



Effective Urban Church Planting

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary 2

Saul’s Armor Doesn’t Suit David 6

Introducing World Impact 12

Church Planter Profile 18

Congregational Portrait 28

Preparation Equals Impact 36

Transforming Communities Together 44

Drawing Conclusions 54

Endnotes 63





Executive Summary

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Only 5% of the world's estimated 3.4 million pastors are ministry trained. The primary problem is access and affordability of educational resources.

Denominations and church-planting networks struggle in preparing leaders for any context that is not white, suburban, and upper-middle class.

We utilized what is known as a “Shoestring Evaluation” approach of our outcomes, i.e. the highest quality evaluation possible under constraints of limited budget, time and data availability.

86% of planters participating in our study rated the training “extremely” or “very” helpful.

Employment status emerges as a critical factor as most planters are bi-vocational. This suggests that to plant successfully in a community of poverty, bi-vocational ministry must be considered normal rather than exceptional.

Based on participant interviews, the four themes that emerged highlighting the benefits of World Impact church-plant training were 1) Applicability of content; 2) Affirmation of calling; 3) Planning through collaboration; & 4) Support through connections.

When a congregation is mobilized by a skilled leader, it becomes a neighborhood asset. During interviews it became clear that impacting their local neighborhoods was so natural to the planter's thought process that there was a blurring of the lines, in a good way. Their churches were a model of demonstrating “church without walls.”





Saul's Armor Doesn't Suit David

Saul's Armor Doesn't Suit David

When it comes to church planting, World Impact has a BHAG (Big Hairy Audacious Goal). How can we spark the planting of 3,500 urban churches in a five-year span? As former urban church planters, we have firsthand knowledge of the problems related to achieving this vision. Harvard scholar Robert Putnam has found that America's churches have grown weakest in poor and working-class communities.¹ The Center for the Study of Global Christianity estimates there are between 2.2-3.4 million pastoral leaders. Only 5% are trained for pastoral ministry. If we filled all the brick and mortar seminaries to full capacity, that number would rise to 6%.²

The reason the percentage is so low has to do with affordability and accessibility of the education being offered. A total seminary educational cost can range from \$35,000-\$50,000. Seminary at that hefty price tag guarantees virtually no graduates will deploy to urban poor neighborhoods. This is at least in part due to the model of the American church, which inadvertently discourages pastors from ministering in poor neighborhoods. The model makes churches too expensive to fund for low income communities.

Pastor salaries are drawn from church budgets, which are drawn from the household budgets of congregants. So, in a low-income area, even when a church grows, its budget does not expand so much as stretch. It's asking more than most can bear to minister to a poor congregation with a large amount of personal debt. The congregation typically cannot provide high enough salaries to provide for both a living wage and debt service. There also is the issue of the type of training being offered. The marketplace overwhelmingly is skewed towards a suburban bias. Curriculum, affordability, and accessibility is no small matter when we consider that most of the world's pastors minister in urban, poor communities.

The best model for training pastors in this environment is not the brick and mortar one. Instead of asking them to go get training, training must be brought to them. It should be offered at an affordable price and the curriculum should align with city life.

Saul's Armor Doesn't Suit David

Concerning urban church planting, instead of the popular notion of rising to the occasion, it's more accurate to say we sink to our level of preparedness. And frankly, denominations and church-planting networks struggle in preparing leaders for any context that is not white, suburban, and upper-middle class.

Maybe the most famous biblical illustration concerning the importance of level of preparedness is the story of David and Goliath told in 1st Samuel 17. For 40 days Goliath taunts the Israelites to send someone to challenge him one on one to decide the conflict between the Israelites and the Philistines. David is the only one brave enough to accept the challenge on behalf of Israel. A key part of the story is stated in vs. 38-40 when Saul puts his armor on David to prepare him for battlefield success.

David immediately recognizes this isn't a good idea, as Saul's tools for combat were not relevant to him. He would use the tools he knew worked from his time battling animals as he served as a shepherd, and the rest is history. The lesson from this part of the story is one size doesn't fit all concerning expectations of what works best on the battlefield. Just as Saul's armor is not suited for David, suburban church and planting models and expectations are not meant for urban ministers.

There also is a double standard at work concerning the endgame. In 2017, The Washington Post and the Kaiser Family Foundation surveyed around 1600 adults about their attitudes towards the poor. They found Christians are much more likely than non-Christians to view poverty as the result of personal failure.³ This mentality leads to the poverty-stricken often not valued unless they overcome some sort of deficit, a standard rarely applied to those who live in the suburbs. Naturally, people think the most effective urban ministry are compassionate in nature, such as food pantries, tutoring, community development, etc.

Doing such activities builds a platform of goodwill, which in turn provides an opportunity to share the gospel. What most don't do is ask what happens next?

Saul's Armor Doesn't Suit David

Say the goodwill opportunities and evangelism are so successful that it's possible to form a church plant. What follows? Hopefully a vibrant church that is self-supporting, self-sustaining, and multiplies. That only happens if the leader of the church is effectively trained.

In our combined 50 years of urban ministry experience, we've seen the following story play out too many times to count. A suburbanite goes in to do good works in an impoverished neighborhood. Time passes, and the suburbanite gets frustrated because the citizens do not "act right," which often means upper-middle class values, attitudes, and beliefs about life are not displayed in response to the help given. The relationship goes sideways, and all involved are bitter about the experience.

Contrast that to how suburban populations are treated. The citizens are rarely viewed as objects; people-hood is automatically granted, and no deficit must be overcome to earn it. Good works involves entering the civic life of the community in some way, like coaching sports teams or joining the local Rotary Club. The goal, from the start, is to build enough goodwill to form healthy relationships to share the gospel, leading to the assimilation into a church. It is assumed that doing life together within the community of the congregation is where life transformation happens. That is always the finish line in suburban contexts yet rarely the finish line in urban ones.

Too many times the good works-goodwill activity becomes the tail that wags the dog of the good news of the gospel. The local church that spreads the gospel should be the anchor point of the good works-goodwill activity. It is also important to note that urban church planting should be considered an art more than a science. Determining a church planter's effectiveness is closer to judging what makes a painting or song great than it is to answering a physics problem. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.





Introducing World Impact

Introducing World Impact

Since 1971, World Impact has had a laser focus on serving the citizens of urban poor neighborhoods. Our philosophy can be described by the old Home Depot slogan, “You can do it, we can help”—equipping and encouraging leaders in practical yet highly-sophisticated programs that are specifically contextualized for the city. This partnership with the community is reflected in our mission statement: World Impact empowers urban leaders and partners with local churches to reach their cities with the Gospel. We have three core competencies:

- 1. We are champions of the ability of the poor to own and lead ministry.**
- 2. We are “theologically friendly,” which allows for a wide range of partnerships.**
- 3. We have accumulated unique expertise from doing wholistic ministry among the urban poor for close to 50 years.**

We believe the local church is the foundational element for personal life and community transformation. Our programs are designed to multiply rapidly with minimal training and financing, i.e. the “train the trainer” model. We serve hundreds of pastors annually, stretching across the globe. We have three groups of stakeholders (partners): utilizers, donors, and missional. The typical urban church leader we serve is a bi-vocational protestant pastor who leads a church of between 20-100 members. Concerning our donors, most have contributed to us for more than five years, are religiously Protestant, and live in the suburbs. Our mission partners are organizations that have an interest in deploying ministry workers among the urban poor.

Introducing World Impact

What brings these groups together is their faith and belief in the power of the local church to change lives. Our stakeholders believe the best way to change our world is the hope of the Gospel in our cities. They believe the best way to declare that hope is to partner with local church leaders within these cities. And the best way to partner with local church leaders is leadership development through relationships and welcomed resources.

Our value is we build relationships, add resources, and offer space for renewal to assist urban church leaders in accomplishing his or her ministry vision. Our short-term goal is urban church leaders receive effective training for ministry among the poor. Within five years we hope these leaders are self-supporting, self-sustaining, and self-multiplying. Long term, we desire to see these ends achieved in as many geographic locations as possible, both in the U.S. and globally.







Church Planter Profile

Church Planter Profile

World Impact is not aware of any U.S. based denomination or church-planting network that has trained more leaders for urban church planting than us. According to our records:

- More than 3,600 leaders informally trained through five national conferences:
- ***The Jericho Conference*** (Los Angeles, 1996). World Impact's first church-planting conference trained some 200 missionaries and urban leaders in the foundations of urban church planting.
- ***The Crowns of Beauty Conferences*** I (1999), II (2001), and III (2004) in Los Angeles brought together over 3,200 urban church leaders from more than 30 denominations to launch new churches and church plant movements among the poor.
- ***The Timothy Conference*** (Wichita, KS 2004) brought together some 200 urban church leaders to challenge them to pursue church planting in their own communities.
- Since 1995, more than 2,000 urban church leaders have taken courses in church planting through our church-based seminary satellite network, The Urban Ministry Institute (TUMI).

In the Fall of 2018, a research team commenced a program evaluation to strengthen and improve our Evangel School of Urban Church Planting (Evangel). We utilized what is known as a "Shoestring Evaluation" approach, i.e. the highest quality evaluation possible under constraints of limited budget, time, and data availability. The goal is to conduct evaluations that are credible and adequately meet the needs of key stakeholders, given the conditions under which such evaluations need to be undertaken.⁴

We've done an effective job of capturing a diverse representation of who we serve with our Evangel program. This evaluation will help shape the program by analyzing the impact and value of its services. We focused on measuring the results of 103 church-plant teams that have been commissioned since 2000.

Church Planter Profile

Our study engages a mixed methods format, drawing survey data from 21 congregations and conducting in-depth interviews with 15 church planters. Our aim was for the survey to include participants from the primary ethnic groups, denominations, regions, and socio-economic groups served through Evangel. We accomplished this task.

Quantitatively, we recognize that our response numbers do not render statistically significant results, but neither would a response from all 103 church plants. However, based on the diversity of responses that we received, we are confident that our respondents represent a helpful cross-section of the types of churches being served by Evangel.

In that regard, the collected responses provide insight into how distinct churches are benefitting from Evangel, and how we might better serve this wide spectrum. The qualitative portion of our study was added for the very purpose of fleshing out the human experience of church planters on the field. Again, we ensured that our sample of interviewees represented a broad cross-section of the churches we serve.

From the 103 churches we received a 20% survey response rate. To put our survey response rate into perspective, we may compare existing research on online survey response rates. Nulty⁵ reviews online course evaluation response rates and finds that across eight institutions analyzed for his study, the average online response rate is 33%; such response rates are associated with immediate evaluation of courses.

Some institutions in the study receive as low as 20% and 23% response rates. Our response rate does not veer far from these numbers, even though many of our participants are now several years from having participated in Evangel. Our most significant challenge toward increasing our response rate concerns a more preliminary issue, which is the updating of contact information. Our response rate increases significantly (to 41%) when considering only those pastors for whom we have updated contact information.

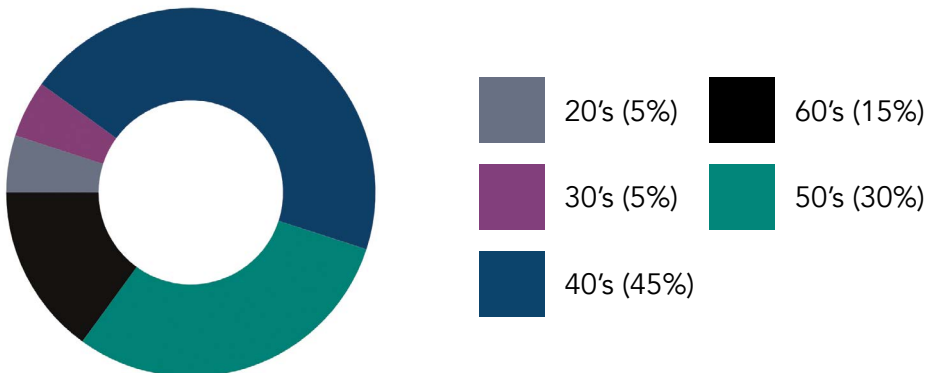
Church Planter Profile

In terms of church affiliations captured by survey respondents and those interviewed, we note that five different denominations are represented, as well as eight independent church movements, for a total of 13 distinct church traditions. Participants are affiliated with the Reformed Church of America, Christ the Victor, Evangelical Covenant, World Impact,⁶ and Baptist organizations. Among independent affiliates, we recognize that some church leaders identify with Pentecostal-leaning traditions, based on interview responses. This mix, while representing a segment of World Impact's broader partnerships, speaks to the theological diversity of the churches being served.

Leaders were asked about their church demographics, the relevance of the church plant training we provided, and their church member's community engagement. We were surprised to learn about the critical nature of being bi-vocational. We were not surprised to learn about the organic connection these churches had to their neighborhood, as they engaged in a way that church activity spilled outside their four walls consistently.

Age

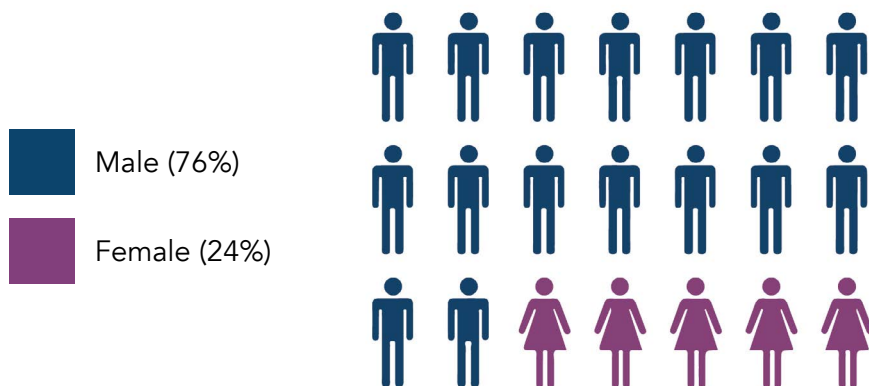
The age of research participants ranged from 29-65, with the average being 50.45. We celebrate the broad range, as it represents Millennials, Generation X, and Boomers. Three-fourths of our group falls between the ages of 40 and 60, indicating that many have both significant life experience and years ahead of them to engage in ministry.



Church Planter Profile

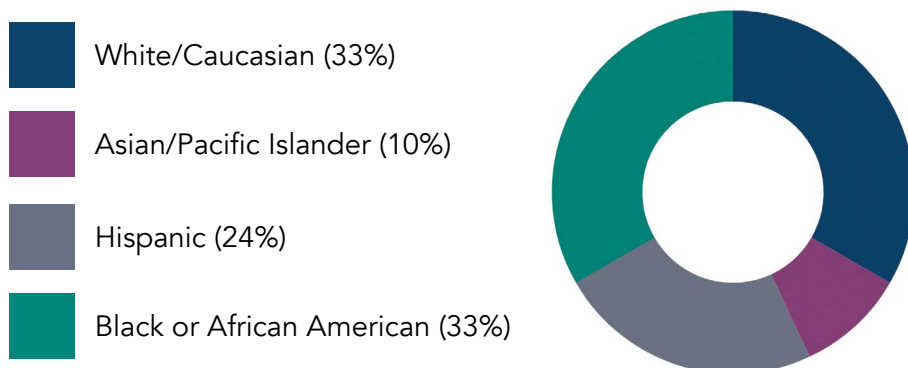
Gender

In terms of gender, male participants dominate our study with women being below a fourth of participants. World Impact partners with a variety of different denominations and church-planting networks representing distinct stances on women in ministry. Regardless, we recognize that in most ministry contexts, and perhaps especially in ministry among the urban poor, women have historically played a critical role in church leadership.



Ethnic and Racial Identity

Responses indicating the ethnic and racial identities of our participants signal that we've done an excellent job of serving leaders from diverse backgrounds. The background of these leaders to some extent represents the diversity of the churches they lead, but in interviews we found that churches are often more diverse than the group of leaders itself. These planters often minister within multi-ethnic contexts, whether that be their congregations or their neighborhoods.



Church Planter Profile

Bi-Vocational

Employment status emerges as a critical factor as most planters are bi-vocational. This suggests that to plant successfully in a community of poverty, bi-vocational ministry must be considered normal rather than exceptional.



Regional Impact

In terms of geographical representation, the majority hail from California and Kansas. The history of an area with World Impact directly correlated with responses, i.e. the longer the history, the better the response. We have longstanding hubs of operation in Los Angeles and Wichita, Kansas.

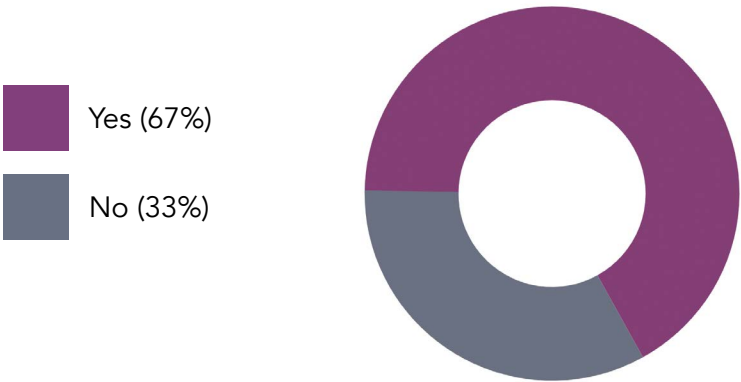


Church Planter Profile

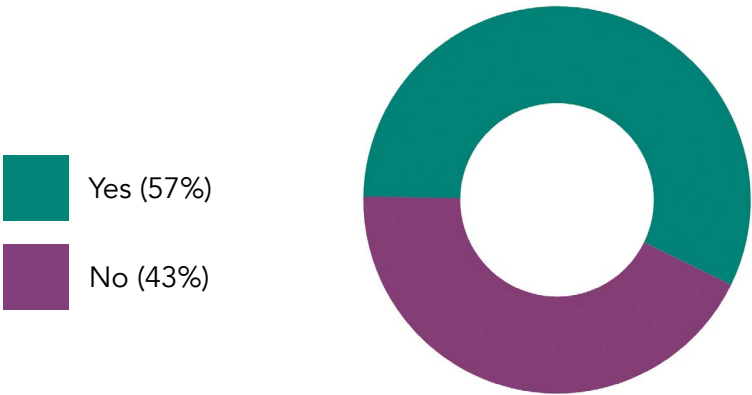
Outcomes

In suburban contexts, churches may shift over time in terms of the audiences they focus on. In our study we find that urban planters remain committed to the populations they envisioned serving from the start. From interviews we learned that none abandoned the target population they set out to serve. Most are still located in the same target neighborhood in which they planted. Interview data indicates that those who shifted location have either moved nearby or expanded their focus.

Is your church still serving the original target population?



Is your church still located in the original target neighborhood?





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Congregational Portrait

Congregational Portrait

Given that World Impact serves the urban poor, the socioeconomic demographics of congregations being launched are of high interest. Are planters hitting the target population? Yes, they are. Of the leaders participating in this study, none represent churches that are serving churches comprised solely of upper middle-class congregants. Some churches represent a blend of upper middle class and those of lower socioeconomic status. The bulk of churches planted are serving congregants classified as working poor.

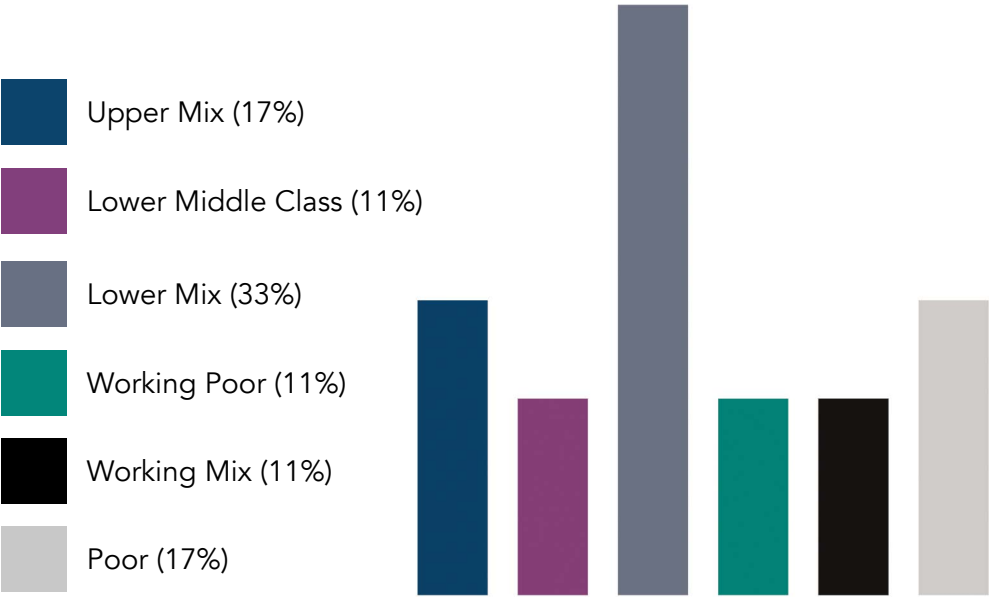
In terms of our social class groupings, upper middle-class congregants are educated professionals who most likely live in suburban neighborhoods. Lower middle-class congregants typically have some college education or training, stable incomes, and live in modest neighborhoods. Congregants classified as working poor have lower wage jobs, are often underemployed, and typically live in lower income neighborhoods. The urban poor are congregants that are the least likely to be gainfully employed and may struggle to meet basic needs such as housing and food. When churches are blended socioeconomically, pastors indicate that more economically-resourced congregants often mobilize resources to help meet congregant and congregational needs.

Socioeconomic Status

While racial diversity is important, diversity of socioeconomic class is also important, and in some ways more difficult to achieve. Oftentimes shared values, attitudes, and beliefs about life run across economic status stronger than racial classification. We celebrate that several of our congregations experience this type of diversity (chart on following page). On the other hand, churches that almost exclusively serve the urban poor provide important opportunities to individuals who may not feel at home in middle-class churches. Such churches provide critical resources for those on the margins of society.

Congregational Portrait

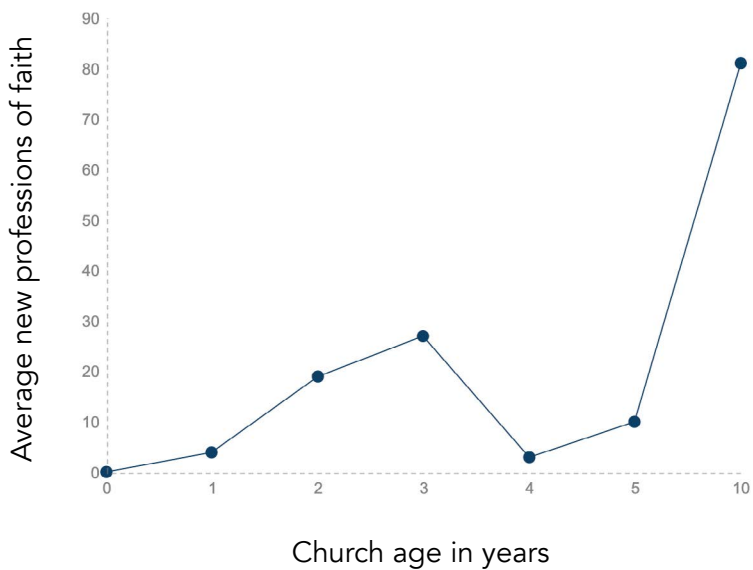
Socioeconomic Status



Outcomes

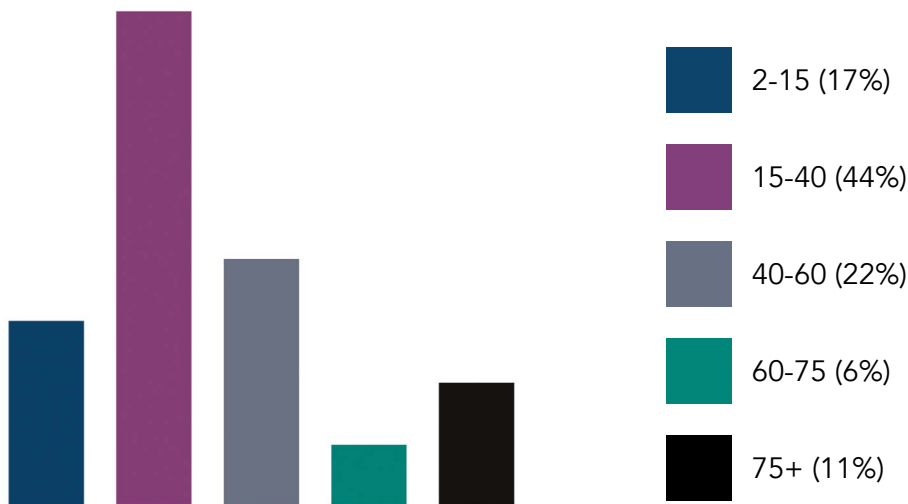
Measuring new professions of faith is one way of tracking how church plants are impacting the spiritual lives of the local community. Given that our church plants are at different age stages (one to ten years), it is no surprise they report a wide range of numbers (see graph on next page). A pleasant surprise is that only two out of the 21 surveyed churches are no longer in existence, and both closed just recently after 10 years of existence. In fact, one of those did not technically close but merged with another church. Along with years in operation, the church size tends to correlate with the number of new professions.

Congregational Portrait



Congregations

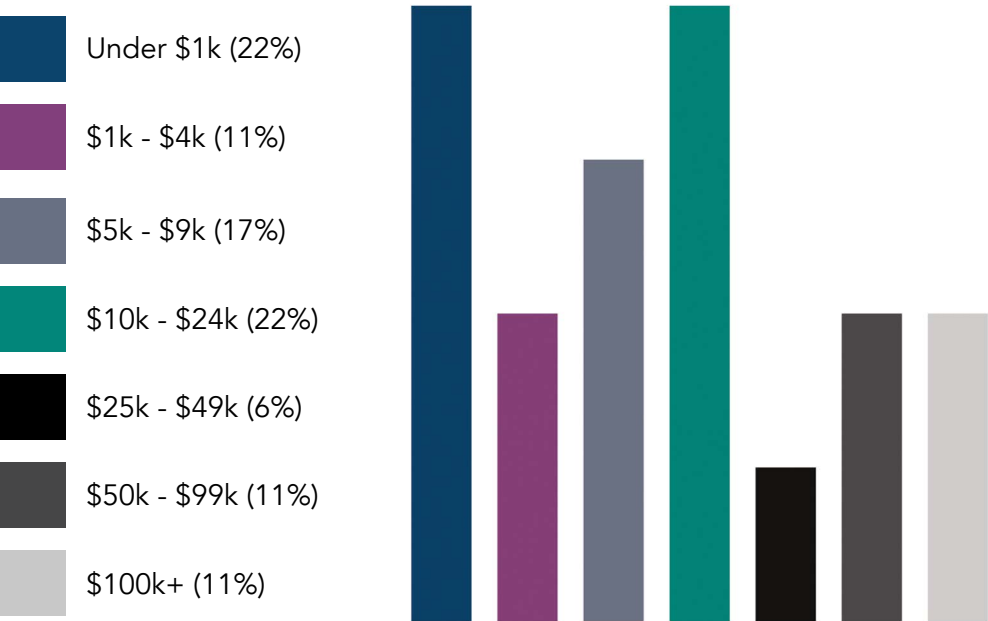
Congregational size ranges from 2-100, with the largest group represented in the 15-40 range. We learned through interviews, church planters are employing a variety of different church models, with some intentionally aiming more for smaller, intimate gatherings like house churches. Thus, smaller congregational sizes may not fully capture the impact that is being made, even in terms of congregational membership.



Congregational Portrait

Church Budgets

Church budgets are an important factor in the capacity churches have for impacting their communities, and the churches studied reflect a range of annual budgets from a \$1,000 to beyond \$100,000. Several factors correlate strongly with church budgets, most typically age of church, congregational size, and socioeconomic status. Denominational affiliation may also be an important factor as some denominations provide notable funds for their planters.



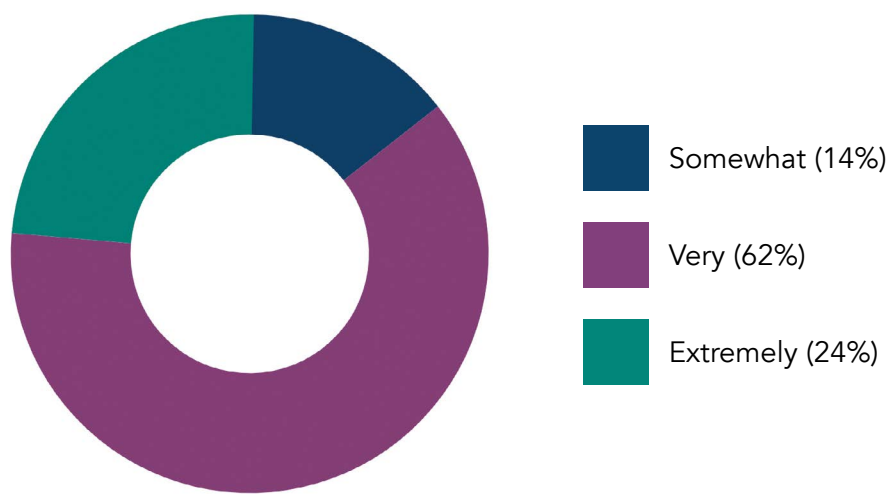




Preparation Equals Impact

Preparation Equals Impact

The response from church planters regarding their training experience is overwhelmingly positive. Nearly all planters participating in our study verbalized their appreciation of Evangel as an experience that provided content that was applicable to both their roles and contexts. Most respondents stated Evangel was “very helpful,” with nearly a quarter of all respondents answering it was “extremely helpful.”



Based on participant interviews, four themes emerged highlighting the benefits of Evangel.

Applicability of Content

Accessibility, it turns out, is the most important aspect of applicability. Several planters indicated the importance of the program being accessible to them, meaning being geographically close and affordable. Daniel⁷ stated “It’s not too expensive. It was great for us. Wichita is a two-and-a-half, three-hour drive. Housing, everything is taken care of.” Likewise, the scheduling was accommodating to their life commitments.

Church planters also noted the content was applicable in such a way they could reproduce the teachings among others, namely their leadership team and congregants. Even as the material made sense to participants, some expressed the ideas were new and refreshing.

Preparation Equals Impact

The fact the content was not merely practically oriented but also had a strong theological base was important. Matthew stated “I am assured, I’m greatly comforted that the training for sharing the Gospel is still focused around the crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Jesus. That is what brought me the greatest comfort.” For Matthew and others like him, the biblical grounding of Evangel makes the process worthwhile.

Chris expressed his appreciation for the ability to explore different models of church and to apply the teaching material within these distinct models. From his experience other church planting organizations are more rigid:

It’s not geared towards a specific style of church plant, right. It talks about, you can be a house church, you can be a hub and community church, or you can be a storefront. It validates all the expressions, and so you don’t feel like ... well, I know [there are other groups that] have a very specific way they want church planting, and they would never consider me.

For Ricardo, the reproducibility of Evangel’s content is of utmost importance, particularly as he works with an audience that has limited freedom. Ricardo has taken the content he received to a local correctional facility, where he has shared it with prisoners. He is also taking his training abroad to Latin America. In the process, he is sharing his knowledge with other trainers in the U.S., so they can accompany him in his work.

Affirmation of Calling

Numerous church planters in our study articulated the benefit they received from experiencing a sense of affirmation through their time at Evangel. Church planters not only expressed the need to experience a sense of calling to the work before them at an individual level, but also that their team would experience a sense of being called to a particular purpose in shaping their congregations. As one explained:

Preparation Equals Impact

I was like boom! Just rocked me. [My spouse] reminded me of that this morning. There were some moments at the Evangel Church Planting training at the school, that were just these prophetic moments.

Others expressed having moments of illumination that often came from interacting with leaders at the gathering. Steve explained that a similar sense of calling could be felt at the group level. He stated, “Okay, Okay, here’s some ideas we can try, here’s some things we could do that really kind of suit who we are and what we feel God is calling us to.”

For some leaders, their team needed clarity about what they were called to do, and Evangel provided that for them. Some expressed this sense of calling as being centered on a specific way of doing church. Glenna, when describing a conversation with her team, stated “They were like why a house church, why small, why this, and were just pushing those buttons and asking.” Evangel helped Glenna’s team define the type of church they were called to be.

Planning through Collaboration

Church planters expressed the value of going through a planning process in a collaborative setting. While church planters generally arrived at Evangel with some level of planning already accomplished, the process they were walked through as a group proved to be life-changing. Charles stated:

The most impactful thing for us was the opportunity to bring a team, and not only bring a team, but also have our team be validated in their leadership. And then also, come up with a plan. The six-month plan was crucial for us, because we felt stuck before we got to Evangel.

Part of the benefit of doing this type of planning is the opportunity to hear from others that are involved in church planting. Bronson shared “One of the things we got the most was being able to sit with other people who were doing urban church because we came out of a suburban church.”

Preparation Equals Impact

Being surrounded by leaders and peers who understood the urban context amplified the benefits of the planning process. Per Marty, the planning process was something that had a clear carry over beyond Evangel: “You have to know what the vision is and what the mission is, and then the processes will help support them. So, for us, we really stayed with our vision statement and our four core values, which we still have today.” For him, the team planning documented at Evangel has helped them several years after.

Support from Connections

The theme of social and spiritual support through connections made at Evangel was extensively discussed. Many expressed they are not finding the moral and spiritual support they need and desire from other networks they belong to. World Impact fills an important gap for many of these leaders. As Sara explains in relation to the World Impact leaders she worked with, “I consider them my mentors. Whenever I have a question, I can straightforward ask; my doubt or my thinking, I can share with them, and they will teach me.” Sara also stated support comes through peers from other teams involved in the process.

Mario explains the value in the network that he gained from Evangel: “As much as I love some of these other church-like networks and things like that, they don’t get this, they don’t get [our city]. They don’t get the brokenness in the way that we do.” For leaders like Mario, it’s important to be surrounded by others that share common experiences of urban ministry. Participants indicate they return to these support networks whenever possible.





Transforming Communities Together

Transforming Communities Together

Instead of focusing on poor neighborhoods and their inhabitants' deficiencies and problems, asset-based community development begins with a clear commitment to discovering a community's capacity and assets.⁸ Church leadership development should be about leaders multiplying leaders regardless of social class. If church leaders in poor neighborhoods have access to educational ministry opportunities, then they can use them to build both their congregations and neighborhoods.

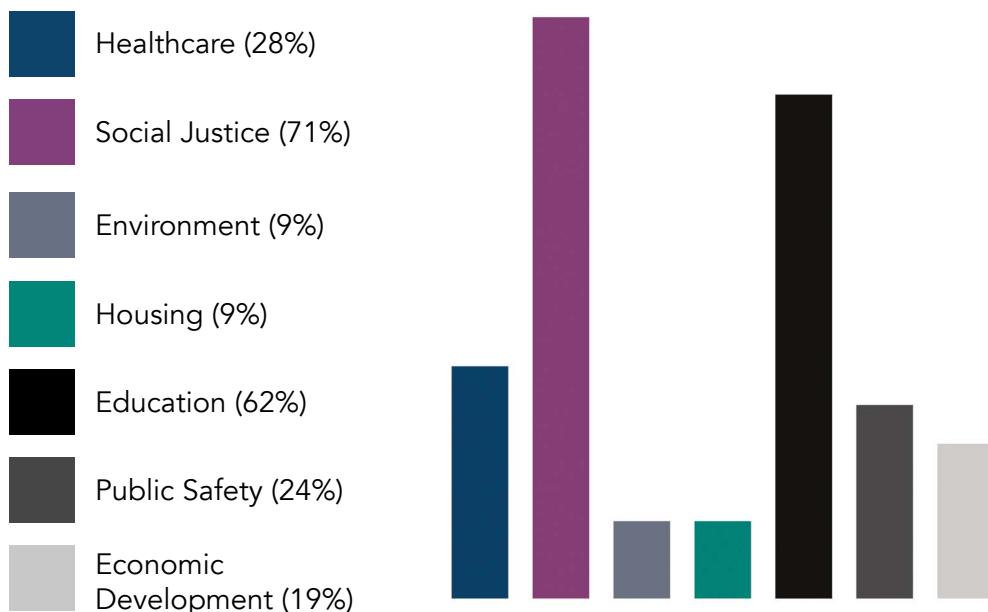
Churches are assets to poor neighborhoods that are often overlooked. Church members are some of the most committed volunteers of any organization. When a congregation is mobilized by a skilled leader, it becomes a neighborhood asset. Besides internal church commitment to things such as worship attendance, many people get involved in the community through volunteering, giving of financial resources, and community organizing.⁹

During interviews it became clear that impacting their local neighborhoods was so natural to the planter's thought process that there was a blurring of the lines, in a good way. Their churches were a model of demonstrating "church without walls."

Transforming Communities Together

Community Engagement

Prior to collecting data, our research team identified seven categories of community impact to measure in our church plants. Aggregately, our church plants were engaged in all seven categories, though naturally some churches tended to focus primarily on one or two.



In addition, we asked participants to discuss the experiences of evangelism they were engaged in throughout their communities. Planters spoke extensively about the impacts they were witnessing in their cities and neighborhoods through the work of their churches.

Economic Development

Economic development is an area that is in nascent form for most of the churches in our sample. Mike discussed the opportunities they have developed by renting out space to other tenants. Mike explains, “Now their partnership with us has been with use of that building that we have on the corner. They pay a rent for using that.” By renting their space to other organizations, Mike’s church has been able to establish partnerships with other local nonprofits.

Transforming Communities Together

A planter from the Midwest described how he has encouraged congregants to invest in local businesses, stressing the importance of their viability:

We did a cash mob. So, this was cool. We do prayer walks through the neighborhood, and through one of those, we met the owner of a beauty supply store. It's actually one of the oldest African-American owned beauty supply stores in the country.

Public Safety

One of the ways church planters add to local public safety is by practicing the ministry of presence. Several leaders spoke of ways in which their church's presence adds to the general public safety in the community. Isaiah described he and his church's outlook:

I just want to be known as a safe place for people that don't have anywhere to go. That's my goal. Our tagline ... is "one neighborhood connected to Christ". And really, what we've decided to try and do, and we're doing at Easter ... we're inviting all the kids on the street.

Sara described a memorable exchange in which police officers appeared at an outreach event she was overseeing for homeless people:

Officer, I'm sorry, we are moving [our vehicles], give us a couple of minutes. He said, Don't worry about it, we come here and just want to thank you, all you do, for the ministry. I said, not I, it's my Lord.

Education

Church planters shared numerous ways that their churches benefit educational systems within the community. Although most are numerically small, they are especially adept at making an impact through educational partnerships. One planter explained his church's partnership with an organization that provides classes for parents:

Transforming Communities Together

Yeah, this is a program that actually has been designed by I think a government agency on how to teach and train and nurture children from infancy. We have a couple of parents who come, and we're hoping that we can reach a little broader.

Teri describes her involvement with an afterschool program:

There were some after school programs that I would attend with the city department, it was a police officer who actually hosted ... it was like an after-school program for refugees. We partnered in that way.

Finally, one planter in the Midwest talked about a parenting program that his church was involved with:

Early Start is an in-home, parent education program that helped start the play group that [my wife] was a part of. We're good friends with the executive director, who is an atheist, but loves what we do. So, we partner together on things in the community because she gets our philosophy.

Housing

Housing is an area that is less developed than others among the team of church planters who participated in this study. Nevertheless, one leader did express a desire to engage in work related to housing, and several leaders are involved in ministry to individuals who are homeless. One of them elaborated:

Another way we served the community was to attend to the many homeless people who would be on our doorstep on Sunday mornings because they slept there. We weren't a homeless ministry, but we did model how to be kind and always offered coffee and food, and a place to come inside if we found anyone there in the morning.

Transforming Communities Together

While these churches are not yet developing housing, they are certainly dealing with individuals most affected by lack of housing, and they are clearly doing this work as a church body.

Environment

There are a variety of ways the churches contributed to the well-being of the environment, with most of these churches engaging in the improvement of their immediate surroundings. Greg stated, “We have a community clean up once every month.” His congregation is not only helping to improve their local environment, they are inviting their neighbors to join with them.

Another planter discussed the partnerships that her church has engaged in that have bettered their local environment:

[The local university] had a design center that developed a ramp for the church. Another partnership was with the city, and there was a lady in the community, she would periodically attend. She wasn't really an attendee of the church, because she was kind of a Catholic faith. She really wasn't a member at a church, but just really passionate, so she was kind of spearheading setting up these playgrounds. We got a chance to partner with her and the city and some major grant folks to pull out the larger projects. When we got involved, that was actually the second playground that got put in.

Social Justice

While social justice is a broad term, we use it here to highlight the work of churches in advocacy for groups and individuals that have been socially marginalized and/or discriminated against. Leaders described a variety of ways they are involved in social justice work, sometimes as churches, and sometimes through the engagement of individual church members. Justin described how his church “created a small food pantry, because we have a small building, and the interesting relationship is our partner in that is bail bonds.”

Transforming Communities Together

He further explained that their local ministry helps prisoners whose families they meet through the bail bonds business located next door to the church facility. Some individual church leaders have key positions in their communities that allow them to advocate for issues of social justice, and this often carries over to the church.

Craig points to the work of one of his teammates:

[One of our leaders] who went through Evangel with me ... She's also a licensed pastor under us as well. She actually is now on the Human Relations Commission for the City ... So, she's on the board that reviews complaints about sexual discrimination and racial discrimination. She's involved with that. She served on the Mayor's campaign team, the new Mayor that was elected.

He went on to explain that the work of this leader opens the door for other members to volunteer at the city and work through issues of justice advocacy.

Healthcare

Church planters indicate various ways in which they are involved in health initiatives in their community. Most of these churches are not involved in formal healthcare programs, yet many are engaged informally in types of healthcare actions. Robert states, "Once a month ... We do the pregnancy center, we do our own food bank, and then we provide coffee for them." The pregnancy center he is referring to is a mobile clinic they help run periodically through their church.

Matthew discussed various partnerships his church engaged in, including "with Coastal Health, which is the health authority for [the city]." Various leaders pointed to cases wherein their hospitality to people with a variety of needs provided opportunities to engage issues of health and wellness. Jeff talked about a young man who visits his church:

Transforming Communities Together

He has really bad PTSD and anxiety. He's been in some really bad situations, been shot six times. And so for him to go even to a, what we would consider a small church, of 60 to 75 people, that is just so intimidating for him. But to come over to his friend's house and have church on Saturday evening and have dinner and then just ... singing some songs and reading some Scripture and share the Communion ... he's faithful.

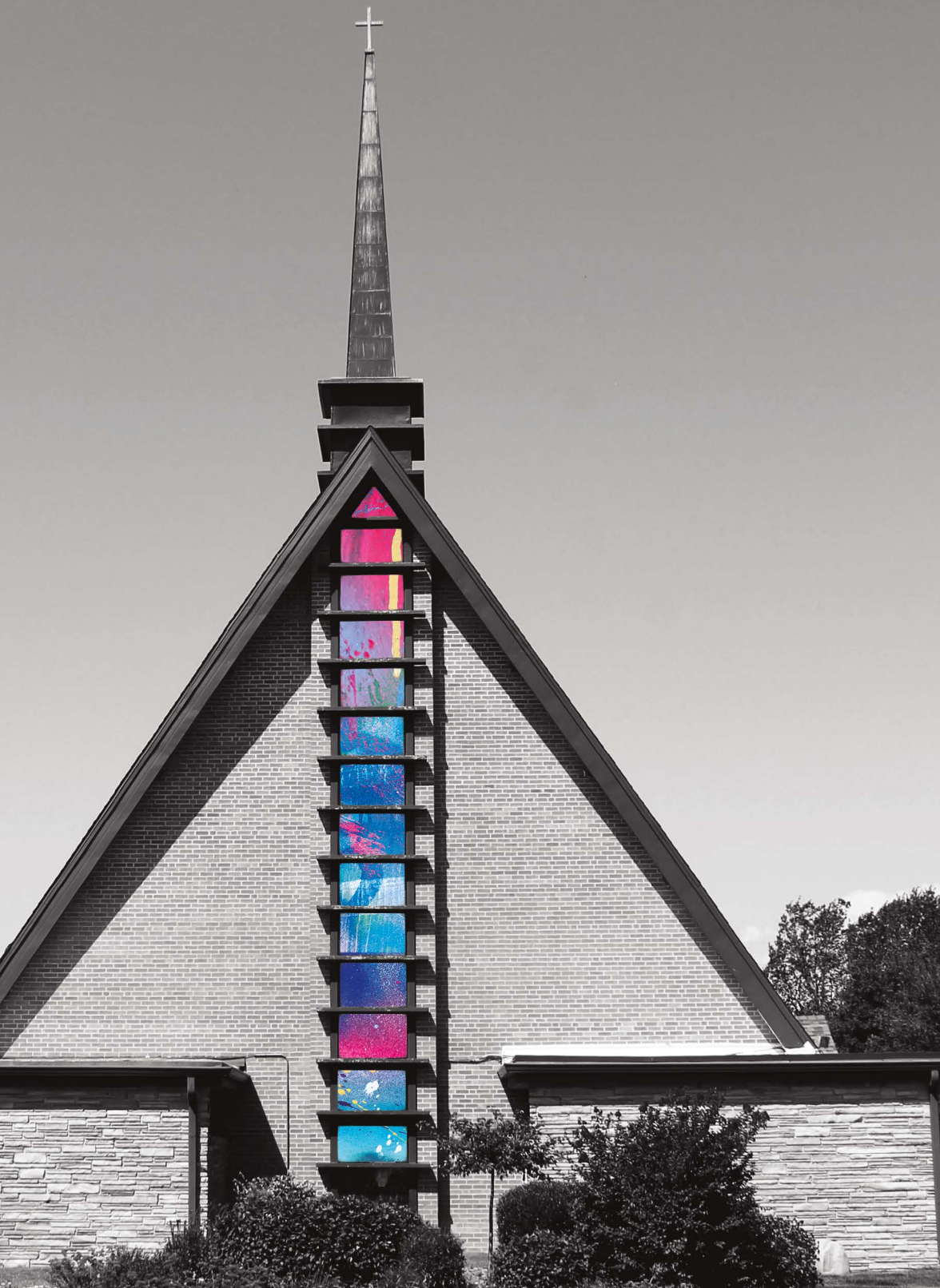
By them providing a welcoming space to this traumatized young man, Jeff and his church are informally helping him to work through some of his issues of trauma.

Evangelism Intersects Impact

Church planters point to a variety of ways in which they engage in forms of evangelism within their communities. Considering that evangelism is a holistic endeavor, much of the work previously described can be considered as evangelistic. In addition, there is work that reflects a more direct invitation to follow Jesus Christ. Ricardo discussed some of the initiatives that he is currently most enthusiastic about:

I'm starting another church plant in [my city], but I'm working with this believer that he's been a believer longer than I have. He's filled with the Holy Spirit ... We started doing outreaches in various communities. And this one community that we got to ... we ended up staying. And God just gave me through an exchange of goods. I got rid of my Harley-Davidson. I traded for five lots in that area where we were doing the outreach. And we're going to start a tent church there.

Various leaders like Ricardo demonstrate a passion for sharing a Christocentric message throughout their regions and beyond. For some, evangelism work involves targeting a demographic, such as children. Teri explained how her church “did VBS two years in a row and opened it to the community, and to the students who had children. That was a pretty big deal for us.” She also described working with senior citizens and a variety of other age groups. For many Evangel-trained leaders, being present in their communities opens the door to the most effective forms of evangelism.





Drawing Conclusions

Drawing Conclusions

For over 150 years within the world of missions, the simplest definition of a church has been guided by what is known as the three self-formula, developed by Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson. It states that a newly-planted church is mature when it is self-governing, self-propagating (multiplication), and self-supporting.¹⁰

Applying these as the standard, the program evaluation has demonstrated that Evangel training produces churches that possess these characteristics.¹¹ There is no question that Evangel has demonstrated feasibility. In fact, we think it is in the “prototype” phase and has high capacity to deliver many more outputs and outcomes than it presently does. All it needs is the ability to increase capacity. There are several calls to action that have emerged.

Filling the Needs of the Bi-Vocational Pastor



The fact that World Impact is already successful at capturing bi-vocational pastors indicates a huge strength. World Impact will continue to explore what this reality means for our training moving forward. Given our success with this demographic, we believe World Impact has the potential to function as a key player in ministry training among them. We should seek ministry partners that utilize this model and conduct more research in this area.

Drawing Conclusions

Satisfying the Small Church



Not only is the average church planter we work with bi-vocational, most of them will pastor a church of between 15-60 members. Small church pastors are not any less valuable than mega church ones. They have a different skill set that needs to be developed, and we need to identify and train towards those skill sets.

Generational Diversity



The average age of an Evangel participant is 50. On one hand, it's a great representation of serving different generations.

Drawing Conclusions

On the other hand, we also note the less represented age groups present a strategic opportunity for World Impact.

More fully capturing younger ages (under 40) will be important for ensuring that new models of church planting are brought to fruition and that younger generations are being addressed by peer leaders.

Likewise, individuals beyond 60 might provide channels of strategic support to church plant teams. Some of these could be individuals exploring a call to urban ministry while in retirement who bring critical life experiences to the church-planting arena. Thus, we note the success of Evangel in capturing church planters within the 40-60 age range and are likewise eager to draw in participants from the edges of this range.

Gender Bias



This finding points to the need for including more women in Evangel training. The women who did participate had exceedingly positive feedback about their experience, suggesting that inclusion will require working with church leadership teams in helping them to better integrate women participating in Evangel. We also need to work with more denominations and church planting networks that are egalitarian in their view of church leadership.

Drawing Conclusions

Geographic Expansion



The clustering of church planters suggests that accessibility in where Evangel meetings are held is an important factor shaping the engagement of church planters. We've learned that the closer the geographic location, the more affordable and accessible the training will be. More thought needs to be put into how to offer trainings outside the traditional strongholds of Kansas and Southern California.

In conclusion, the positive response from participants suggests that Evangel is operating effectively for the overwhelming majority of those trained. World Impact can continue to build on this existing foundation that has already been proven.

Endnotes

- ¹ Wilcox, Bradford W. (2015, March 26). Why so many empty church pews? Here's what money, sex, divorce, and TV are doing to American Religion. *The Washington Post* Retrieved April 8, 2019 from https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2015/03/26/why-so-many-empty-church-pews-heres-what-money-sex-divorce-and-tv-are-doing-to-american-religion/?utm_term=.033737c3a683
- ² Richard, Ramesh (2015). Training of Pastors: A High Priority for Global Ministry Strategy. *Lausanne Global Analysis*. Retrieved April 8, 2019 from https://www.lausanne.org/content/lga/2015-09/training-of-pastors#_edn2
- ³ The Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation (2017). *Survey of Rural America*. Washington, DC
- ⁴ Bamburger, M., Church, M., Fort, L. & Rugh, J. (2004). Shoestring Evaluation: Designing impact evaluations under budget, time, and data constraints. *American Journal of Evaluation*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 2004, pp. 5–37.
- ⁵ Nulty, D. (2008). The adequacy of response rates to online and paper surveys: what can be done? *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 33:3, 301-314.
- ⁶ In the past World Impact used missionaries to plant churches. We now do not plant churches but rather train grassroot leaders to do so and there is no longer such a thing as a “World Impact” church plant.
- ⁷ All names used are pseudonyms.
- ⁸ Kretzmann, J. & McKnight, J. (1993). *Building Communities From The Inside Out*. Chicago: ACTA Publications
- ⁹ Studying Congregations Website (2015). *Resources Frame*. <http://studyingcongregations.org/resources-frame>
- ¹⁰ Reese, R. (2007, July-August). The surprising relevance of the three-self formula. *Mission Frontiers* 25-27.
- ¹¹ It should be noted concerning “self-propagating” that according to our records there have been at least 17 second generation church plants, one third generation, and two fourth generation.



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