

Junius B. Dotson

Spiritual Start-ups

New Churches Bring Clarity about Mission

In the start-up culture of the Silicon Valley, companies often reach a size when their mission becomes a distant memory for most of their employees. The trend in recent years is to reorganize, creating smaller or “new” companies within the larger one, in order to recapture the essence of the mission that allowed the company to become successful. These new businesses then teach the larger company how to compete in a new and changing environment.

Similarly, new churches give the established church a unique opportunity to recapture the spirit of its mission, “to make disciples of Jesus Christ.” The church is called to continually reach out to others. However, we are currently facing a challenge unparalleled in our history. We are in a crisis in our efforts to grow our churches. Many of our churches do not have memory of why they exist. Revitalization and church transformation often take years to achieve. The largest denomination in our country is the denomination of the unchurched. What is the answer? If we follow the axiom of corporate America, we must start new churches!

Starting new churches is one of the most effective and efficient ways to fulfill our mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ. In order to reach a new generation of people we need spiritual start-ups designed to make the gospel of Jesus Christ relevant for our unique time. There are three factors that support this claim.

1 New churches remind us of our mission. They inspire a new passion for reaching those who are lost. This is the heart of effective evangelism. “For the Son of Man came to

seek and to save what was lost” (Luke 19:10, NIV). Unchurched persons are often attracted to the enthusiasm generated by a new ministry. There is an incredible amount of energy and spirit generated in beginning new churches. Because of the nature of this start-up, the focus is not on traditions, processes and procedures but rather on what it takes to help persons truly grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ.

New churches bring a great deal of focus and clarity about their mission. The vision and core values are fresh and not ritualized. There is no history that diverts leaders from the core process of the congregation. There is an intense focus on creating winsome worship and offering many opportunities for persons to discover the joy of knowing Christ.

Genesis United Methodist Church in Silicon Valley, California offers a vibrant worship experience that attracts persons who have a desire to hear how the gospel story applies to their unique situations and circumstances. We are market sensitive and yet we are bent on spiritual transformation. Genesis offers numerous small-group opportunities for people to study the Word, pray with one another and provide another entry point for new persons into the spiritual life of the congregation. It is this newness that attracts hundreds of seekers.

2 New churches offer creativity and innovation in evangelism. They bring a fresh set of eyes to address adequately the felt needs of unchurched persons in our community. They are not afraid to try new things and take risks. Genesis has developed a reputation for innovative evangelism.

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Genesis utilizes a variety of media to reach its target market of unchurched Silicon Valley stressed-out professionals. This includes radio and TV commercials, newspaper advertising, and direct mail. The marketing focuses on inviting persons to receive a new beginning in Christ. It is specific and includes invitations to community events that deal with relationships, stress management, money management and parenting. We provide practical, biblically based instruction at these events. They are quality events done with a great deal of professionalism. We extend the invitation to know Christ. This has resulted in hundreds of people accepting Jesus Christ into their lives.

We are not afraid to do things with excellence. The church should not hesitate to invest in high-quality marketing materials. We sometimes include on our invitations that we are serving Starbucks coffee and we find this communicates a message of professionalism to people we are trying to reach.

3 New churches motivate existing churches to expand their outreach. Evangelism is contagious. Studies show

that the enthusiasm generated by a new church benefits the existing churches in a given community. Existing churches are encouraged to reexamine who they are trying to reach and what gifts they have been given by God. This results in established churches recapturing their sense of mission as they expand their outreach into the community.

New churches can teach what they have learned about unchurched people and why many choose not to attend church. This sharing of information is invaluable to all churches as we seek to reach people for Jesus Christ. There is nothing more appealing to unchurched persons than a whole community of churches not competing with one another but working together to offer help and hope for people's lives.

We live in one of the richest mission fields in the world. If we were thinking about how to reach people in China, Africa or Russia, the answer would be clear. Start new churches! We must use the same rationale in our communities across the United States. New churches should not be feared but embraced. Existing churches should encourage

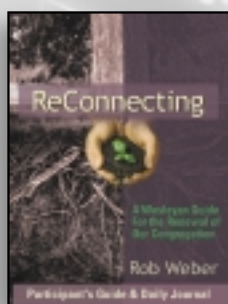
their members to support them as a way of extending their own witness. Send them short-term missionaries to help them get started. Support them financially. Preach about the significance of the new church movement in the Book of Acts. We must help persons see the immeasurable value of new spiritual start-ups in igniting a spark that can evangelize millions, alter destinies and literally change the world! ☐



Junius Dotson planted Genesis United Methodist Church in 1997. Meeting in Rancho Miltipas Middle School in Miltipas, California, the congregation is known for vibrant worship, small groups, and creative children's ministry.

The creativity of this new church has been featured in several news media, including *The San Francisco Examiner*. Rev. Dotson has recently been appointed to serve as senior minister at St. Mark United Methodist Church in Wichita, Kansas.

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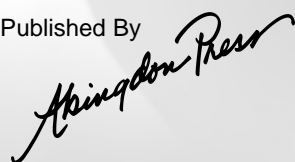
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