

Starting a New Church

DVD Included



Morning Worship

*How to
Plant a
High-Impact
Church*



"We've shed a lot of blood from those who wanted something that would appeal more to church people," he says. "Our most valuable leadership mandate is that we can't be all things to all people. Even good friends sometimes want us to do ministry another way, but we can't do it all—our vision and narrow target drives everything."

Part of Real Life's unique appeal comes from its ability to love people as they are and to speak in an authentic way. "People are dying to find truth and significance," Paul says. Paul's wife, Tamara, who grew up in an unchurched home, leads worship in a transparent way. Paul's preaching regularly conveys that Real Life is a safe place to be yourself, to ask questions about God, and not to feel judged by others. Small groups—the main emphasis at Real Life—are structured in a way that people don't have to pretend to be something they're not. "We show people without manipulation that God is bigger than they are," says Paul, "and the momentum continues to build."

Create Fresh Momentum

Leaders not only must understand momentum but also should know how to create it. Heb. 11 provides a vivid illustration of how to produce faith-building momentum: you center on marvelous things that God has done and will do. Similarly, a Christian can't read the Book of Acts without being caught up in the momentum of something great happening in the Church.

The leader is the person able to focus the congregation on God and what He wants to accomplish in their midst. As a momentum-producing leader, you have to be more like a thermostat than a thermometer. A thermometer simply measures, but a thermostat sets the climate. A church leader functions as a thermostat by:

- Casting a vision of faith
- Focusing people on God
- Sharing testimonies of what God is doing through changed lives
- Helping people live in positive expectation of future events planned for their church
- Being enthusiastic about everything God has done to date
- Believing God for the impossible in the future

As a leader, be optimistic. Express enthusiasm. Plant dreams in the spirit of your congregation. Spark fires in their hearts. Lead into further positive experiences by putting "wins" under their belts. As you equip people for ministry along the way, you will build momentum. As Elmer Towns says, "When they buy into your dream, they buy into your leadership."

New churches come in all sizes, shapes, and flavors. Most start in a school, community building, or another congregation's facility. Others have more unusual launch points: Carson Valley Christian Center, Minden, Nevada, started in a casino, and Memorial Baptist Church in Harlem, New York City, began in a funeral parlor.¹ Many well-known congregations likewise had unusual starts. Jerry Falwell began Thomas Road Baptist Church in a former industrial building, the Donald Duck Bottling Company. T. D. Jakes began the Potter's House in a storefront. Robert Schuller began the Crystal Cathedral in an outdoor drive-in theater.

Your location can help or hurt you, but it cannot control whether you have momentum. That's what Terry Smith learned at The Life Christian Church, a nondenominational church in West Orange, New Jersey, a suburb of New York City. "Initially, we were meeting in the basement of a church and were as insignificant a church in the eyes of the community as you could imagine," he says. That was back in 1991.

Terry kept painting the story of a preferred future. He pointed them to a big God who wants to transform lives through Jesus Christ. He focused on what God would do through the congregation. He pointed people beyond where they were. He built an expectation for God to show up. He led the church to be seeker-friendly, culturally relevant, and intentional in expanding their influence, from community service days to projects that would support the emergency medical services, fire department, and police department.

"Nothing has been easy," says Terry. "We feel we're digging a work out of granite, but I've sensed a need to stay here and show the community a church that can thrive and grow."

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When people were reached and lives transformed, Terry proclaimed their stories. "Look at this life God has changed," he would say. Nothing is more powerful in building people's faith than a constant flow of changed-life testimonies or answered prayer.

Whenever a setback occurred, Terry didn't fixate on the church's limitations. He kept talking about what God was going to do.

A significant turning point happened when the church wanted to buy a former bowling alley and convert it into a church facility. The proposed zoning change brought out all kinds of community opposition.

"This became the opportunity for the community to get to know us," Terry says. As church leaders built relationships with the community, many local politicians came over to the church's side. "Later we gained credit for revitalizing this section of the community. One key community leader who strongly opposed us said six months later, 'You guys are the best thing that has happened to this section of town.' All of this gave us a very positive public image."

"Today we have become a significant influence in our community of 50,000," says Terry. "Now community leaders look to us for leadership in moral and civic issues."

In 2002 the church again needed to relocate due to its growth. This time instead of opposition, the mayor and others went to bat for the church, encouraging developers to work with the church. "One of the most exciting things has been to watch the church's influence grow in the community," Terry says.

New Waves of Momentum

Steve Sjogren (mentioned in chapter 10) grew Vineyard Community Church in Cincinnati from a group in 1983 that met in his living room at home to a congregation with a week-end attendance of more than 6,000 today. It's also a church committed to launching other churches, and so Steve is no longer the senior pastor but is known as the launching pastor.

Based on his experience in Cincinnati and in mentoring church planters, he says the role of most church planters is to be a "good gatherer."

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Until your attendance draws more than 400 to 500 people weekly, the pastor has to focus on gathering people, according to Steve. You have to be all-consumed with reaching people from early in the morning until late at night. The majority of your waking moments must go to thinking, doing, and asking, "How do we gather people?" You have to keep personally reaching out in this way until you assemble 400 to 500 people.

Once you have gathered 400 to 500 relationally connected people who are enthusiastic and excited for Jesus, they will spark the outreach and the momentum to bring in