

Church Planting Insights from Pastor Rick Ferguson of Riverside Baptist Church in Denver

Rick was tragically killed in a car accident in 2002, but his legacy and heart for the Kingdom are alive and well. Pastor Rick Ferguson was one of the Southern Baptists' leading pastors. Here are a few of his thoughts:

SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

After a spiritual awakening there must be some immediate adjustments. There had to be some adjustments in my heart, particularly in regard to the Great Commission.

1) The direction of the Great Commission is to go, not to come.

We had reversed the Great Commission. Almost all of the strategy and programs we had were focused on bringing people to the church rather than taking the church to the people. Church growth philosophy says, "Ya'll come". The result has been a shift from a ministry to marketing emphasis in the church.

2) The destination of the Great Commission is global, not local.

We are to take the gospel to every nation. In Matthew, the Greek word "ethne" is used for nation. That is where we get the English word "ethnic". Inherent within the concept of global evangelism is the need for cross-cultural evangelism and ministry. You cannot be globally evangelistic without being cross-cultural. Most of our evangelism strategies were intentionally homogenous and not cross-cultural.

By the year 2050 Caucasians will no longer be the majority dominant population. Anglo population is stagnant in America today while Hispanic, African American, and Asian populations are growing at double-digit rates. The whole face of America is going to change in the next fifty years. Multiculturalism is here to stay.

3) The design of the Great Commission is to produce disciples, not merely decisions.

I evaluated our evangelism strategies and discovered we were heavily focused on getting decisions, not on making mature, complete, obedient disciples. Real discipleship cannot happen apart from thriving, dynamic, energetic, spirit-filled, growing congregations and churches. The most effective way to produce disciples is to establish congregations in the location, language and lifestyle of the peoples that we are trying to reach.

Before Pastor Rick Ferguson's untimely death last summer he had addressed leaders about churches planting churches.

THREE ADJUSTMENTS

Three adjustments that we made almost immediately in our philosophy of ministry:

1) We felt that God was telling us we need to begin to think Kingdom growth not just church growth.

We talk a lot about reaching our cities with the gospel of Christ, but often what we really mean is building up our own church and expanding our own ministries and developing our own programs. Kingdom growth philosophy says, "We'll come to you!" A church growth approach says, "Come help us build our church, increase our programs, grow our offerings,

build more buildings." Kingdom growth says, "We are not here for ourselves. We will give ourselves away and we will come to you and connect with you at your felt point of need that we might have an opportunity, a bridge to cross, that we might preach the gospel and share the gospel of Christ." Church growth philosophy spins mainly on ourselves. Kingdom growth philosophy looks at giving ourselves away.

2) We felt that God was telling us to think meta-church not mega-church.

The word 'mega' means large. The word 'meta' means change. It is a prefix to words we use every day such as metamorphosis, metaphysical, and the Greek word 'metanoia' which we translate 'repentance'. A change of heart, mind, and disposition toward God, self, and sin. A meta-church does not speak of the size of the church but of the change. Churches changing their minds about organization so that they are free from size restraints. A meta-church refuses to limit its size or ministry to a single campus, a single building, or a single location. It is made up of multiple campuses, multiple congregations, multiple cells, and multiple satellites. We saw ourselves as a hub church that would serve as an equipping, discipling, training center from which we could raise up pastors, leaders, and church planters and plant churches that could cross the boundaries which our central, hub church could never cross.

3) We began to think catalytically not just bureaucratically.

If we were going to be committed to planting churches it would require for us to go through open doors as God would open them. I believe that Christ is still the one who opens doors that no man can close and closes doors that no man can open. With our leadership, we agreed that if God opened a door to start a congregation, we would go through that door whether we had all the resources in line or not and we had to act quickly, spontaneously, and catalytically. We discovered that we had to streamline our organization and our decision making processes. Many ministries spend all of their time, energy, and people resources simply maintaining their machinery and never taking the machinery out into the fields to gather the harvest. If you visited our church today, you would find a very streamlined organization without a lot of committees that meet monthly and do nothing. When it comes to establishing congregations, we have to be intentional about it and we have to be able to act as the Holy Spirit of God leads.

How do you know when God is opening a door to start a church? Here are the two things we look for: a viable location and a visionary leader. We found you can do without the first one because there are lost people everywhere and there is a need for a church just about any place in America. We found that a visionary leader, without any income or resources, can start a church out of rock and build it.