3 HCSB).

Today, that means church planters don't plant alone, launch their first service alone, do post-launch ministry alone, do marriage alone, parent alone, etc. The impetus rests on both planters and support providers to ensure a church and its leaders live in biblical community—a multi-dimensional community that cultivates a prevailing church and ultimately, serves as a tangible expression of Jesus' love for the people far from Him.

## **Conclusions / Observations**

The report highlights the following:

- Discouragement and loneliness are understandable amid the challenges of planting.

- The obstacles, barriers and challenges in planting are significant highlighting the importance of the right, called point leader.
- Satan can easily leverage discouragement and loneliness as footholds through spiritual warfare to further discourage and even paralyze the planter and their family.
- Highlights the need for a solid foundation of faith and trust in God, a surrendered life and a relatively healthy marriage and family.
- Highlights the importance of a rigorous assessment process that includes a trained clinical psychologist review.
- Affirms the importance of the key pillars of most organizational support systems: assessment, training, coaching. These are vital.
- Highlights the benefits of other emerging services like project management and spousal support systems that are positioned to become future pillars of support.
- Highlights that most planting organization support structures target the pre-launch phase with less emphasis in the post-launch phase. Significant opportunity exists for serving and ministering to planters in the post-launch phase.
- Highlights the need for peer-to-peer relationships and fellowship. This will help the planter see that they are not alone in their struggles.
- Highlights the advantages of waiting to launch until a number of milestones are in place, including: 1) clarity of philosophy of ministry (vision, mission, values, leadership culture); 2) solid team of leaders committed to the cause; 3) fundraising support for the planter family in place for the first few years of the launch; 4) several non-negotiable priorities that shape the initial ministries of the church and create a filter for saying “yes” and “no”; and 5) solid core processes and systems in key areas such as discipleship, evangelism, leadership development, planning, etc.
- Highlights the importance of having people around the planter who speak into the planter’s life on a regular basis with encouragement.
- Highlights the difficulty in discerning between whether to quit or whether to persevere and continue when things get difficult.
- Top 7 Issues does provide a framework through which existing church planting ministries can assess their strengths and weaknesses in providing support to planters.

Of course, church planting is spiritual warfare and survey participants commented on that in a variety of ways. Satan’s goal is to keep lost people. His tactics have a purpose – to stop people in the world from seeing and hearing the Gospel.

Paul did not include the topic of warfare at the end of his letter to the Ephesians because it was a last minute thought. He wanted everything he had been inspired to say to be seen through the lenses of spiritual warfare. When looking at the 7 Top Issues planters face, they point to a need for spiritual battle:

“Finally, be strengthened by the Lord and by His vast strength. Put on the full armor of God so that

you can stand against the tactics of the Devil. For our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world powers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens” (Eph. 6:10-12 HCSB).

Church planters will continue to face the realities of life while engaging the issues of eternity. But with the proper accountability, training, and support systems in place, church planting can continue to thrive while planters are encouraged and nurtured. Our hope is that this report will provoke the right discussions and activities that will aid the planter, spouse, network and sponsor church to plant more churches aimed at God’s glory.

## National Leaders Participating in the Exponential Survey

- Brett Andrews, Veteran church planter and Senior Pastor, New Life Christian Church, Centreville, Va.
- Mark Batterson, Veteran church planter and Senior Pastor, National Community Church, Washington, D.C.
- Marc Bigelow, President, Stadia New Church Strategies
- Brian Bloye, Founder, Westridge School of Church Planting and Launch Network
- Nick Boring, Director, Vision 360 North American Church Planting
- Phil Claycomb, Founder, Nexus Church Planting
- Artie Davis, Founder, Comb Network and Director, Sticks Conference
- Dave Ferguson, Founder, New Thing Network
- Jon Ferguson, Co-Founder, New Thing Network
- Brent Foulke, Director, Church Planting Assessment Center and Stadia New Church Strategies
- Doug Foltz, Director, Project Management for Stadia New Church Strategies
- Pat Furgerson, Director, Passion for Planting
- Stan Granberg, Director, Kairos Church Planting
- Bob Harrington, Director, Church Coaching Solutions
- Tom Herrick, Director, Titus Institute
- Billy Hornsby, Director, Association of Related Churches (ARC)
- George Johnson, Executive Director, Christian Evangelistic Association
- Ron Johnson, Director, Accelerate Alliance
- Debbie Jones, Director, Bloom!
- Tom Jones, Executive Director, Stadia New Church Strategies
- George Klippenes, Director of Church Planting, Evangelical Free Church of America
- Mac Lake, Director, Launch Network
- Shawn Lovejoy, Co-Founder, ChurchPlanters.com
- Will Mancini, Founder, Auxano
- Eric Metcalf, Director, New Thing Network
- Tom Nebel, Director of Church Planting, Converge Worldwide
- Larry Osborne, veteran planter and Senior Pastor, North Coast Church, Vista, California
- Darrin Patrick, President, Acts 29
- Steve Pike, Director of Church Planting for Church Multiplication Network (Assemblies of God Church Planting)
- David Putman, Co-Founder, ChurchPlanters.com
- Mark Reynolds, Redeemer Church Planting Center and City to City Alliance
- Gary Rohrmayer, President, Converge MidAmerica
- Jim Sheppard, Founder, Generis
- Ed Stetzer, Veteran church planter, author, Founder, NewChurches.com, President, LifeWay Research
- Brent Storms, Executive Director, Orchard Group
- Greg Surratt, Veteran church planter and Board Member, Association of Related Churches
- Ron Sylvia, Director, Next Church Planting
- Scott Thomas, Director, Acts 29
- Gailyn Van Rheenen, Founder, Mission Alive
- Craig Whitney, President, Emerging Leadership Initiative
- Paul Williams, Chairman, Orchard Group
- Todd Wilson, Director, Exponential

- John Worcester, Veteran church planter and Director, San Diego Church Planting Alliance

## Authors

**Ed Stetzer** serves as the president of LifeWay Research and LifeWay's missiologist in residence. He has planted several churches and transitioned declining churches. He has trained pastors and church planters on five continents, holds two masters degrees and two doctorates, and has written dozens of articles and books. He serves on the faculty of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Chicago and Southeastern Seminary in Wake Forest, NC. His church planting books include *Planting Missional Churches* (B&H, 2006) and *Viral Churches* (2010, Jossey-Bass, with Warren Bird). He is currently lead pastor of Grace Church, a new church planted in 2011.

**Todd Wilson** is on staff as the church planting director at New Life Christian Church in Centreville, Virginia. New Life has planted more than 75 churches through active involvement in a number of national support ministries for church planters, including Passion for Planting, Church Marketing Solutions and PlanterApp.com. Wilson has also provided leadership for the startup of several multi-site campuses of New Life. Wilson is an entrepreneur at heart and loves dreaming about and starting new things to advance the Kingdom. He serves as the director of Exponential, a non-profit organization that seeks to serve the church planting community as a national advocate. Exponential seeks to attract and inspire Kingdom-minded leaders to engage their time, talent and treasure in catalyzing a movement of healthy, high-impact faith communities. Exponential oversees the Exponential Conference, the world's largest gathering of church planters, and the Exponential Book Series in partnership with Zondervan and Leadership Network. See [Exponential.org](http://Exponential.org) for more information.

*Exponential is a non-profit organization that seeks to serve the church planting community. Exponential seeks to attract and inspire Kingdom-minded leaders to engage their time, talent and treasure in catalyzing a movement of healthy, high-impact faith communities. Exponential oversees the world's largest gathering of church planting leaders each year at the Exponential Conference. This survey was conducted to help provide programming that best fits the needs of church planting leaders who attend the conference. If you are a planter, or know other planters, Exponential 2011 is designed with more than 90 national speakers and 200-plus workshops addressing top church planting issues. For more information, go to [ExponentialConference.com](http://ExponentialConference.com).*