

Faith Report

Reaching: The Book of Acts and Church Planting by Maria Garriott

I've been rereading the book of Acts with an eye to church planting. Perhaps, like me, you first viewed Acts as having two themes: the birth of the early church, and the hard-to-follow missionary journeys of the tireless Paul, who was frequently beaten or shipwrecked, sometimes accompanied by his buddies Barnabas or Titus.

Of course, Acts does tell what happened after Jesus' resurrection: those frightened disciples cowering in the upper room; their transformation by the Holy Spirit; powerful street preaching and mass conversions; Stephen's death-defying and martyrdom-inducing speech; the persecution that scattered the Jerusalem church into surrounding regions; and a hothead named Saul who became Paul, apostle to the non-Jewish world.

And while Acts does tell of Paul's three missionary journeys, the apostle was not constantly on the move. His strategy was to go to major cities (Corinth, Ephesus, Rome, etc.) and stay there long enough to preach and establish churches. Paul was a church planter. Amazingly, after he had started a church and appointed elders, he could say that "I no longer have any room for work in these regions" (Romans 15:19, 23). He moved on.

Paul knew that building and tending a church takes tremendous energy; so how could he say he no longer had any work to do? Because he knew that the established church and its elders would continue the work of bringing people to Christ and discipling them.

Paul's commitment to church planting is an important lesson in our time, when the church in North America is in decline:

- Christian churches are losing two million people a year.
- Between 2000-2005, church attendance declined in all fifty states.
- Less than 18% of Americans attend church regularly.
- In the last 20 years, approximately 3,600 churches closed every year. Newly-started churches are only a fraction of what is needed to keep up with population growth.

One of the strongest summaries of the importance of planting new churches is from Tim Keller, pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City and author of *The Reason for God* and *Generous Justice*. In his article "Why Plant Churches," he writes,

The vigorous, continual planting of new congregations is the single most crucial strategy for 1) the numerical growth of the Body of Christ in any city, and 2) the continual corporate re-

newal and revival of the existing churches... Nothing else--not crusades, outreach programs, para-church ministries, growing mega-churches, congregational consulting, nor church renewal processes--will have the consistent impact of dynamic, extensive church planting. This is an eyebrow raising statement. But to those who have done any study at all, it is not even controversial."

Keller also points out that racially diverse communities are best reached by a new church that is intentionally multi-ethnic from the start. This has been our experience at Faith. As many neighborhoods in the Baltimore area become more diverse, we have a tremendous opportunity to reach the un-churched and the de-churched with new worshipping communities.

But how do we plant new churches? Some of the best models today involve planting daughter churches or establishing multi-site churches (one church holding services at different locations).

Our denomination, the Presbyterian Church in America, is deeply committed to planting new churches nationally and globally. In recognition of the unique stresses placed on church planters and their families, it supported the

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*United that the
world would
know*

*³³just as I try to
please everyone in
everything I do, not
seeking my own
advantage, but that
of many, that they
may be saved.
1 Cor 10:33*

The Book of Acts and Church Planting

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founding of Parakaleo in 2005 (www.parakaleo.us). The mission of Parakaleo is to come alongside church planting spouses with training, support, and encouragement through our local network groups, retreats, and materials. We recently published our first book, *Beyond Duct Tape: Holding the Heart Together in a Life of Ministry*. I began working part-time with Parakaleo in late 2009.

So what does the book of Acts and church planting have to do with you? I don't know—why don't you pray about it? Seeing God's kingdom expand is one of the most exciting, challenging, and faith-building journeys in life. God may not call you to get on a ship like Paul, but he can and will use the gifts he has given you to help build his church. (Acts 1:8) ♦

Sources for statistics: Wicker, Christine. *The Fall of the Evangelical Nation*. HarperOne, 2008.
Olson, David T. *The American Church in Crisis*. Zondervan, 2008.

Prayer

There is no Concert of Prayer in September. Instead, we are encouraging our prayer wrestlers and prayer partners of Faith to gather in twos or threes, wherever convenient, during the month of September to devote the church and her ministries and the launch of a new ministry year to prayer.

Please pick up a prayer guide in the lobby on Sunday or email the church at fcfoffice@fcfchurch.org to request an electronic copy. We hope that you will commit to praying and be blessed as you gather together. ♦

Christian Community in Action

By Elisa Campbell

The Pen Lucy Action Network (PLAN) will come alongside the Pen Lucy Neighborhood Association as they host the Annual Mayor's Clean Up Day later in October. Look for the exact date and more details soon. Please consider lending a helping hand to the community and assisting in cleaning up and maintaining neighbors' yards and removing trash from up and down York Road and Old York Road! ♦

Bits and Pieces

- Congratulations to Zac and Trina Coleman on the arrival of Elias Zachary on August 15.
- Congratulations to new members Tim and Angela Horjus who were presented to the church in August. We also welcome baby Otto, who was baptized!
- Tom and Kedi Milajecki's son Andrew was baptized in August while big brother Thomas looked on. Welcome, Andrew!
- Pastor Craig's back surgery went well and he is making a good recovery. Pray for complete healing and rehabilitation.

CALENDAR

- Sep. 2** No Concert of Prayer (but see item on Prayer)
- Sep. 5** Office closed for Labor Day
- Sep. 11** Ministry Fair
- Sep. 25** Welcome Discovery Luncheon
- Heads Up:**
- Oct. 31-Nov. 4** Annual Advance Prayer and Fasting Week