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Resurrection

Replanting as a New Congregation

One of the Ten "R" s for Plotting a New Congregational Course

Resurrection is one of at least ten choices available to congregations who need to engage in transitions and changes that could lead to transformation as they plot a new course for their congregation. This is when a congregation chooses to start over and replant itself as a new congregation.

The congregation intentionally dies. It stops meeting for worship, discipleship, fellowship, and missions. It allows a sponsoring congregation and a replanting pastor to start a new congregation in their facilities. It transfers management of assets to the new congregation. It desires that a new vital and vibrant congregation use its facilities and serve the community context, or identified target or affinity groups.

People who were members of the former congregation may attend, be members, and participate in the new congregation. However, to provide time and space for the new congregation to develop their own identity and culture as they seek to fulfill their God empowered vision, former members will not hold any church elected or appointed leadership position for at least the first 18 months of the new congregation, and perhaps up to three years.

Resurrection, as opposed to **Reinvention** or **Redirection**, is truly a new congregation from the very beginning. It needs to be formed by the sponsorship of one or more congregations, a pastor gifted and skilled as a church planter or a church planting team, a core group of people who desire to launch a new congregation, and a sense of God's empowering vision for the new congregation.

Empowering **Resurrection** becomes the last missional engagement of the former congregation. They use their power as a Christ-centered, faith-based community to bless the founding of a new congregation. It is one of the greatest grace gifts a congregation can offer to the Kingdom of God. Rather than holding on as a remnant group, they bless a new congregational expression. In appreciation the new congregational expression provides pastoral support and the rites of passage of the congregation to the former members as part of the launch of a new congregation.

Why Replant as a New Congregation?

Here are seven reasons for replanting as a new congregation. Perhaps you can think of more.

1. Because the existing congregation is no longer characterized by vitality and vibrancy. It is a preaching state at subsistence level and is highly unlikely to be any different in the future.
2. Because the existing congregation is located in a community context where there are unreached or under-reached people, or target or affinity groups who need a Christian congregational expression.
3. Because the existing congregation has facilities that are underutilized and provide a viable place where one or more new congregations can be housed.
4. Because the existing congregation has various assets it desires to invest in new missional engagement and realize they do not have the capacity to do so, but a new congregation may.
5. Because the existing congregation feels God is calling for it to bring closure to its ministry and make way for the new thing God desires to do in their community using their facilities and assets.
6. Because the existing congregation is presented with an opportunity by another congregation or congregations to do something new and significant in their community context using their facilities and assets.
7. Because it is not about survival of the remnant congregation. It is about the new thing God could do through a new congregation passionate about the future. Just as the families in the existing congregation have blessed their descendants, so they choose to bless the next congregation.

How to Replant as a New Congregation?

The “how” of replanting a congregation is much like planting a new congregation. It carries with it some of the same potential and excitement.

1. Just as with planting a new congregation where there had not been one before, replanting involves starting with the basics of rediscovering the character and nature of a New Testament church and figuring out what that ought to look like at the current time in the location of the replant.
2. It is much deeper than a pragmatism that simply seeks to plant a new congregation as a franchise of another congregation. It is about “why” a new congregation is needed at this time in the place among this demographic of people. And, what God’s empowering vision is for the new congregation.
3. Replanting a congregation, as opposed to restarting a congregation, needs to begin as though there was no congregation in this location and among these people. It must begin with an empowering vision from God for the new congregation in this context.
4. A deep spiritual foundation must be developed among the sponsoring congregation or congregations, the church planter or church planting team, and the core group of disciples who first come together to form and launch the replant.
5. It is important to not publicly launch the replant until at least 21 leaders—including the church planting pastor—can be identified and make a commitment to the replant. These 21 leaders likely represent 12 to 15 households committed to the replant. Ideally these should be people obviously maturing as Christian disciples, expressive of leadership abilities, and committed to connecting with the community context and the demographic God has chosen for the replanted congregation.
6. Despite all pre-public efforts to brand the identity of the replant, the community context will provide the true branding and identify of the replant within six months after its launch. Therefore, be ready to present a mature, quality, Christ-centered, faith-based ministry from the launch forward.
7. Realize that in an area where the denomination of the replant has significant presence and the size of the target demographic allows, the benchmark for numerical success within two years is an active congregation of 50 households and a weekly worship attendance of at least 125 to 135.

What is the Impact of Replanting as a New Congregation?

Here are seven possible impacts. There will be others you can name.

1. A new congregation is born and all the excitement and passion present in new congregational expressions is present. Joy and praise will abound. Not only is the replanted congregation celebrating, but also the sponsoring congregations are celebrating with prayer and praise.
2. The congregation that died—or better yet came to a closure—has been resurrected as a replanted congregation, so the institutional grave could not contain the former congregation. It is blessing the lives of new people and households. It is addressing the needs of different target and affinity groups of people the former congregation may not have been able to reach.
3. Kingdom resources are recycled and continue to be used with great joy for the fulfillment of the Great Commission in the spirit of the Great Commandment. Facilities may be renovated, retrofitted, and repurposed, but more than that, they will come alive with new people.
4. Perhaps multiple congregations are occupying the facilities of the former congregation and breathing great life into the facilities the former congregation gave sacrificially to build and maintain. The heritage of the former congregation is being honored in the new things taking place.
5. The former congregation who made the choice to cease to exist so that a resurrection could take place are continuing to receive ministry in a Christ-centered, faith-based community. They attend worship, participate in a small group, and receive pastoral care and the rites of passage of the church.
6. Pre-Christian, unchurched, dechurched, and underchurched people are reached by a replanted congregation, and grow and mature as Christian disciples. The efforts of the new congregation may even exceed the efforts of the former congregation and the sponsoring congregations.
7. New relationships will be established with God and new friends in the congregation that allow for dynamic spiritual formation, leadership development, and missional engagement. A spiritually maturing congregation will be a hallmark of the success of the replant.