

Today is Church Planting Sunday in the Assemblies of God

Be a part of Church Multiplication Network

By Steve Pike

At a recent Convoy of Hope preparation day, I saw the foundational principle of Church Multiplication Network in action. Three hundred people packed 10,000 bags of groceries in a little over two hours. My job was to make sure each bag had a small package of pancake mix in it. Everyone (including AG General Superintendent George Wood) did something. We set aside our personal agendas to work together and complete an otherwise impossible task.

That is the core idea behind Church Multiplication Network: to help churches work together to do more than they could ever do by themselves.

Today is Church Planting Sunday in the Assemblies of God. Imagine what could happen if, starting today, the 12,000 churches and nearly 3 million people in our U.S. Assemblies of God Fellowship decided to set aside their personal agendas and work together to plant 1,000 churches in two years?

Let's consider the possibilities. The average Assemblies of God church plant has 51 active attendees by its first anniversary and 65 by the second, according to researcher Ed Stetzer's *Church Plant Survivability and Health Study 2007*. This means adding 1,000 new churches could result in reaching more than 55,000 new people within the next two years. That is a significant number, since for the past decade the AG has added an average of 38,058 adherents every two years. The question we need to ask ourselves is, "Are the souls of nearly 17,000 additional people worth our efforts to reach them?" Hopefully our answer is a resounding yes.

America is a nation plagued by religious paradox. A majority of Americans claim to be Christians, according to David Kinnaman's research in his book *Unchristian*. Yet according to David Olson's research entitled *12 Surprising Facts About the American Church*, in 2006 only 17.3



Steve Pike works with a Convoy of Hope packing team.

Church Multiplication Network

percent of Americans attended church on any given weekend.

More books and literature on church planting and church health are available than ever before, yet the number of new church starts is not keeping pace with the U.S.

attending church in America weekly has remained constant at about 51 million since 1990, while 94 million new souls have been added to our population.

Organizational consultants tell us the Assemblies of God

than any previous generation. Conversely, every study shows young people are attracted to a church where they have a voice in the form that church takes. (That church is usually not their parents' church.)

If we hope to reverse these trends and surge forward in the mission of reaching lost people with the gospel, we must aggressively plant healthy churches at a greater pace than we have in the past.

The concept for the Church Multiplication Network was birthed in January 2007 during a time of Holy Spirit visitation in a meeting of the Assemblies of God Executive Presbytery. Church Multiplication Network is built around a ministry plan carefully crafted and reviewed by leaders from all perspectives across national regions, networks and cultures. The network is focused on delivering resources and assistance to local churches and leaders to reach their utmost potential for multiplying the presence of God's kingdom in the communities in which they serve.

Our AG executive leaders have expressed their passion for church planting and they have endorsed Church Multiplication Network by investing \$2 million in seed money to provide for a healthy launch of this collaborative effort. AG U.S. Missions and the Reach America Coalition are active sponsors as well.

The Church Multiplication Network's goal is MX9: to plant or commit to plant 1,000 (M) churches by (X) General Council in 2009 (9). It's a God-sized dream, but I am firmly convinced God has called the Assemblies of God to be part of an unprecedented surge of birthing new communities of faith



Volunteer teams make possible a mountain of resources ... a key church planting principle.

population growth rate, and the number of churches paralyzed on a maintenance plateau hovers consistently at 80-85 percent.

New churches, planted for the purpose of helping lost people know Jesus, have proven to be the best methodology of evangelism. Yet church planting, as a part of the missional strategy of most churches and denominations — including the Assemblies of God — has been consistently underprioritized, underfunded and underutilized.

We are seeing some alarming trends that could affect the future vitality of the Movement. The average number of people

should increase the number of its churches by 2 percent per year (net gain) just to keep up with population growth. In 2006, the AG had a net gain of 13 churches (.1 percent gain, or one-twentieth of what is needed).

The average age of AG pastors is increasing to disturbing levels. In 2005, only 24 percent of AG ministers were younger than 40, with another 24 percent at 65 or older. The number of younger leaders seeking credentials has been trending down.

Many studies seem to indicate the current generation of U.S. young adults is more disconnected from the church

throughout our nation.

Here are some ways you and your church can be involved:

1. Pray for new church plants. A frequently updated prayer list and newsletter are available at www.churchmultiplicationnetwork.org.

2. Give a special offering to invest in the Church Multiplication Network Matching Fund. This fund will provide for crucial church planting support systems like assessment, training and coaching of church planters. If every church receives an offering equal to \$10 for every attendee, a pool of funding will be created that will adequately support the planting of thousands of new missionally focused churches.

Give \$10 to reach 1,000!

3. Choose to be a parent church.
4. Choose to send a church planter.

We hope today, on Church Planting Sunday, every AG church will take a step of faith and say yes to expanding the Kingdom through starting new churches. **tpe**

STEVE PIKE is national director of Assemblies of God Church Planting and Development.



Editor Ken Horn speaks with Steve Pike about church planting in this week's podcast, available at tpe.ag.org.

E-mail your comments to tpe@ag.org.

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