

# SEVEN SEASONS

OF CHURCH  
PLANTING



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**DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRIES**  
The United Methodist Church



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# THE SEVEN SEASONS OF PLANTING

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When planting new churches, we seek to help congregations grow through a series of seasons. From the early days of planting, through the time when weekly worship begins, we move faith communities toward the ideal of multiplying ministries. These healthy churches multiply to form other new faith communities that reach even more people.

## THE BASIC SEASONS OF PLANTING CHURCHES ARE:

1. **Discerning**
2. **Visioning**
3. **Gathering**
4. **Discipling**
5. **Worshiping**
6. **Maturing**
7. **Multiplying**



## DISCERNING: ARE YOU CALLED TO BE A CHURCH PLANTER OR TO PARTNER A NEW CONGREGATION?

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*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.*  
(Romans 12:2 NRSV)

The discernment process begins when a prospective planter (or potential partner congregation) senses God's calling to plant a new church. Such a divine calling is greater than simply a desire to start a new community of faith. This calling is affirmed by others who assess the necessary gifts

for this ministry. Ongoing discernment could occur through training and assessment events, personal or corporate study, prayer, and conversations with experienced church planters or partnering congregations.

### **SOME QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER DURING THIS SEASON:**

- Are you called to be a church planter?
- Are you called to be a partner church?
- Is there confirmation from God? From others?

### **SCRIPTURES FOR DISCERNING: BY STUDYING THESE PASSAGES, WHAT LESSONS DO YOU LEARN ABOUT DISCERNMENT?**

- **Matthew 3:13-17** (John baptizes Jesus)
- **Luke 7:18-28** (John's disciples ask Jesus if he's "the one;" Jesus tells them to report what they see)
- **Matthew 16:13-20** (Peter declares Jesus is Christ; Jesus tells Peter that he is going to build his church on this rock)
- **1 Samuel 1-3** (God answers Hannah's prayers for a child, Samuel; she dedicates his life to the Lord and he begins to discern his calling as a prophet, through Eli's teaching and God's call on him by name)



# VISIONING: EMERGING AND CLARIFYING VISION THAT CONNECTS TO THE MISSION FIELD AND GOD'S DREAMS FOR THE PEOPLE IN IT.

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*Then the Lord answered me and said, write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it. For there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end, and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay. (Habakkuk 2:2-3 NRSV)*

The soil in which God sows the seed of a new church is in the planter or planting church's heart. Vision offers a shared picture of a preferred future, inspired by God and often first articulated by leaders and then affirmed by God's people. A vision for starting a new church may arise from a need to reach a geographical area, cultural group, or specific community of people. Energized by this vision, leaders motivate others to develop strategic plans and begin to enlist teams of persons to help that vision become reality. Visioning happens early in the planting process, often during the season of discerning or just beyond.

## **SOME QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER DURING THIS SEASON:**

- What is God's dream for you? For the people of your church? For your community?
- How will you begin to share that vision with others?

## **SCRIPTURES FOR VISIONING: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO CAST A CLEAR AND COMPELLING VISION?**

- **Luke 4:14-30** (Jesus declares his fulfillment of a prophet's vision)
- **Matthew 9/Luke 10** (send laborers to the harvest)

- **Acts 10** (Peter and Cornelius: Peter is open to God's leading and vision; converts an entire household because of a new definition of "clean/unclean")
- **Nehemiah 1-2** (lay person following God's calling and vision to rebuild Jerusalem)



## **GATHERING: ATTRACTING AND ENGAGING A CRITICAL MASS OF PEOPLE TO FULFILL A NEW CHURCH'S VISION**

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*After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."*  
(Luke 10:1-2 NRSV)

Engaging people to help plant and nurture a new church (including members from a partnering church, friends, family and inquirers in the community) requires a great deal of invitation, networking, and relationship-building. Church planting is never solo work. The planting team's first and most important task is to connect people to Christ, to the planter, to the vision, to each other, and to opportunities to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Gatherings of small groups, fellowship events, and preview worship experiences can ensure a critical mass of people necessary to plant and firmly establish the new faith community.

### **SOME QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER DURING THIS SEASON:**

- How do we engage a critical mass of people?
- What are we doing to connect people to the planting team, vision, Christ, and the mission of the church?

- What difference does our congregation's presence make in the community?

## SCRIPTURES FOR GATHERING: HOW DO GOD'S PEOPLE GO ABOUT GATHERING OTHERS TO BE ON GOD'S MISSION WITH THEM?

- **Matthew 4:18-22** (Also Mark 1:16-20; John 1:35-51; Jesus calls the disciples)
- **Luke 6:12-16** (Jesus chooses the Twelve)
- **Acts 3** (Peter heals and preaches)
- **Exodus 3-5** (God calls Moses and Moses brings along Aaron for the job of addressing Pharaoh)



## DISCIPLING: CREATING A CULTURE OF MULTIPLYING DISCIPLESHIP

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*And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*  
(Matthew 28:18-20 NRSV)

This season requires the planter to focus on leading, teaching, guiding, and growing the planting team both in size and spiritual depth. No new church needs to be encumbered with heavy systems and structures. However, *simple* organization needs to be in place to enable others to multiply themselves and mentor others in the faith. A Wesleyan model of church planting intentionally incorporates small groups for mentoring and multiplication. Spiritual growth and leadership development are the building blocks of a healthy faith community.

## SOME QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER DURING THIS SEASON:

- What process do we have to help people discover and release their God-given gifts for ministry?
- How do we encourage people to grow and multiply themselves and their small groups?
- How do we create new faith communities that bring hope to our world?
- How will we make disciples who, in turn, make disciples?

## SCRIPTURES FOR DISCIPLING: HOW MUCH OF DISCIPLING IS TAUGHT AND CAUGHT?

- **John 3** (Jesus and Nicodemus; teaching about eternal life and new birth; life-long learning)
- **Mark 9:14-50** (healing/prayer: little one with the spirit disciples could not cast out; teachable moments about greatness in kingdom of God; sanctification)
- **Deuteronomy 4:5-14 & 11:18-25** (teach God's word to all of Israel)
- **Acts 13:13-53** (Saul and Barnabas teach in Antioch of Pisidia)
- **Matthew 5-7** (Sermon on the Mount [on the Plain in Luke 6] - principles for living)



## WORSHIPING: PUBLIC LAUNCH AND CONGREGATIONAL GROWTH

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*But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth. (John 4:23-25 NRSV)*

We were created to be in relationship with God and one another. As human beings we have worship embedded in our very nature. One of God's great commandments to Israel set the tone for how we express that deep-seated love and worship of God: "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (Deuteronomy 6:5 NRSV). How we begin a church's public expression of worship requires careful planning and timing (not too soon and not too late). Worship styles vary greatly among cultural contexts, areas of the country, and age groups. Let the mission field guide your decision-making. Seek to meet their needs and interests. Experiment to see what will work in your setting. Worship is central to the church's launch and to life itself!

### **SOME QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER DURING THIS SEASON:**

- What does worship mean to us?
- When and how do we start worshipping together as a new church?
- When (if ever) does worship become a public weekly experience?
- How will we help people learn worship as "lifestyle" and not as Sunday event?

### **SCRIPTURES FOR WORSHIPING: WHAT DOES RELEVANT, SPIRIT-FUELED WORSHIP LOOK LIKE IN OUR CONTEXT?**

- **John 4** ("Worship in spirit and in truth"; woman at the well)
- **Acts 2** (temple courts and house to house; both public and private worship)
- **Acts 17** (Paul notices all the worship options and "unknown god" and uses that as an entry to preaching)
- **2 Chronicles 34** (Josiah consults the Law and prophets and restores Covenant)
- **Luke 2:41-52** (Jesus at age twelve; compelled to be in worship and study)



## **MATURING: GROWING PEOPLE WHILE DEVELOPING HEALTHY SYSTEMS FOR MISSION AND MINISTRY**

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*The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.*  
(Ephesians 4:11-14 NRSV)

As a congregation continues to develop and grow, it becomes viable, sustainable, and poised for multiplication. Growing people and developing healthy systems (leadership development, financial sustainability, structure, and discipleship) will help the church grow spiritually, multiply its mission and ministries, and prepare itself for inevitable leadership transitions. Building a fruitful and multiplying church requires recognizing and honoring each person's God-given gifts, especially those that complement the planter's gifts. Recognizing your dependence on God, maintaining a consistent corporate life of spiritual discipline, and faithfully exercising the gifts of the Holy Spirit mean you will take big risks for Christ and experience personal and corporate growth and maturity.

### **SOME QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER DURING THIS SEASON:**

- What needs to happen next to grow people as servants?
- What systems do we need for sustainability?
- How are we developing leaders who “equip the saints” rather than doing ministry on their own?

## SCRIPTURES FOR MATURING: WHAT LESSONS ABOUT GIVING MINISTRY AWAY CAN WE LEARN FROM SCRIPTURE?

- **Acts 5:17-42** (Gamaliel urges Jerusalem Council to leave the believers alone and see what happens)
- **Acts 6:1-7** (Stephen and others distribute food to widows so apostles can keep preaching the gospel)
- **Acts 15:1-35** (Jerusalem Council offers guidelines for Gentile believers)
- **Exodus 18** (Jethro observes Moses and advises him)
- **Romans 12** (be transformed by the Spirit and grow in faith together)
- **Corinthians 2:6** (maturing breeds wisdom)
- **Ephesians 4:13** (our goal is becoming like Christ in all ways)
- **Colossians 4:12** (prayer is crucial for maturing faith)
- **Hebrews 5:14** (training oneself and others to distinguish between good and evil)
- **James 1:4** (the place of perseverance in the journey of faith and maturity)



## MULTIPLYING: REPRODUCTION THAT RESULTS IN OTHER NEW PLACES FOR NEW PEOPLE

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*He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. (2 Corinthians 9:10-11 NRSV)*

Healthy organisms reproduce and multiply and so do healthy churches! Healthy churches multiply disciples, leaders, ministries, and congregations. Reproduction begins from day one and manifests itself throughout the various aspects and stages of church life. With multiplication in the DNA of a new church, reproduction happens more naturally. The gospel of

Christ mandates churches to be healthy, grow in ministry and mission, reach new people for Christ, and reproduce. Through multiplication we build new bridges to the culture around us, introduce more people to Christ, and continue in ministry in fresh and vital ways.

### **SOME QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER DURING THIS SEASON:**

- How do we reproduce to build God's reign in vision-replicating, resource-honoring ways?
- What can we do to ensure that multiplication remains in our church's DNA?
- Why do we need to multiply healthy ministry?

### **SCRIPTURES FOR MULTIPLYING: WHAT'S SO IMPORTANT ABOUT MULTIPLYING AND WHAT HAPPENS IF WE DON'T?**

- **John 6:1-14** (Jesus feeds five thousand)
- **Matthew 25:14-30** (Parable of Talents)
- **Matthew 13; Mark 4:1-9; Luke 8:4-8** (Parable of the Sower)
- **Deuteronomy 6:1-3** (faithfully observe the law and you will multiply)