

Church Planting Protocol

“Protocol” may be defined as “the established ceremonial forms in official dealings,” but it is also used of the order of things - what begins and what comes next. It is in that sense that I use the word in connection with church planting. What follows is an account of the five steps we followed to plant a church in Three Forks, Montana.

- **Assessing the need**
- **Planning the birth**
- **Birthing the church**
- **Organizing the church**
- **Letting go**

This was our protocol. If it can be of help to you in your ministry, we are gratified.

Assessing the Need

How does one know that a community needs a new church? That’s a difficult issue to grapple with unless you see a community that has no church. Even out here in the “wilds” of Montana, most communities have a church of some kind. Where and when should we plant another? To me, it is the height of arrogance to say “I’m going to plant a church in _____.” Jesus said, “I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail.” Giving birth to a new church means following God’s lead, not my wants. Where is God leading me to further His kingdom, not where would I like to live so I think I’ll plant a church there. God is going to plant His church in the place of His will in His time, and He may choose to use you! God has used me to plant two churches. In both cases it wasn’t something I wanted to do; it was more, “I being in the way, God used me.”

How do we assess the need? We can survey the community to which we feel God is leading us, but I struggle with that because it so easy for me to walk in the flesh using such a tool. I can take from that survey what I want it to say. It is a tool that can and has been used to determine a need, but I would be very cautious with it.¹ So how does one know God’s leading? I feel people are the best way to see where God is leading. God uses people to intersect our lives and to open doors for ministry. Both churches I planted grew from Bible studies. When people meeting together informally catch a vision for forming a church, it is obvious that God is at work and a door is being opened. Possibly, the best mindset is “God is leading me to start a Bible study; let’s see if He builds a church.”

Before we became involved in establishing a Bible church in Three Forks, I was Montana Field Director for Northwest Independent Church Extension and also associate pastor at Manhattan Bible Church. At Manhattan Bible, I was in charge of small groups and we had a Bible study group in Three Forks. These were people who attended church outside their community, either at Manhattan Bible, ten miles away, or Grace Bible in Bozeman, thirty plus miles away. This group soon developed a vision for a Bible church in their own community. I did not cast this vision; it came from the group. There were churches in Three Forks, but some thirty families left the community to attend other churches because they needed a church where the Bible was taught and God was the center. Evidently, they did not feel that was true in any of the already existing churches in the community. So these people expressed to me a need and a vision for such a church in Three Forks. I took their vision to the church boards at Manhattan and Grace. Those men also caught the vision and wanted to be a part of a new church plant, being willing to invest, not dollars, but something far more precious, people!

It was not our original intention to plant a church in Three Forks. God just opened the door and we kind of fell through it. We went into this project with much fear and prayer, and yet a certain excitement about what God was doing. Could we really plant a church in this community? God was certainly leading that way.

¹ For such a tool see “Community Evaluation,” published by Northwest Independent Church Extension. Available for download at www.NICEChurchPlanters.org

Planning the Birth

1. The Organizational Meeting:

We began by sending letters to all the people living in Three Forks but attending either Grace Bible Church or Manhattan Bible Church. This letter simply stated our intent to have a meeting in January 2006 about possibly forming a Bible Church in Three Forks. A couple dozen people attended. We handed out an information packet with four documents.²

Who are the Millers?

This was the story of Kathy and me: a brief history of our lives, our testimony, and our **Philosophy of Ministry**. I thought it very important that people know our heart and philosophy of ministry. This document also provided a forum for questions people might have about our expectations for the church plant.

Six Things You Need To Know About a Church Plant

It is important that people understand the positives and negatives of a new church. In planting a church, you don't have a "full fledged up and running" church on day one. Just like birthing a child, it takes time for it to come to full term, and then it takes time for that youngster to grow up. A church plant is a church in process.

It is very important at this organizational meeting to establish where you are doctrinally. We were a church plant from already existing churches of like-mind; therefore, we just took their doctrinal position. If I were having this meeting with people who were interested in starting a church but we had no other connection, I would have my personal doctrinal statement available to them and be completely up front that this is where I'm coming from. It would be foolish to proceed without doctrinal agreement.³

Vision for this Church Plant

The vision statement was simply answers to the obvious questions people would have about beginning a new church; but in answering these questions, we also wanted to impart our vision for what could be and how we would birth this church.

Response Form

The fourth vision question, "*When will this church begin to meet?*" and our response, "*This will depend on the feedback we receive,*" led to the Response Form. This form was important because we wanted people to pray about starting a new church and then respond to us if they were truly interested. This was not a step to be taken lightly. Many of these folks were deeply involved in the parent churches. One of the main things that surfaced in that meeting was that in order to really reach a community you need to be a part of a functioning church in that community. I think people caught that vision.

After going over this information we had an interesting question and answer session. There were quite a few questions, some we anticipated and some surprised us. We ended with refreshments and fellowship. Everyone left with the information packets, and we went home to wait for the response forms. They didn't come! A few trickled in, but we found out very quickly that people in southwest Montana do not do forms. The lack of response made me think there wasn't any interest. That was incorrect!

2. The Strategy Meeting

We formed an "advisory board" of men from Grace Bible, Manhattan Bible, and the Three Forks

² See Appendix A, Page 10, 11: Organizational Meeting Documents

³ The complete doctrinal statement of Northwest Independent Church Extension can be found at www.NICEChurchPlanters.org – click on “about us.”

Bible study, all of whom attended the organizational meeting in January. We met to discuss if we should go forward or not. Our conclusion was that we really wouldn't know unless we tried. So, we scheduled a Sunday night service for the first Sunday of March. We also developed a strategy for the upcoming church plant. What we anticipated was three phases, almost like a pregnancy with trimesters. After each phase, we would re-evaluate our progress and if this project would continue.

The first phase was "Sunday Night Fellowship." We began on Sunday nights because our core people were already involved in one of the mother churches. We didn't want them to have to make a transition immediately. Though living in the same small town, many of these people didn't know one another. Because Grace Bible is a large church, many of the people from Three Forks attending there didn't know one another either. We needed to bring these people together as a new body, to give them time to meld.

The second phase would be to begin Sunday morning services. The purpose of going to Sunday mornings would be to see if we had the commitment for a new church.

Phase three would begin when leaders were in place and the church was ready to call a pastor.

3. Finding a Place to Meet

Where would we meet? This was the first concern people had about starting a new church, but I never saw this as an obstacle. I was confident that the Lord would provide a place once we decided to proceed. I met with our Three Forks Bible Study Group and "sicked 'em" on the task of looking for options. We soon had the high school lined up for our beginning. We were able to get a liability insurance rider through Manhattan Bible's policy so that we could use the school, which required a million dollar liability coverage. The superintendent of the school was so very gracious, gave me a tour of the school, and went out of his way to accommodate us. Such incidents reinforced our sense that God was going to plant a Bible church in Three Forks, and that He was going to use us!

4. Planning the First Service

Every worship service is important, but the first one is especially so. The old adage, "You never get a second chance to make a first impression," is true for that first service as well. If it is disorganized and unprepared, that sets the tone for the future of the ministry. Plan that service well. In a new church plant, conditions are often less than ideal. That means you may not have the luxury of a good speaker system, power point, or even a podium. You probably won't have hymnals and perhaps not even a piano. Plan according to what you do have, not what you don't. In our case, to emphasize the family aspect of our new church, we wanted it informal yet to be a time of worship as a family.

First, consider the music. What kind and who will play it? Since we had no piano or keyboard, we lined up some folks who played guitars and I put them in charge of the music. The next issue is how will everyone see the words to the songs? We had no power point projector, not even an overhead. We prepared a "worship folder," that included the words to the songs and an outline of the message. At first, Grace Bible printed this for us; later, we printed it on our home computer.

What about the message? I felt that if we were starting a new church why not study the book of Acts and see where it all began? So my message was an introduction to Acts. That doesn't sound very dynamic for a first service, but it worked well! You also have to think through exactly how that service is going to function, beginning to end. Who is going to set up chairs? Who will take them down? Who will clean up? Who is responsible to turn off the lights and lock up? Who is going to take the offering? Who handles the money? All of these details need to be thought through and planned.

Things you can do ahead of time include advertising in the local newspaper or on the radio, sending flyers in the mail, and placing posters in store windows. We did none of these. We had no budget for

such things. Our first meeting was advertised only by word of mouth. We made a sign that directed people to our place of meeting when they arrived at the school. Other than that, we left it in the Lord's hands.

Birthing the Church

The First Service:

We planned for our first meeting in the school library. From the response forms, I was expecting around a dozen people. You can imagine my surprise when sixty came through the door! So much for my well-laid plans! We quickly moved the service into the cafeteria. We didn't have enough worship folders, but people were gracious and glad to share with one another.

Our first service went something like this...I welcomed everyone to the very first service of Sunday Night Fellowship and then turned the service over to our musicians. We sang "All Hail the Power of Jesus Name" followed by "And Can it Be." I then preached a message that was an introduction to the book of Acts and the beginnings of the Church. We finished up with "As the Deer" and "Create in me a Clean Heart," again accompanied by guitar. We didn't take an offering. We didn't want the gathering of funds to be a distraction. We did have an offering box available to any who wanted to help with our expenses. We continue that practice still. After the service, we had a light meal available and people stayed quite a while and visited. All in all, it was a very encouraging evening.

Phase One — Sunday Night Fellowship

Our goal was a self-sustaining Bible church. Our first phase was meeting Sunday nights. Thus, we called this stage "Sunday Night Fellowship." This we considered the early gestational stage. It was a time to see if people were interested in a Bible church and a time for people to get to know one another. We met at the public school for a month. A problem was that Sunday nights were open gym nights. Although our service was planned to be over before the open gym began, kids always showed up early and were wandering through the service to the gym. We also wanted a place that people would identify as ours. Meeting at the school left the impression that we weren't permanent. Again, people went to work scouting for a place to meet; and after much prayer and footwork, the Lord provided the Ruby Theatre to rent for a much discounted price. So the first Sunday in April 2006, we began meeting at the Ruby.

We continued in the Ruby and the church was going well and growing. It became evident that we needed to go to Sunday morning services to see if we really had a church. We polled the congregation to see if they felt the same way and the response was overwhelmingly positive. The Advisory Board decided to begin Sunday morning services and see where God would lead us.

The Advisory Board made a letter available to those attending our Sunday night services.⁴ So with fear and trepidation we proceeded to phase two, Sunday mornings.

Phase Two—Sunday Morning Fellowship

The purpose of phase two was to establish our core group. Sunday night really didn't do that since many were still involved in one of the parent churches on Sunday morning. So on June 18, 2006, we went from Sunday Night Fellowship to Sunday Morning Fellowship. We still didn't want to call this phase a "church" -- we didn't know if we really had a church. On that first Sunday, we had 34 people. Our attendance dropped by 50%!

Our goal never was numbers. The goal was to establish a Bible Church, not attract a big crowd. We were happy with the ones who felt the need to be a part of this exciting new work. We were also supportive of those who felt they needed to stay in one of the parent churches and serve there. Now came the scary chore of figuring out if we really had a church or not. Summer would seem to be the absolute worst time to evaluate a church plant. But the Lord proved otherwise and the church continued to grow during that summer. Before long, attendance was back up in the 50 to 60 range. The problem we had (and still have to some degree) is the phenomena I call "permanent visitors." Attendance was steady, but many people that were in and out. A core was emerging, however. I sent a report to the Advisory Board sharing both my hope to begin Phase three in the fall and my

plans for leadership development.⁵

⁴ See Appendix B, Page 12: Letter from Advisory Board

⁵ See Appendix C: Page 14: Report to Advisory Board

In August, I met with the men I considered “emerging leaders” and we considered the qualifications for leaders and if they were willing to be servant leaders. They were hesitant yet willing to learn. In September, as we prepared for phase three, we had the final meeting of the Advisory Board and they accepted and commended these men as leaders of Three Forks Bible Church. So with the summer behind us, we looked to phase three, becoming Three Forks Bible Church.

Phase Three

The purpose of phase three was to organize the church, solidify its leaders, call a pastor, and then put together a constitution. This would be the final “trimester” of the gestational period for the church plant. By phase three, we no longer wondered if the church was going to go or not. It seemed like it had a head of steam and certainly God was at work and we were making disciples. We felt the Lord was leading us to stay here and pastor this new work, so we asked the church to consider this and take the very first vote of the new Bible Church. We had them vote by families, every family discussing their vote. We had a unanimous call.

We began phase three with a community mailing in October.⁶ We had it printed and then had a work night to seal each piece and put on postage. It was a big undertaking but a good time of working together. The total cost of printing and mailing was \$1,000. Several skeptics thought this was a waste of time and money because people don’t read bulk mail. That is true to an extent, but the difference was this was about people in our own community. I thought this would be a good way to let the community know we are here and functioning. Also, there just might be people out there who would really like to be a part of a new Bible teaching church. As it turned out, I was right! After the mailing, we had a flood of people through the doors to “check us out!” Some of them stayed and some didn’t, but the church grew and the community knew we were here to stay!

On Sunday evening, November 19, 2006, we had a “Send-off Service” with guests from Grace and Manhattan Bible Churches. The purpose of this service was for the parent churches to praise the Lord with us as we were now officially an independent Bible Church. And yet we weren’t! We had several goals yet to accomplish. In January, 2007, I sent an update to our prayer partners asking them to pray about our leadership, our meeting place, and the variety of people who were attending.⁷

Phase Three wouldn’t be completed until we had our leaders firmly leading and our constitution done, which would be in January 2008.

Organizing the Church

1. The Church Plant Mindset:

The church has been birthed but is it really a church? In reality, it’s a church plant still maturing into an established church. I think it is very important early in the project to be sure that people understand that this is a church plant, not an established church. (See Appendix A: *Six Things you need to know about a Church Plant.*) Once the Church is birthed, it still isn’t “grown.” It needs time to develop and mature. The new leaders need to learn to lead; programs need to be evaluated; finances need to be managed; and the government wants to know who you are. All of these things come in good time. Trying to make them happen all at once won’t work. Be patient and keep your people patient.

At Three Forks, people were always trying to get ahead of where we were. We would hear things like, “When will we start Sunday School?” Well, we can’t start Sunday school until we have membership in place, and we don’t have membership yet because we don’t have our constitution written yet, and we don’t have that in place because we are a church plant! Planting a church is building upon a good foundation one detail at a time. As long as they understand this is a church plant and it’s primitive now but it is going to grow and mature and will meet the needs of the body, people are surprisingly patient. They just need to see that there actually is a plan in place and progress is being made.

⁶ See Appendix F: Page 16: Community Mailing

⁷ See Appendix G: Page 20, Prayer Partner Update

2. Leaders:

We had the luxury of having an Advisory Board made up of godly men from the parent churches and from our own group. The Advisory Board took us through phase two and handed over leadership responsibilities to our emerging leaders. It is important to identify potential leaders and get to know them. Not everyone who has a servant's heart is biblically qualified to serve as a leader in the Lord's Church. Even those who are qualified may not have the emotional makeup to lead the church. One of the tasks of leadership is conflict resolution. Men not willing to face conflicts usually hurt the church rather than help her, so we must prayerfully consider those men whom God would have lead His Church. The greatest potential for conflict and division comes from the leadership dynamic, not from the ranks of the congregation. Sometimes, you have few men to choose from. In some cases, you may not have any. When that is the case, you will have to carry the load until you can train men to lead. If you have none willing to be trained, you don't have a foundation for a church.

We use the term "Leadership Team" because I have found that using the term "Board" has negative effects. Men tend to govern rather than serve. That's why you may want to begin with a Steering Committee until your constitution is completed and you have men ready to serve as elders or deacons. It takes time to develop good leaders. You, as the founding pastor, have to set the example of a servant leader and develop trust with your men so that you can be transparent with one another and lead with unity. You may not always have oneness of mind as you make decisions, but you should be able to resolve issues without hurt feelings.

In our case, we had good men willing to serve yet reluctant to step up. With time, they got over their hesitations and have become good leaders. We as a group of leaders are still a work in progress, but I wouldn't have it any other way. As the church progresses, the church planter has to turn more and more responsibility over to these men. Be careful in expressing your opinions as they may be seen as decisions. (A mistake I made.) Transition isn't easy and men have egos and tempers. Walk carefully and in the Spirit. If you will determine to always act nobly, your men will usually follow suit.

As 2007 progressed, the men began to gel as a group and we found a comfort zone for leading and working together. One of our first big tasks was our By-Laws, which helped us deal with conflicts in opinions and see how we could find compromises and talk through what was best for the church. Here is part of an update in the summer of 2007.

Our leaders are coming along slow but sure. Right now, we are finishing up making the final draft of our By-Laws. Once this is done, we will be looking toward a formal membership. Please pray as we head toward accomplishing these goals. The leadership team is also reading through the book, "Disciplines of a Godly Man" by Kent Hughes. Pray with us that this will be a profitable endeavor.

As it turned out, those By-Laws took a lot longer than we had anticipated, but we learned how to work with one another along the way.

3. Programs

In the early Church, Acts 2:46, 47, things were pretty simple. They met for worship, instruction, fellowship, and communion. It appears their only "program" was to meet the needs of the new believers by combining their assets (2:44). With time, more was needed; and so by chapter 6, we see the need to appoint the seven over the ministry of caring for widows. What kind of programs does a church need? The needs of the body will tell you. The gifting of the body will determine if you can meet the needs or not. There may be a great need to feed the hungry of your community; but a program won't feed them, people will. A program is only a tool you can use to meet a need. We determined we didn't want any programs until there was a clearly defined need. We wanted our church to function within the same parameters of the early church with worship, instruction, fellowship, and partaking of the Lord's Supper together.

Our first need was that of connecting and instructing our teens. We were blessed with a great group of teenagers that needed be together and grow together. Right after we went to Sunday mornings, we organized a teen fellowship led by a young couple. They met in different homes for lunch and a

Bible study time following our Sunday service. The group became too large to host in homes after awhile, so now they meet together after our service. In the summer, they have various social functions (Like "bridge jumping" -- I don't even want to know!).

As other needs arose, we instituted programs to meet them. The men on the leadership team wanted to grow closer together so we agreed to meet once a month to pray for our church and to discuss the book "Disciplines of a Godly Man" by Kent Hughes. As we met, we expanded that to any of the men who wanted to meet with us. We also instituted women's Bible studies. We had a longstanding church Bible study, but new people coming into the church would not attend. If we started small group bible studies, however, they were all enthused! We found we could better meet the need for spiritual growth and fellowship of the believers by dropping the church Bible study and creating various small groups. This also allowed me to expand the ministry of my leaders. I paired them up and put each set in charge of a small group.

We also needed to disciple the younger children, so I began a teaching time for the children during the service. This will give way to a full fledged Sunday school once we have membership in place and people to teach. We are very adamant that you must be a member of our church to teach because we have a clear testimony of salvation; we have agreement with our doctrinal position; and we have a layer of protection from predators, as most aren't willing to go through an official process to be a part of a children's ministry. If all goes as planned, we will have a Sunday school up and running this spring (2008).

If there are other needs, we may implement other programs. I believe it a mistake to implement a program just to have something that might attract new people. Programs should be "need driven." Choose carefully; they are easier to get started than to keep going. Once you have them, it's hard to get rid of them.

4. Missions:

The one program that I think is essential in any church is missions. Should a church that doesn't fully support its pastor support missions? My answer is unequivocally yes! If our mandate is to reach the world with the message of Jesus Christ, then a missions program is essential to do that. Early on, we wanted our people to have a bigger view of their Christianity than just our town. We wanted to be a mission-oriented church. What about the finances? Aren't you really robbing the church planter who may be working a secular job in order to plant the church? Yes, but it's worth it. What you need is a balance. As leaders, we understood that missions were providing vision to reach the lost and funds to support those called to various ministries. We felt the best way to do that was to set up a missions policy that set a percentage of our income that would go to missions.⁸

This policy has served us well. A young couple who attended our church from the first was looking toward serving on the mission field with New Tribes Mission. We were excited about that and wanted to be part of that ministry. We began supporting them monthly as a church in January of 2007. We really couldn't do that before then, as we didn't have our leaders in place to make that kind of decision. We continue to be part of their ministry. As God has blessed us, we can in turn bless them.

5. Finances:

We didn't want money to get in the way of our message. People seem to think that churches are all about raising money. Maybe that label is rightly deserved. We sought to avoid that by not taking an offering. We have an offering box available for any who wish to support the ministry of the church. It is completely free will and we don't want people to feel that they need to give. In fact, we rarely even announce that this is available. Logic would tell us that this would hurt the giving; but in reality, the giving has outpaced the spending by wide margins. We wanted God's ministry to be supported by God's people who had a heart to give. That has happened.

When the church begins, you have zero funds. Usually, the church planter has to fund the beginnings out of his own pocket. For that reason we kept our expenses low when we began. I did

⁸ See Appendix G, Page 15: Missions Policy

not take a salary for the first seven months. I worked part time at a grocery store and had missionary support through NICE. I wanted the church to be able to get some funds ahead to work with before they took on paying a pastor. I did expect them to cover my travel expenses. I expected to work an outside job for a year or more but the church grew so quickly that they were able to pay my salary. What do you pay a pastor? We researched what pastors in this size church and in this area were paid and came up with a goal of what we felt was a fair wage for a pastor. As finances increased, the church would review the pastor's salary and seek to meet the goal.

On day one, the church plant had no funds. After the first service, funds were available. How do you handle those funds? We had no treasurer, but I felt strongly that a missionary pastor should not handle church finances. One of the parent churches agreed to handle our finances for the first year. An advisory board member made the deposits into their account. They kept the funds separate and we had our own checkbook. When the year was over, we had everything in place to deal with the finances. We wanted to be very careful about how we handled the Lord's money, so we adopted a financial policy describing how funds are to be received and disbursed.⁹

6. Government Obligations

Because we have freedom of religion, the government of the United States does not grant a group of people the right to form a church. That right is already ours; therefore, we are not obligated to ask permission to become a church. We declared ourselves to be one. Non-profit status, however, is a different matter. Churches are by nature non-profit entities and have the right to give receipts for donations (That's not a requirement; it is a service churches usually provide to donors). Paul and Peter are both very clear in their epistles that Christians should be in submission to their government, however, and our government wants to know who we are. The reason for that is there are so many "scoundrels" out there trying to pass themselves off as churches or non-profit organizations for the privileges our government grants these entities. It's a bit of a hassle but there are some hoops that need to be jumped through.

EIN or FEIN

Once you begin paying your pastor or any staff, you need to have this Federal Employer Identification Number. It is very easy to get; a simple phone call will do it. In fact, they gave us our number right over the phone. The church then will need to issue a Form 1099 or W-2 to their pastor and report those distributions to the government at the end of the year.

Incorporation

The church will need to become a non-profit corporation by filing Articles of Incorporation with the state in which it meets. In my view, this needs to be as simple and concise as possible. The Articles can be expanded in the By-Laws to define how your church will function. Articles of Incorporation should include: Name, Purpose, Place of Meeting, Core Beliefs, Membership, Officers, and a Dissolution Clause.¹⁰ The dissolution clause is very important. The State wants to know that if you cease to function, any assets will be distributed to another non-profit corporation. This must precede your application to the Federal Government for a non-profit tax identification number. Incorporation is fairly simple and was granted to us quickly as we met the requirement for a church.¹¹

By-Laws

Depending on your state, you may need to have your By-Laws done before you can incorporate. The By-Laws are much more in-depth and explain the overall functioning of your church. Our By-Laws are outlined like this: [1] The Church Covenant, [2] Why we exist, [3] Doctrine and Ordinances, [4] Membership, [5] Officers, [6] Government, [7] Missions, [8]. As you can see, some of the By-Laws expand on the Articles of Incorporation and some of them stand alone. The State doesn't care what your doctrinal position is. Your By-Laws need to

⁹ See Appendix H, Page 18: Policy for Receiving and Disbursement of Funds

¹⁰ See Appendix E, Page 14: Dissolution Clause

¹¹ For Further Information contact Northwest Independent Church Extension (www.NICEChurchPlanters.org) or IFCA International (www.IFCA.org).

define your doctrinal position as clearly and simply as possible. As time goes on, you will be altering your By-Laws to better reflect how your church functions. Hopefully, the doctrinal position will not change!

Tax Exemption Status

The Federal Government requires completion of Form 1023 before issuing a federal tax number (different from an EIN number). This means you are a federally recognized non-profit organization. This form is huge! It also comes with a hefty price tag (\$750 in 2008). With that in mind, it is necessary to keep good records from day one, especially of the finances. It is best to get this form in within the first 27 months of the church's beginnings. Otherwise, you have even more to fill out. Don't let the form overwhelm you. The government just wants to know if you are a legitimate church.¹²

Letting Go!

The church has gone through the gestation stage and birth and is in the infancy stage, what now? Now, it's time to start letting go. As the founding pastor, everything has revolved around your gifts. Now, it's time for this new church to be able to function without you. If it can't do that, you really haven't planted a church; you've planted a fan club. One of the greatest church problems in Montana is pastor-dependent churches. I suspect that this is true nationwide. A healthy church should be able to function without a lead pastor for an indefinite period of time. How do we accomplish that? Let go!

Consider all the things you do. What can you let go? What can you train someone else to do? Do you have men you can train to preach? Maybe you need to step down from the leadership level and let your men lead completely without you. Your job as a church planter is to get things going and then figure out how to let it all go so that you can move on if the Lord should so lead. The church needs to be about the body of Christ functioning as a body. The only way for that to happen is for you to get out of the way.

So what will a self-supporting, fully established church look like?

It will have solid leadership men who are Biblically qualified, experienced leaders.

It will be self-supporting. It can meet all of its obligations including paying its pastor a living wage.

It will have a place it calls its own where it meets. An established church has to have some kind of structure where they meet. It may be a home, it may be rented, or you may build your own; but it needs to be somewhere that you consistently meet.

It will have programs in place and people to minister in them to meet the needs of the body.

Once these goals are met, you have done the job God has called you to. A church has been born! Now, what will God do with it as the years go by? Hopefully, it is a group of people God can use to His glory!

¹² Churches that affiliate with IFCA International are granted Federal Tax Exemption status under the umbrella of that fellowship.

Appendix A – Organizational Meeting Documents

Philosophy of Ministry

My philosophy of ministry is based on the concept that the Church is the family of God not the “business of God.” The Church is about people, not about the “bottom line”. It is about ministry not buildings. It’s about discipleship that puts people in ministry. My view of ministry isn’t based on the concept of success but rather the concept of what makes for a healthy church.

What a privilege it has been for Kathy and me to shepherd God’s people. God has called and gifted me to be a pastor teacher. I have served as a church planter, missionary pastor, solo pastor, associate pastor, field director, and Bible college instructor. It has been a blessing! As the Montana Field Director, I am usually in a different church every Sunday. I’ve learned so much about churches and about “The Church” by being in this position. Often people say to me “you are so enthusiastic!” I have to admit I am excited about God, His Word, and his People.

Six Things You Need To Know About A Church Plant.

A Church “plant” is a church being born. The analogy of planting a seed and watching it grow is a good one. Hopefully, that growing plant is healthy and will reproduce. A church plant is much different than a mature church. Here are some things you should consider:

- 1) A church plant is small, perhaps only twenty people, certainly fewer than a hundred.
NEGATIVE: More people means more interaction, more gifts, and more ministry.
POSITIVE: A smaller church is much more conducive to being family. You won’t get lost in the crowd.*
- 2) A church plant is mobile. It doesn’t have its own building.
NEGATIVE: It’s harder to “see” a mobile church in the community. Also, it is a burden of set up and take down for each service.
POSITIVE: Church isn’t about a building; it’s about people.*
- 3) Fewer programs are available through a Church plant. There is no nursery, youth group or Awana.
NEGATIVE: People often attend a church that can best minister to their children. If these things aren’t offered, some people would rather drive.
POSITIVE: A church plant is much simpler. There aren’t things going on every night of the week. Families can actually have time together. One advantage we have is our connection with Grace and Manhattan. Their youth ministries are available to us. As the church grows we can develop our own youth ministries and have an opportunity to “think outside the box”.*
- 4) A Church plant has no history. It’s brand new.
NEGATIVE: People don’t know what to expect. They’re not sure where it fits in “churchdom”.
POSITIVE: Some churches carry a lot of baggage from their history. A new church has none. Hopefully, we can create a positive history.*
- 5) A Church plant takes commitment from everyone involved.
NEGATIVE: If you just want to be a “permanent visitor,” you really can’t do that in a church plant.
POSITIVE: The New Testament model is every believer a minister. A healthy church should involve everyone and their gifts.*

6) A Church plant faces unique challenges. Oftentimes, people from various doctrinal positions will come to a new church that is beginning.

NEGATIVE: Sometimes, people will come with an agenda that they feel they can exploit in a smaller group.

POSITIVE: We will begin with a “core group” that is in doctrinal agreement. The church will have a solid doctrinal statement before it begins. While we will welcome people from various backgrounds, we will stand on the fundamental doctrines of Scripture.

Vision

Why plant a Church in Three Forks?

Every Sunday there is a mass exodus from Three Forks to attend churches elsewhere. We think this shows that there is a significant need for an independent Bible Church.

Who will be a part of this?

While Grace and Manhattan Bible Churches will assist the formation of this new sister church, it will be an independent church made up of believers from the Three Forks area.

What is the goal of establishing such a Church?

Certainly, the primary purpose of any church is the Glory of God, but our main objective will be to provide a Bible-centered church that clearly teaches the Word of God, has a heart for missions, and is committed to disciple-making.

When will this Church begin to meet?

This will depend on the feedback we receive from the mail-in response form. If we have enough families interested in forming a church, we will contact them and set a date to begin meeting together. This will be the “core group” for the new church. I would like to see us meet together on Sunday nights for a period of time until our core group “gels” and then form a plan for a “kick-off” Sunday of the new Church.

Where will we meet?

No set place has been established yet. If the response is positive to proceed, we will begin to pursue a place for meeting together to worship and fellowship.

How will this Church work?

In the beginning the Church will be under an advisory board made up of men from Grace, Manhattan, and possibly Dry Creek. This board will be active until the church can ordain its own elders. Pastor Jim Miller will oversee the preaching and teaching ministries. Depending on the gifting of the local group, worship leaders may come from one of the three Bible Churches. Flock groups will be in local homes.

Who is funding this?

Pastor Jim has outside support as the Field Director for Northwest Independent Church Extension. No other outside funding will be sought as we feel that God's people should support their own church.

Response Form

Name:

Address:

Phone

e-mail

Yes, we would like to be involved in the new Bible Church plant in Three Forks. This means we are willing to commit ourselves to the worship, fellowship, and discipleship of this new church.

Mail to: Pastor Jim Miller, P.O. Box 873, Manhattan, MT 59741

Comments:

Appendix B — Letter From Advisory Board — 05/15/06

We had a great meeting Monday night. Very positive and upbeat! We went over the input forms that had been turned in and I conveyed the views of those who had contacted me personally. Certainly, the majority view was that we need to go to Sunday morning services. The question was when? After weighing the options, we decided to begin Sunday morning services on June 18th.

Here is the plan as we envision it:

Starting on June 18, we will begin Sunday morning services from 10:00 to 11:00 a.m. at the Ruby. This will be “phase two” of the process of planting a Bible Church in Three Forks. This phase will last from June 18 to mid September when we will re-evaluate and see if we have the core we need to start a church. If we do, we hope to kickoff as Three Forks Bible Church the first of October. Until then, while we are still in the “gestational” stages meeting on Sunday mornings, we will be simply Sunday Morning Fellowship.

Once we begin morning services, we will also need to begin to minister more as a body. We would like to see more people involved.

We need people to take over some of Gary’s jobs as he seems to be doing quite a bit.

We would like to connect our teens up on Sundays. We hope that the parents of the teens will host them for lunch after Sunday services. I’ve asked Joel and Morgan to pray about being a part of this.

For younger kids, we’d love to see a family host a backyard Bible club. We feel that would serve us now better than Sunday school.

Another area of concern is for a sound system. We need to figure out what would work best for us at the best price. Then, we need someone to run it, set it up, take it down, and store it each week.

Another need is follow up. We’ve had a lot of folks visit Sunday Night Fellowship, and we need people to contact them and see how they are doing and encourage them to fellowship with us again.

We also need help with the music part of our worship service. That includes a need for someone to take over the responsibility of putting together the worship folders.

So, we have several ministries; what we need is ministers! That’s what being a part of a body is all about.

Appendix C – Report to Advisory Board

Dear Advisory Board members;

As you know, we completed stage 1 of the plant on June 11 with our last Sunday night meeting. Stage 2 began June 18 with our first Sunday morning service. Our goal was to establish a core group and we felt it necessary to go to Sunday mornings to do so. I'm happy to report that this goal has been accomplished. We now have a solid viable Church functioning. Going to Sunday mornings meant losing some who felt the need to continue in their established churches outside the community. While that meant we would shrink in numbers, it was well worth it to build the core. Interestingly, we have grown again to an average attendance of over fifty and under sixty. A consistent core group attends even during the summer.

Lord willing, Stage 3 will begin in late September or early October. The goal is to have an established church functioning with its own leadership and constitution followed by individual membership. To achieve that goal, I have identified our emerging leaders. I hope to meet with these men to open the Word and examine the qualifications for leaders of God's church. We want to get a feel for who is qualified and called to serve. In September, I'd like the Advisory Board to meet with these leaders to (1) Review the six ministries we identified in our last meeting, (2) Decide what the Church should be paying their pastor, (3) Determine where I fit in this ministry, (4) Turn the reins over to these guys to lead the Church. This will complete the ministry of the Advisory Board.

Words mean things, and I'd like this new group of men to be referred to as the "Leadership Team" rather than the "Board." This term seems to take on a meaning that may be counterproductive to what we want to accomplish. I'd love to see a unified team of Elders and Deacons serving together to shepherd this Church (which I think better represents the Acts model). Once this leadership team is in place, we will begin the task of approving a constitution, introduce a membership plan, and determine what, if any, programs we may need to implement. I am also working on a mailing to the Three Forks Community to introduce our Church once the Leadership Team is in place.

We appreciate your prayers, time, input, and the affection we have received from you as we have progressed on this journey. Thank you Guys!!
His Blessings, Pastor Jim

Appendix D – Missions Policy

It is the heart and desire of Three Forks Bible Church to be like the ancient church at Antioch and raise up and send forth missionaries. Our missionary policy will be that our priority is to train up and send forth members from our own body to the mission field (at home or abroad). It is our hope that we can provide their complete financial support. Our mission budget shall be 10% of our net income as long as we are a mission church, with our pastor receiving outside support through Northwest Independent Church Extension. Our goal as a self-supporting church will be to invest 20% of our net income in missions.

Appendix E — Dissolution Clause

Any property or other assets accumulated by this church shall be irrevocably dedicated to religious, charitable, or hospital purposes. In the event of dissolution, any and all assets of the corporation will be given to Montana Bible College of Bozeman, Montana. Should this entity not longer exist, assets shall be distributed for one or more exempt purposes within the meaning of section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code, or corresponding section of any future federal tax code, or shall be distributed to the federal government, or to a state or local government, for a public purpose. Any such assets not disposed of shall be disposed of by the court of Common Pleas of the country in which the principal office of this organization is then located, exclusively for such purposes or to such organizations or organizations, as said Court shall determine, which are organized and operated exclusively for such purposes.

Appendix F – Community Mailing
Side 1



Have you noticed.....
that people are like plants?

They need a place to grow
They need nourishment
They respond to care
They sometimes need support
They are designed by God
They are designed to GROW
COME GROW WITH US!



We're your neighbors

**And we're starting a new
church!**

Community Mailing Side 2



A bit of History: Our Church Fellowship began as *Sunday Night Fellowship* the first Sunday in March 2006. We began morning services in June. This fellowship is a joint effort of families from Manhattan Bible and Grace Bible to plant an independent Bible Church in Three Forks. The reason for this is that over thirty families leave Three Forks every Sunday to worship in a Bible Church outside their community. That tells us there is a great need for an independent Bible Church here.

What is a Bible Church? We accept the Bible as our foundation for faith and practice; therefore, our church is centered on the teaching of the Word of God. We are completely independent of any denomination.

A Family Church. Our goal is to create a church that feels like a family. We don't want to just "do" church, we want to be a church that ministers to the whole family through prayer, encouragement, and instruction from the Word of God.



We Welcome You! If you don't already have a church home, we'd love to have you come and worship with us. At the present time, we are meeting at the Ruby Theatre at 110 N. 5th Avenue on Sunday mornings with a get-together time at 9:30 and a worship service from 10:00 to 11:00.

If you have any questions about our church, please feel free to call our pastor, Jim Miller at 284-4213.



Appendix G — Prayer Partner Update

I thought it was time to update you on the Three Forks Church Plant. We continue to be amazed at what God is doing in Three Forks. At the present time we are averaging in the 80s on Sunday. What a blessing! I'm convinced that there are several coming that don't yet know the Savior. What a privilege to be able to share the Gospel message of salvation by grace. Pray with us that God will plant the seed of His Truth in the hearts of sinners.

Even with those numbers coming, we are still not a "functioning" church. I say that because (1) We don't have leaders in place yet. The men I had hoped would step up to lead are very hesitant to do so. On the positive side, all are willing, but none are really ready for various reasons. So that is something we will continue to work on and ask that you would pray about. (2) We are not self supporting. The Church right now is able to support us half salary. Our support through NICE then allows us to minister there full time. (3) We are still "gypsies". We rent the Ruby Theater for Sunday service. It's for sale and should it sell, we will be looking for another place to meet. The Lord provided the Ruby, and he can provide another place, but I'm not sure the body would survive a move at this point. Pray with us about these three areas especially.

Right now we have four categories of people coming. Our "core group" are people who minister and are there every Sunday. Then we have people who are there fairly frequently but not ready to minister. The third group I would classify as "permanent visitors". They love being there, but making a commitment to the Worship of Almighty God isn't a priority with them. The fourth group is fairly large, that is people who come once, and can't get out the door fast enough! We don't ever see them again. The preaching of the Gospel to those who are perishing is troubling. Pray that God would use what they heard to draw them to Him!

The ministry is a joy! We love preaching in Three Forks on Sunday and interacting with our Wednesday night Bible Study. God is growing His Church. We just want to be careful not to get ahead of His leading.

Keep On Praying!

Under His Wings

Jim

Appendix H – Policy for Receiving and Disbursing Funds

To insure that church income and disbursements are handled accurately and appropriately and that everyone involved in handling the Lord's funds will be above reproach, the Leadership Team approved the following policy on March 15, 2007.

RECEIPTS - The Financial Secretary shall be responsible to receive and deposit all contributions to the church in a timely manner. The offering from each Sunday or Special Service shall be counted and recorded as soon after the service as possible. During the counting process the Financial Secretary or his designee, shall record on the church's Giving Record form the name of the donor, check number, and amount of the check. Cash will be totaled and added at the bottom of the Giving Record. The check numbers and amounts will also be recorded on the bank deposit slip. The Clerk will assist in counting the offering and placing it in a lockable bank deposit bag along with the completed bank deposit slip. The person not taking the bag to the bank will keep the key.

The person taking the deposit to the bank should be present when the bag is opened and the deposit counted. The deposit verification slip shall then be returned to the Financial Secretary. The Financial Secretary will enter the information from the Giving Record into the church's computer to ensure accurate records of each gift.

If either man is absent, another Leadership Team member or a trusted member of the congregation will fulfill their duties. The goal is to keep the group of men handling money as small as practical.

DISBURSEMENTS - The Financial Secretary is responsible for all disbursements under the direction of the Leadership Team.

Three persons, other than the Financial Secretary, shall be authorized to sign church checks. They shall be members of the Leadership Team, selected by the Team. Two signatures will be required on checks of \$5,000 or more.

The Financial Secretary will make out all checks as authorized by the Leadership Team. No authorized check signer will have access to blank checks. The Financial Secretary will also be responsible for recording all disbursements to the proper account.

A printout of the church's financial records will be provided to the Leadership Team monthly and a summary provided to the congregation at times designated by the Leadership Team.