

CHURCH PLANTER TRAINING PROGRAM ESSENTIALS

———— Multiplication Network Ministries ————

There are five key ingredients essential to most successful church planter (CP) training programs that also are found in the approach used by Multiplication Network Ministries (MNM). These are: vision, modular training, material content, mentoring, and measurement. Once the church planter has been assessed, usually with a pastor's recommendation and an interview, the following five aspects of church planting will prove helpful for multiplication.

1. VISION FOR CHURCH PLANTING

Organizations and leaders seeking to sponsor successful church planting programs need to develop a passionate vision for church planting that is demonstrable by their actions. Denominations and churches that believe church planting is not only biblical, but one of the most strategic ways of transforming lives and communities have a head start. Our experience with thousands of church planters in training indicates that those who have the vision, and whose leadership shares the vision, are more likely to thrive. In contrast, when only lip service is given to church planting, the efforts result in frustration and church planting flounders. A clear and inspiring vision, led by the Spirit, will help a denomination or local church flourish in establishing new communities of faith.

2. MODULAR TRAINING

The modular approach is based on an Action/Reflection model where a participant will receive instruction at intervals, allowing for field experience between training modules. The International Labor Organization defines modular training as a "system where training content is divided into independent units or modules which can be combined to form a program suited to individual needs, technical developments, or occupational structure, etc., permitting continuous adaptation of the program." Those who participate in modular training learn incrementally. In fact, some call

this “just-in-time learning,” as the participants put into practice what they learned between modules and then return to report on what happened.

The Multiplication Network Ministries system includes 12 months of church planter training for a total of 100 hours of instruction. Usually the participants gather for a full day per month, for example on a Saturday, and are trained in four or five topics. Then they return to work for a month before receiving the next training. As explained above, the great advantage of the modular approach is allowing the church planter to return with questions and to see their very practical need for more skills and knowledge. The modules are sequential, presenting the next degree of church planting complexity after the simpler issues are learned and implemented. The descriptor “Action/Reflection Model” is useful because it emphasizes the benefit of pausing to learn and reflect on the current activities needed to plant the church. This high frequency of meeting helps with peer accountability and mutual encouragement as well. This is very effective for church multiplication.

3. MATERIAL CONTENT

The content of the training process involves more than just the curriculum. In some training contexts, there is a tendency to over-value the curriculum. The MNM approach is to emphasize the content of all that happens in and between modules. What happens outside of the modular training is just as important to the growth of the church planter.

Many of the characteristic elements in MNM's material content are not unique to MNM if taken alone. The elements are like beads on a necklace that can also be found on other necklaces, but the order and pattern makes it unique. The following highlights some of the components found in the MNM content.

- a. **Contextualized Curriculum:** The MNM material follows three key axes: the man, the message, and the method. The first element (man) has to do with the church planter and his own spiritual and skill development throughout the program. The second element (the message) has to do with the content of the gospel message and the manifold ways of presenting, proclaiming and modeling it. The third element (the method) has to do with a holistic understanding of the church in its community context and the communication of the gospel to the wider culture.

The material is designed specifically to establish a new community of faith. The initial content deals with how to research a community demographic, how to make new contacts, and how to make a basic gospel presentation. Later content includes higher level skills regarding discipleship, small group leadership, and strategies to serve the local community according to its needs.

- b. **Practical Skill Development:** We do not just transmit information or academic material during the training. We also emphasize the development of practical skills for church planting, such as knowing how to research and interpret a community's demographics, serve a community according to its felt needs, make new contacts, present the gospel in contextualized ways, lead small group Bible studies, resolve conflicts, train other leaders, lead worship services, work in teams, preach, develop strategic plans, and create a budget, among other things.

Demonstrations of the practical skills are carried out in a public setting. For example, the church planters are taught to lead an inductive Bible study. They learn how to work with the text and write their own study. Then they prepare the inductive questions and actually demonstrate the study with a

small group in front of their peers. A friendly environment is nurtured so the planters feel comfortable as they practice. The facilitator and peers then make comments for the skills to be honed. Repeating the skill throughout several modules assures the planter's constant improvement with this basic but critical church planter skill.

The teaching of skills is both diachronic and synchronic. Skills are learned in the order they will be needed, but once a skill is learned, they continue to be sharpened as new ones are grasped. For example, when church planters are learning to train other leaders, they still continue to hone the skill of making new contacts.

- c. **Action Plans:** Each training session concludes with action plans prepared by the church planter or church leader. They must finish each day of training knowing the answer to the question, "What's next?" or "What do I do now?" These action plans can be presented to the class and accountability for those plans is factored into the next session.
- d. **Inductive Methodology:** Our preferred teaching style is to ask questions and allow participants to discover the answers in small group settings. There is a mix of presentation, dialogue, and inductive learning, but the inductive methodology is of highest value, especially when learning how to lead small group Bible studies. Learning takes place between peers after biblically-based content has been presented by a skilled and experienced instructor.
- e. **Holistic Community Project:** During the training, each church planter is taught how to put together a community project and implement it as part of his or her training. As the planter conducts surveys and demographic studies, the felt needs of the

community are discovered. The planter is provided with some strategic planning tools to become immersed in the community and thus more able to demonstrate the love of Christ.

4. MENTORING

MNM requires each church planter to have a mentor. This will usually be the pastor of the mother church or someone assigned by the pastor to accompany the church planter in the new endeavor for a year. The mentor is required to meet monthly, between modules, with the church planter. This meeting will preferably be at the church planter's location of work and includes a time of sharing experiences and praying together. MNM has developed training for these mentors and a mentor's log and suggested questions to ask during the mentoring session. The questions cover three general areas: personal growth, family life, and the ministry of church planting itself.

A key ingredient of this aspect of the program is the attitude of the mentor. The mentor is there to encourage the planter and help him or her be successful and should take a serious and compassionate role in accompanying the church planter in this Kingdom enterprise. We do not intend this aspect of the program design to just be an extra hoop the planter has to go through. It is intended to give the church planter a greater probability of success. This also helps to solve one of the greatest problems in church planting—loneliness.

5. MEASUREMENT

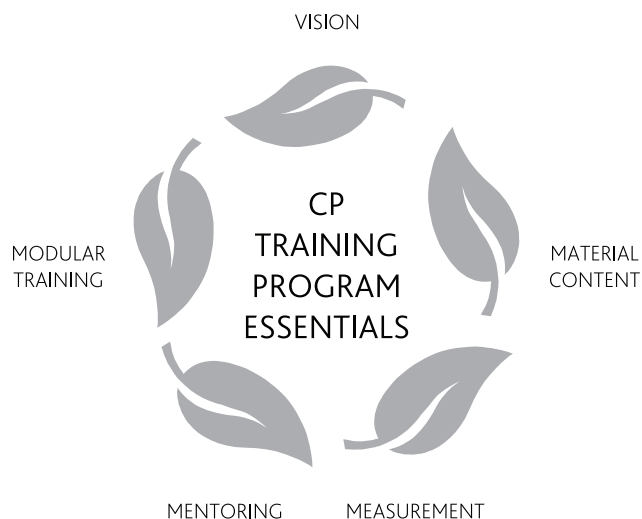
MNM encourages measuring the outcomes of the church planter's work. Accountability is a key practice in the church planting program and participants must report on the outcomes of their work. At each module, the planter must submit a monthly report with specific metrics to

key indicators for church planting, such as:

- How many contacts did you make this month?
- How many people accepted Christ this month?
- How many people were baptized?
- How many small groups did you start this month?
- How many people are in these small groups?
- How many new leaders did you begin to train this month?
- How many people are attending worship services (once they start)?

These questions help guide the monthly activity of the church planter. It follows the old maxim, "You get what you inspect." If the participants know ahead of time what will be asked of them during each module, they are more likely to do those activities that lead to the results to be reviewed. (See also the document on "5 Beneficiaries of Reporting".)

In summary, these five ingredients must be present in a healthy church planter training program. They work together to heighten the probability of success in this Kingdom venture. Leaving out one of the ingredients out would be like leaving out the flour or the sugar in a cake recipe. But, when present, all five ingredients can result in a powerful combination that aids the church planter in achieving his or her purpose of establishing a new, vibrant, healthy community of faith.



Footnote:

The modules can be delivered to the participants according to their needs. In urban areas, these might choose to meet more often, for example one night a week. However, when participants come from distant geographical areas, they usually prefer to spend three days together and then not meet again until three months later. Although a more expensive model to sustain, this retreat style training allows for more in-depth fellowship among the participants and is often one of the key elements they remember later.

Here are the three most typical delivery mechanisms of our modular approach:

- Weekly meeting: Meeting 48 weeks in a row, just one night per week for a session.
- Monthly meeting: Meeting once a month for 12 months, with 4 or 5 sessions per meeting.
- Trimester meeting: Meeting four times a year for three days, with 12 sessions per meeting.