



GOING FROM NOTHING TO SOMETHING

GUIDING QUESTIONS TO HELP YOU START A NEW CHURCH





Introduction

The idea of starting a new church can be both empowering and intimidating. You have turned it over in your head a number of times, talked with your closest mentors and friends about it—maybe you’ve even attended an assessment, spoken with your denomination, or contacted a church-planting organization. You’ve done this because inside you is a desire you can’t ignore, a seed that - if tended well - may become a church one day.

In this workbook, we hope to help you cultivate and nurture that seed. The following resources will act as a tool to develop the kind of divine inquisitiveness that leads to true partnership with God in giving birth to a church. You will find this workbook broken into four seasons:

Season 1: Discernment

Season 2: Initial Organization

Season 3: Initial Public Expression of the Church

Season 4: Adapting Initial Public Expression of the Church

Each of the seasons listed above represent a phase of church planting. The goal of this workbook is to help you with some guiding questions based on what season you are in as a leader.

To use this workbook, start with the Action Brainstorm. This page will bring you into an intentional space that allows you to reflect on your upcoming journey. Spend some time considering where you stand in this present moment and what you envision this process looking like. From there, proceed to Season 1: Discernment, or find the season that best represents where you are in your journey.



SEASONS OF

STARTING A CHURCH

How you begin matters.

01
DISCERNMENT

02
INITIAL ORGANIZATION

03
INITIAL PUBLIC EXPRESSION
OF THE CHURCH

04
ADAPTING INITIAL PUBLIC
EXPRESSION OF THE CHURCH

action brainstorm

Why am I doing this?

What steps do I have to take to get started?

What tools do I need to get started?

What limiting beliefs do I have to overcome to achieve this?



SEASON 1: DISCERNMENT

It's almost impossible to start a missional church without first having a sense of call. This call may or may not be articulated, but it is nurtured and clarified through spiritual development, an ongoing process to be tended to patiently and faithfully.

Neglecting this internal work can be detrimental.

It is vital for all the people who participate in starting a new church to engage in an intentional season of discernment, but this is especially true for the person who feels called to lead it. In fact, what most often undermines church starters today is not a lack of competency but an underdeveloped spiritual life. Church starters must nurture their internal calling. Ruth Haley Barton says, "If spiritual leadership is anything, it is the capacity to see the burning bush in our own life and having enough sense to turn aside, take off our shoes, and pay attention."

Successful starters are watchful and attentive to the Spirit.

They can recognize burning bushes and turn aside in curiosity to discover their calling. Through regular spiritual practices of rest, prayer, solitude, confession, and other rhythms, they build strong spiritual reservoirs that help sustain them during difficult seasons of leadership.

The discernment season also involves looking for occasions where the inner call is echoed and affirmed by an external call. People around the leader begin affirming the internal call to start a church. The leader weighs their thoughts with trusted people. They begin to look for confirmation that God is actually joining people together, that the vision they hold internally is making an appearance outside of their own brain. If the external call does not reciprocate the internal call, the leader is wise to wait patiently for the right time, context, and calling to emerge.

QUESTIONS TO CULTIVATE THE INTERNAL CALL

How would you describe your spiritual life?

How much does your spiritual life match that of what you would desire in the life of a church starter?

How does your inner life with God allow you to face challenges?

How much time have you spent on this process and are you satisfied with that amount of time?

QUESTIONS TO CULTIVATE THE EXTERNAL CALL

How would you describe your church starting discernment process?

Who has come alongside you in this process and what has been their response to your discernment?

Have you ever started something? How did it go?

Is God calling a people to start a new church?

Is God calling a starter or a group of starters to start a new church?



Season 2: Initial Organization

You can't win a golf match in the first two holes, but you can lose it. The same paradigm is true in starting a new church. If the first two seasons are not tended well, the positive outcome of the new church will be at risk. The second season of starting a new church is the season of initial organization in which the focus has moved from the discerning church starter to the leadership team that is emerging.

During this season the leader begins to form a leadership group, which begins mining the missional practices and habits latent in the people who may be called to start the church. They use frames for understanding each other's giftedness, such as Strengths Finder, Enneagram, or the APEST gifting from Ephesians 4. They spend more time together in prayer and in the community to which they are called.

The Season of Initial Organization also involves discovering the missional purpose of the church. The leaders engage the Holy Spirit as they enter their neighborhood and community. They search for other people who are already joining God's mission, whether they are Christians or not.

They seek to join in on that activity or they create something of their own, using the gifts inherent in their community.

During this time, they also begin forming a culture of generosity. They talk about money, resources and what will be prioritized in a future budget, as well as what sustainability might look like in the church. In doing this they are clarifying the vision and preparing the church to start off well.

QUESTIONS TO MINE GIFTEDNESS

What are the latent missional habits and patterns within the members of your group?

What will be the frame for your common understanding of one another's giftedness?

How will you begin to gather well?

QUESTIONS TO PRIME GENEROSITY IMPULSES

How will a culture of generosity be cultivated?

What will be prioritized in the budget of the church?

How will current or future leadership be supported with both economic generosity and other types of generosity?

How will you move toward sustainability?

QUESTIONS TO ELICIT MISSIONAL IDENTITY AND PURPOSE

How will you engage the Holy Spirit?

What might the reign of God look like in your community?

Who is already joining that activity?

How might you, as a gifted person and group, join that activity?

Does something need to be created to join the reign of God in your neighborhood?



Season 3: Initial Public Expression of the Church

Until this point, the new church has existed, for the most part, with a fixed boundary. The initial spiritual culture and vision of the church has been growing under the protection of a core group of people. During the season of initial public expression of the church, the new church allows itself to exist for the sake of those who don't identify as part of the church.

The church becomes a gift to be shared.

There are many different assumptions and approaches that coalesce in this season, which can be a source of celebration and also conflict. There will be differences in musical and liturgical preferences. There will be differences in assumptions about who the church is for. There will be differences in how the members expect to relate to one another. These differences lead us to ask, What makes church... church?

During this phase it is helpful to consider three distinct yet connected facets of the church: communion, community, and co-mission. Communion rhythms are ones that guide the church in abiding in God's love together. This may look different based on space, demographics, personal preference, theology, tradition, and resources.

Community rhythms help guide the church in sharing life together. The church equips people with models and resources for how to engage in communal life, share resources, and care for each other. They find ways of ensuring community happens spontaneously as people open up face-to-face availability for one another.

Co-mission rhythms help the members of the church bear the reign of God in a specific place. Together they discern where they are being invited to enter in, then contribute their energy, time, and resources to God's mission there. The church seeks to make the good news tangible while also exercising a prophetic stance against evil powers such as individualism, consumerism, racism, and violence. The church also develops communication channels to the public that testify to God's reign and create channels of connection to the church.

COMMUNION : RHYTHMS THAT GUIDE THE CHURCH IN ABIDING IN GOD'S LOVE

What will be the initial rhythms of the worship gathering?

Who will determine frames for worship? Who will plan worship?

What will be the time, space, and pace of worship?

COMMUNITY : RHYTHMS THAT GUIDE THE CHURCH IN SHARING LIFE TOGETHER

How will we equip people for community?

How will members embrace spontaneity and availability to one another?

How will members be physically present to one another in person?

How will members share resources and care for one another?

CO-MISSION : RHYTHMS THAT GUIDE THE CHURCH IN BEARING THE REIGN OF JESUS IN A SPECIFIC PLACE

How will members join the mission of God with one another?

Into which places in the community is the Holy Spirit inviting members to enter faithfully?

How will members contribute energy, time, and resources to the mission of God in their context?

How will the church make the good news of the Gospel tangible from its very first public expression?

How will your church stand in opposition to forces that oppose God's reign?

Season 4: Adapting Initial Public Expression of the Church

The church continues to mature best as an adaptable body. It's tempting during this time to drift into technical leadership, in which leaders become fixated on certain metrics or practices that cement the church into pragmatic operation. What is needed is adaptive leadership that is responsive to the constantly changing context of the church. Alan Roxburgh describes the adaptive leadership process as a cycle that starts with listening, then moves to discerning, experimenting, reflecting, deciding and finally back to listening. If leadership can embrace this kind of experimental adaptation, they will help the church incarnate the gospel in their unique context.

The church leadership intentionally opens itself to God's guidance and maintains a posture of openness and curiosity about the future.

They seek to create a culture of change and give voice to committed members about what may need to be adapted.

They determine how final decisions are made and they create an implementation process to ensure the most important decisions are put into practice.

Over time, leaders become sensitive to moments of homeostasis when there is capacity and internal reserves required to change. They use these moments to strategically shift closer to their vision for sustainability and multiplication.

Throughout this final season, leaders need courage to either pivot towards new tactics or persevere in their current vector. The cumulative result of adaptive leadership over time is the resiliency of the church, the capacity to absorb change and make thoughtful and theological decisions that allow the church to enter into God's kingdom afresh.

QUESTIONS ABOUT ADAPTING

How is your church opening itself to God's guidance?

What are you sensing needs to adapt in the near future?

What are you sensing needs to adapt in the not-so-near future?

QUESTIONS ABOUT EXPERIMENTING TOGETHER

How do we create a pneumatological culture of change and adaptation?

How are final decisions made regarding adapatations?

How are you giving voice to committed participants regarding necessary adaptations?

How do we implement change and adaptation?

QUESTIONS ABOUT DEVELOPING RESILIENCY

Are you currently in a moment of homeostasis? How do you know?

How would you describe sustainability for your church?

Are you satisfied with the efforts that are being made to achieve moments of sustainability?

How does your church plan to reproduce in moments of homeostasis?



We developed this workbook because starting something new is hard. It's normal to experience challenges considering what you're up against. Thank you for picking up this resource and trusting us with your journey. We hope that with these questions you can enter in curiously, with wonder, awe and awareness for what God is doing in your midst. Starting a new church is a natural and historical cycle that you now get to be a part of.

As you leave these pages, reflect on which season you find yourself in. Are you discerning, organizing, opening, or adapting? Or are you somewhere else in your planting journey? Cyclical helps people and regions navigate through each of these seasons, and we've realized that individual efforts in any of these seasons is exhausting and ultimately futile. If you're working through these questions alone, give us a call or email and we can begin connecting you to multitiered relational networks to help you move through whatever season you're in.



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