

**PRACTICAL CHURCH PLANTING GUIDE** by Terry Williams  
(Revisions in italics by Mike Watters)

So many "how to" books and papers do not actually tell you how to do something, they simply state the obvious. This essay is to give a new church planter in depressed areas a step-by-step practical guide in doing depressed area ministry. It is flexible enough to fit different strategies but warns of pitfalls to avoid. First of all find a good ministry partner/pastor and church to work with. It is biblically and missiologically correct to work with a national pastor and church. When picking a pastor as a work partner consider the following:

1. Choose a pastor who you feel you can become friends with. There are basically two avenues you can pursue in a relationship with your work partner; a Christian friendship or a professional relationship. Being friends with your ministry partner is the better choice.
2. It is important to choose a pastor you are compatible with doctrinally. If you are charismatic, choose a charismatic work partner, Baptists should choose a Baptist etc. *It is of utmost importance that both the missionary and pastor adhere to ACTION's Statement of Faith. They must also be able to exposit a clear Biblical exposition of the Gospel. If the missionary or Filipino pastor is into questionable doctrines (i.e., holy laughter), they should not be permitted to do church planting with ACTION.*
3. Try to find a pastor who will commit to the depressed area for the long haul. It is very disruptive to the ministry to continually change partners.
4. Find a pastor with a history of persevering in ministry. In my experience, the pastor who has stuck it out in a small church shows that trait more than the pastor who has a larger congregation. *The missionary and pastor should not just have philosophy on church planting but a proven track record.*
5. It may be better to choose the pastor of a small church over a larger one because the pastor of a large church may be more busy than the pastor of a small church, thus having less time to work with you in the depressed areas. The large church may have more resources but the ministry in the depressed area will be perceived as something small added on to other ministries. In contrast if the church is small, the depressed area ministry will become the important ministry of the church.
6. It is better to choose a middle-aged or older pastor to work with. They are more mature, less prone to discouragement, less sensitive to being hurt and more apt to persevere.
7. Push your co-worker to lead. If you do not, the pastor's perception will be that he is your employee or your helper in your ministry. He will never have a sense of ownership in the ministry which is very important. *It is of utmost importance also that the pastor have a track record of financial accountability and is not heavily into debt. If he is, he will always be looking to the missionary to provide his needs.*

After you have a committed work partner, the next step in the depressed area ministry is for you and your work partner to go to the purok leader of your area first and tell that person you want to do ministry in their community. Tell them you respect them because they are the elected leader of that community. 95% of the time the response I have received from that person is a welcome to the community. They have asked us to let them know if we have a problem with anyone in the community and also that they cannot show us favoritism over another group.

If you do not go to the purok leader first, in a sense you are not following protocol. The smaller the depressed area is, the more important it is to visit the purok leader because in a smaller area, you have a higher profile. In an enormously larger depressed area like Welfareville in Mandaluyong City, it is far less important to contact the purok leader however it is still the best thing to do.

What is the first issue a Christian worker will face in the depressed area ministry (after speaking to the purok leader)? The first will be curiosity about who you are and what is your intent. The best way to meet this challenge is head on. Walk up and down each alley and introduce yourselves, giving your names and that you are a missionary and pastor. This will help people feel more comfortable with your intentions. Then you will need to revisit the alleys and give people personal info about yourself, e.g. siblings, parents, where you come from. This helps you to become an acquaintance with people.

The next phase is much slower. Engage people in conversations about their families. Memorize their names, (write them down). Pay attention to those who respond positively to you. This is biblical. Remember Christ told his disciples to bless the ones who received them. Give out Gospel tracts (free) to those who want them.

After visiting all the alleys and taking note of the people who were friendly, revisit them. By now they are becoming more than acquaintances and you can comfortably share the Gospel with them. You can talk to them about your goal to have a bible study in their community. Sometimes people will get the hint and just offer their home for one. For others, you can just gently ask if they would be willing to host a bible study in their home. Remember if you force someone to have a bible study against their will, it will not last. Avoid thinking of bible studies as just discipleship. They are great evangelism tools.

After you have established a bible study, do not let up on your effort. Continue visiting all the alleys, sharing Christ, distributing tracts and starting more bible studies. After time goes on, bring your bible studies together for corporate worship on Sundays. It is very hard to promote bible studies as church to Filipinos. In fact, to really have church the bible calls for church leadership, the Lord's Supper and Baptism. *Every church planter (missionary) and pastor should thoroughly acquaint themselves with Acts Chapter 2 & I & II Timothy and Titus in order to follow the New Testament pattern, it will make church planting much simpler. They should pray and encourage the Filipino pastor to pray and ask God to raise up leaders according to 1 Tim. 3 & Titus 1 this should be a priority.*

### **Pitfalls to Avoid**

Avoid strategies that are unrealistic. Beware of any strategy that calls itself the "only correct way" to do ministry in depressed areas. Every depressed area is different. There is no one strategy that is right for all depressed areas.

Be skeptical of strategies devised by facilitators who have no experience doing the ministry. Have a realistic approach to the time you will have to invest in an area. Be skeptical of any strategy that boasts of a quick timetable. (E.g. "With this strategy you can finish a depressed area in 6 months and move onto the next.") Remember there are no simple quick fix answers in depressed area ministry. There is no substitute for perseverance, hard work, and long-term commitment.

Avoid permanently leaving any depressed area. Even if you move on to another depressed area, regularly visit the ones you have finished in. The absolute tendency in depressed areas is for ministry to die. It is important to buoy up the existing ministry and make sure it remains healthy.

Avoid the temptation to work with a Christian worker who is not a pastor. Perhaps he is less busy, but people will not respect him as much if he is not a pastor. Filipinos respond to "experts" just like Americans do and are more likely to respect a pastor more.

Avoid being impressed with a pastor who is "flashy". Being a perseverer and having a heart for the poor are far more important credentials.

### **ACCOUNTABILITY STRUCTURE**

*Church planting missionaries should meet every one or two months. They should have a time of prayer, devotions, follow-up, and each should share triumphs and struggles.*

## **COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

In order to do effective and efficient community development in a target area, research must be done to find what the needs of the community are. The best approach is to become acquainted with the community leaders first. An easy way to accomplish this is to drop by their home in the late afternoon to visit. (Late afternoon is when people in Metro Manila socialize). In most urban poor areas, the community leaders are most often the purok leader and the home owner's association leader. It is their responsibility to hear complaints and as a result know what the needs of their community are. There may also be people of influence, unofficial leaders (owners of successful sari-sari stores for example) who are in tune with their community's needs.

Networking is an important aspect of community development. The most important thing is to locate people and organizations willing to help who are near to the area. It is impractical to have people traveling from one end of the city to the other.

Think of doing things that will help the community for the long haul. For example, it is far better to have a doctor who lives nearby who is willing to visit people every week than to have a big medical outreach that is here today and gone tomorrow.

Once the list of needs is made for the community, contact Christian organizations, NGO's or government organizations who can help. Sometimes government organizations and social workers are happy to have missionaries as facilitators in depressed areas.

## **ACTION CHURCH PLANTING PHILOSOPHY**

Church planting is holistic in the biblical sense. Jesus viewed people as whole beings, that are spiritual, physical and social. Therefore evangelism, discipleship, church planting and development (concern for the physical and social needs) are the goals of church planting.

Church planting is for all people in the target areas to the greatest extent possible. This is to obey the mandate, "to every creature" of the Great Commission.

## **ACCOUNTABILITY**

It is good to have two kinds of accountability, "institutional" and "on location." We think of institutional accountability as another missionary in our mission board who will meet with us once a month for example, and hold us accountable for our walk with the Lord.

On location accountability is doing your ministry with other Christians who observe your conduct while doing ministry and hold you accountable for Christlikeness and moral conduct.