

# Church planting: most effective evangelism?



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If the apostle Paul were to come to Ontario to engage in evangelism, what would he do? Would he preach at Yonge & Bloor? Would he conduct city-wide crusades? Would he set up shop to produce the latest line of tents, then practice friendship evangelism? Would he begin a new non-denomination? Would he engage in church-planting given the current climate of our culture?

In recent years evangelistic church-planting has been touted as the most effective means of evangelism under heaven! Is it true?

Haven't many of us been impressed by the evangelistic impact of para-church ministries? They are reaching: students, street people, businessmen, prisoners, athletes, and the list goes on! Many of us support these ministries because of their evangelistic impact.

Para-church ministries function differently than churches. They are highly focused, and are usually conceived in order to reach a specific segment of society. They design their strategies and recruit workers gifted for their ministry focus. The result may be compared to a "commando unit". They travel light, move quickly and adapt readily to changing circumstances.

The church by nature has a wider range of priorities. Its call includes not only evangelism, but also discipling, worship, pastoral care, and much more. Its constituents are diverse in age, race, sex, background, culture, education, etc. The church provides discipling and direction to its members from the cradle to the grave. Evangelistic impact can easily be lost as other primary priorities are pursued.

However, para-church groups have liabilities too. Workers who struggle must leave. People who don't fit the focus group can't be adequately ministered to. Sometimes the para-church ministry develops such an intense loyalty to itself and its manner of ministry that it becomes like a new denomination. In such cases its converts and members have difficulty in relating to churches, even though they claim to be an

"arm of the church."

Paul and his co-workers operated like a "commando group". They travelled light, adapted easily, and ... started churches!

Both kinds of ministries are needed. Churches provide long-term bases of influence in a community. They give priority to long-term discipleship, worship, evangelism, and they carry the truth of God to every slice of the community's life. They seek to apply His will and way to everything they see. The result equals the salt and light of which Jesus spoke.

Evangelistically oriented para-church groups usually devote most of their time to evangelism. Churches don't and shouldn't. But, any church that devotes 15-20% of its energy to the kind of evangelism that incorporates new converts directly into its life will be dynamic!

The genius of the church is its diverse calling. None of its priorities may be ignored without imperiling the others. It is the responsibility of its leaders to ensure that a proper and effective ministry is occurring on all fronts. Vision Ontario exists to help and encourage the leaders of our congregations in achieving that effective balance. Besides, it is our goal to see new outreach oriented churches raised up.

Presently twenty-seven men are involved in our Training in Planting program. They long to see the cause of Christ advanced. We are helping them to think ahead. What should their role be in the planting process? How should this new church function? Where? Who will help? How will we reach this community? How will we maintain our evangelistic edge? These questions require careful thought, prayer, the input of friends, and finally, bold action.

It is our prayer and passion to see congregations started that will have an impact on God-ignoring communities.

There is a tremendous need for the Gospel in our large cities. In terms of church-planting, Toronto is the neediest city in Canada outside of Quebec. Presently four of our trainees are

Gord  
Martin

living and working in Mississauga. Is the Holy Spirit pointing us toward increased activity there? We are working, praying and anticipating His confirmation in days to come.

