

Why Should Spring Run Presbyterian Church Plant New Churches?

Introduction

We are convinced that the continual planting of new congregations is the single most essential strategy for growing the number of followers of Jesus Christ in Metro Richmond and central Virginia.¹ Additionally, planting new congregations and churches is critical for the ongoing revival of existing congregations. No other methodology, ministry, or evangelistic initiative can possibly have the dynamic, renewing impact of new congregations reaching people through a vigorous movement of church planting.

However, when most Christians are introduced to the concept of seeing a local church start multiple new congregations, several common reservations often surface:

“New churches? Isn’t there plenty of room in existing churches for anyone who would want to attend one?”
“We’ve got some good momentum at this church. Wouldn’t it be best for us to just keep on growing?”
“Isn’t that risky? What if it fails? Wouldn’t that change us as a fellowship? I like us the way we are....”

This brief paper seeks to address these concerns, and consider the reasons for Spring Run Presbyterian Church to throw itself into a dynamic movement of newly planted congregations across metro Richmond and beyond. Our Elders believe it is time we take a much more active role in planting new churches and congregations.

We Pursue Church Planting because we were planted and it is part of our vision and values.

We began in the fall of 2005 as a church plant of Sycamore Presbyterian Church and assisted by West End Presbyterian Church. We started meeting at Spring Run Elementary School in March 2006, and have now grown to over 300 worshippers on Sundays and about 750 people who are part of the church.

Our vision is “to make growing followers of Jesus who influence others with the gospel,” and one of our core values is *Church Multiplication*. We are a product of this value and have been deeply invested in it through overseas church planting and partnering with the Metro Richmond Church Planting Network.

We Pursue Church Planting because God passionately pursues people.

Jesus came to “seek and to save what was lost” (Luke 19:10). In Luke 15, he explains God’s heart to pursue those who are lost, and he uses us as ambassadors in His ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:11- 21).

There is not one person, relationship, situation, people group, culture, or neighborhood that is so wrecked and sin-affected that it falls outside the redemptive mission of Jesus. The cosmic message and bold ministry of reconciliation that God has entrusted to his people erupts in and through the Church.

We Pursue Church Planting because it is the Essential Nature of the Church

After the resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples and said, ‘Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.’” (John 20:21) While the New Testament depicts a Church that is essentially missionary in nature, church history is dominated by a belief that the church is the sender, but not the one sent. Over the centuries, the task of outreach has been entrusted to the gifted few evangelists and missionaries who were sent out from the church to lead people into the church. The Church described in the Scripture doesn’t just produce missionaries and risk-taking proponents of the Gospel. It is—at the very core of its identity— a community redeemed and set apart for the purpose of bringing outsiders into this fellowship (Acts 2:42-47).

¹ C. Peter Wagner, Church Planting for a Greater Harvest, p.11.

We Pursue Church Planting because of the Biblical Mandate

“Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’” (Matthew 28:18-20)

These famous words of Jesus are usually applied to the individual Christian’s efforts to introduce others to Jesus leaving the corporate nature of these words overlooked. Jesus’ Great Commission, was not simply a call to “teach” and “make disciples” but also to “baptize”. Baptism in the New Testament meant incorporation into the worshipping community where there would be teaching, administration of the sacraments, and discipline (Acts 2:41-47). New converts were organized and given direction for faith and worship in the context of a local church. Paul’s strategy was to plant local churches and “...appoint elders in every town...” (Titus 1:5).

We Pursue Church Planting Because of Practical Wisdom

New local churches best reach the unchurched. As a congregation ages, it tends to become more institutional and less missional. Energy shifts toward the concerns of its members and constituents more than toward those outside its walls. As a congregation ages focus shifts from reaching the community where it has been planted, to maintaining the momentum, the building, and the programs. However, the new congregations have a sense of urgency and are forced to focus on the community. They have nothing to maintain—only a direction to go. Also, in the first couple of years of one’s Christian life, they have far more face to face relationships with their non-Christian friend groups. A new congregation filled with people who are new Christians has the ability to invite and attract many more non-believers into the church than members of typical more established church.

New churches best reach new residents, new generations and new people groups. New residents are disproportionately found in new congregations because newcomers do not need years of “tenure” before their voices are heard or before they can gain real leadership. New and younger generations are found in large numbers in new churches because there is greater openness to new ministry ideas and to leaders that need to “learn as they go.” Immigrants are also drawn into churches that contextualize evangelism and worship.

That is why dozens of denominational studies² confirm that the average new church congregation in the United States gains most of its members (60- 80%) from outside any worshipping community, while churches over 10-15 years of age gain most of their members (80-90%) from people moving from other congregations.³ New churches are 6-8 times more effective in drawing new people into the Body of Christ. If history continues to repeat itself, many churches in America that are a decade old have already introduced more people to Jesus Christ in their first 10 years of existence than they will in the full number of their remaining years.

We Pursue Church Planting for Historic Reasons

In the first 300 years of America, the number of Protestant churches grew at a faster rate than the population.

- 1820 - 1 church for every 875 residents
- 1860 - 1 church for every 600 residents (pop. increased 300%, number of churches 500%)
- 1906 - 1 church for every 430 residents (pop. increased 275%, number of churches 400%)

In summary, 1 new church was planted for every 300 new residents in the 19th century. Accordingly, there was a rise in the number of people who identified with Christianity and the church:

² C. Kirk Hadaway, *New Churches and Church Growth in the Southern Baptist Convention*.

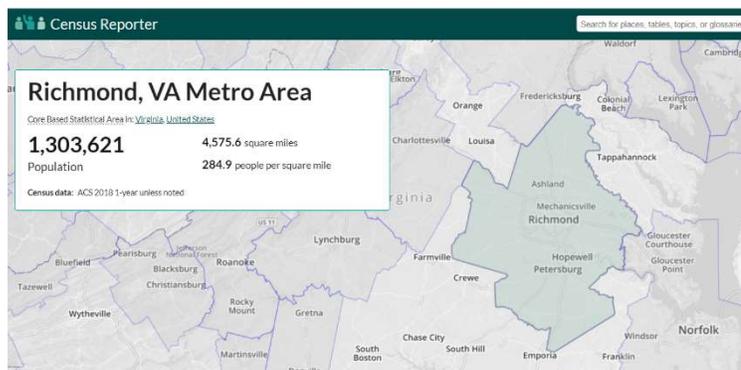
³ D. MacGavran and G. Hunter, *Church Growth: Strategies that Work*, p. 100.

- 1776 – 17% of the U.S. population who identified themselves as “religious adherents”.
- 1916 – 53% of the U.S. population who identified themselves as “religious adherents”.⁴

By 1906, over a third of the congregations of this country were less than 25 years old,⁵ and the percentage of the population involved in local churches steadily increased. For example, in 1860, 37% of Americans were church members, but by 1926, 58% were members. Since 1906 the population has grown roughly 300%, but the number of Protestant churches has grown no more than 35%. This means that no more than one new church was planted for every 1,000 new residents. Churches have had huge declines in membership since the 1960's. America is a post-Christianized society. Even in the South, the predominant view of life is secular. If we want to renew our country spiritually, we will have to plant thousands of new churches annually.

We Pursue Church Planting because of the Present Need

- At least 1,303,621 people live in Richmond Metro area highlighted here.⁶
- Less than 1/3 (<434,000) report that they have attended a church service recently.⁷
- More than 1/3 (>434,000) report that they have absolutely no faith involvement and preference for historic Christian religious affiliations.⁸



Even if we assumed that only the people with absolutely no faith involvement needed to be reached with the message of the Gospel and welcomed into a body of believers, it would take more than 1,000 newly planted churches to reach them all (assuming large congregations of 400 men, women, and children). Statistics are difficult to deal with-- however, even this basic analysis demonstrates that if all of the churches in Richmond planted 250 churches in the immediate future there would not be too many new congregations.

But won't this mean we are neglecting existing churches who need help, or even neglecting our own church? Not at all. It is a mistake to think we must choose between planting new churches or renewing existing ones.

We Pursue Church Planting to Renew the Whole Body of Christ in a variety of ways.

- 1) *Planting new churches is stimulating to existing churches.* We say the “gospel changes everything” including each one of us! Gospel renewal leads to gospel mission, but it is also true that participating in gospel mission can lead to gospel renewal. The ember of faith is often fanned into a flame as we step out of comfort zones. Jesus calls people to follow him, and it is in that context that their faith grows.
- 2) *Planting new churches is one of the best ways to discover and develop new strong leaders.* Many churches have people whose talents and gifts go unused. Church planting requires us to develop leaders who

⁴ Roger Finke and Rodney Starke, *The Churching of America: 1776-1990*, p. 16.

⁵ Lyle Schaller, *44 Questions for Church Planters*, p. 14-26.

⁶ <https://censusreporter.org/profiles/31000US40060-richmond-va-metro-area/>

⁷ Source: Percept Group, Inc., www.perceptgroup.com

⁸ Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, and Percept Group, Inc.

discover their gifting and use it both for the sending church and the church plant. It is a great research and development engine for all churches.

- 3) *Planting new churches renews our focus on evangelism and may be an 'evangelistic feeder.'* A focus on outreach is stimulating to the sending church to renew their efforts in evangelism and loving their neighbors well. As they old saying goes, "evangelize or fossilize." Sometimes the new church is very exciting but also somewhat immature in its leadership. Some new Christian converts cannot endure such quick changes and flexibility and may go to an established church for a variety of reasons.
- 4) *Planting new churches is an exercise in Kingdom Mindedness.* It is tempting to initiate the starting of new churches for reasons that primarily serve the fellowship at SRPC. However, the present need is far more important than our comfort and preferences. If our sights are set on any vision smaller than the expansion of Kingdom of God, we will be critically disabled in this initiative.
 - We cannot be motivated primarily by "geographical convenience" for our current members. Yet we may view a number of households in a particular area as an opportunity to reach that area.
 - We cannot be primarily motivated by "maximizing growth in our current location" for our current members. A dynamic church planting network is likely to attract many more people than we can send, and multiply our efforts in ways we don't foresee. Churches come and go, even megachurches.
 - Consider the impact a kingdom movement of 25 or 50 or 100 gospel-centered churches saturating central Virginia would have for decades upon decades. Such a network could reach into every neighborhood, culture, language, and economic class of Richmond and the surrounding counties.

This is a radical vision. It means that, for some to be faithful to the vision and mission of SRPC, they will have to leave this location to be a part of one of our planted churches! We must put into practice Jesus' teaching that we grow by laying our lives down for the sake of Christ (Mark 8:31-38). SRPC can be a blessing and renew our communities by giving away money, leaders, ministers, and members to new churches.

The reasons laid out above compel us to give ourselves to the initiative of planting of new churches.

What is Our Strategy in Planting New Churches?

What Exactly Do We Mean by Church Planting?

We broadly define church planting as cultivating new communities of faith. Whether these communities initially materialize as a more traditional start-up church, a prayer meeting for ESL individuals, or a Bible study for an immigrant people group, these communities represent places where believers' union with Jesus is to be affirmed and enjoyed. We pray that these communities will grow in wisdom, grace, and number, eventually becoming self-sustaining communities marked by preaching and administration of the sacraments. We also pray that they will be part of a church planting network and characterized by the following values.

Gospel-Centered. We are "not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for the salvation to everyone who believes..." (Romans 1:16). The gospel is powerful because God has reconciled us to himself through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. It is priceless because it is received by faith because of the grace of God. The Gospel is a game changer because it is not simply the diving board into Christianity, but the swimming pool of the Christian life. It reassures us of God's love and renews us in the mission of making followers of Jesus.

Kingdom-Minded. The Kingdom of God includes people from every tribe, tongue, and nation. Therefore we must cross ethnic, cultural, socio-economic, and generational lines. Our churches can work toward loving unity while celebrating diversity in styles and emphases. The Church is the primary agent, a glorious foretaste, and herald of God's kingdom. We must regularly be asking ourselves as a congregation:

- How are we living out the Gospel of the Kingdom—the reign of God in all things?
- How are we addressing our world's brokenness and bringing healing to it?

Culturally Engaged. Scripture and practical wisdom call us to plant churches that are both biblically sound and culturally relevant by meeting the particular needs of their participants. As such, each new congregation embody its commitment to the Gospel in different ways, depending on its context. They will develop different priorities and expertise, and may very well not look like us in terms of:

- Demographics – they may be different in age, education, language, ethnicity, occupations, or income.
- Culture – they may well look different as they meet the unique cultural needs of their community.
- Location – while we focus on metro-Richmond, we will continue to support church planting globally.
- Denomination – Although we aspire to see our church plants become particular churches within the PCA, we recognize the potential in partnering with other Gospel-believing churches across denominations.

Prayerfully Confident. Nothing of significance happens in the Kingdom of God without prayer. Like the early church (Acts 2:42) we must be devoted to Kingdom-centered prayer as opposed to survival or self-centered prayer. Jesus told us to “ask for workers for the harvest,” so we pray asking him to deliver on his promises.

Missionally Courageous. Jesus calls us to count the cost, to take up our cross, to deny ourselves and follow him. This call to be his followers is a call to courage over comfort. It requires sacrifice and a renewed sense of mission. Whether you are part of a new church or part of a sending church, you are a follower of Jesus giving up some comfort to be courageously involved in his mission. What feels like a risk may produce great reward. What feels like a sacrificial cost might actually bring about tremendous generosity. What feels like it might be a burden may actually be the very thing that lifts their heads and bends their knees.

How will we plant churches?

Planting churches depends on the Holy Spirit’s leading us through the process as several factors come into play. Each factor must be considered as a plan is developed. There are many ways to plant a church but all of them require people and leadership. For example, a high number of Spring Run people in a geographic area would demand great consideration. Another consideration would be the gifts and vision of the pastor of the church plant. Still another factor could be high growth area without local churches. Factors to consider are:

- 1) Need for new churches in the area. What percent of people are unchurched?
- 2) Strategic centers of influence. Paul planted church in areas for spreading the gospel.
- 3) Member families who are outreach oriented and might make up a core group in the area
- 4) Church Planter vision and gifts
- 5) Potential for affinity in a church planting network and movement
- 6) Opportunities and resources God presents to us. Where is the Holy Spirit leading?

What can you be doing now?

- 1) Love your neighbors and practice hospitality.
- 2) Learn to do evangelism and begin sharing your faith story.
- 3) Pray for God to open doors and specifically ask whether you should be part of a church plant.

Here are some ongoing prayer requests of the Church Planting Initiatives Team (CPIT)

Pray for our people to have a missionary heart toward unbelieving friends and neighbors.

Pray for new and creative bridges from existing churches to the communities in which we live, work, and play.

Pray for a kingdom movement that partners to begin 15 churches in the next 10 years in metro-Richmond.

Pray that Spring Run would start 3 churches in the next 10 years.

Pray for God to raise up workers for the harvest including Church Planters and Core Groups.

Pray for God to stir the hearts of people in target areas to want a church for unbelievers in their community.

Pray that God would raise up the right pastors who have a passion for those who are not yet Christians.

Pray that God would provide the financial and human resources to begin new churches.

Pray for an ever increasing partnership with the existing PCA churches in Metro Richmond area.

This paper has been prepared by the Church Planting Initiatives Team (CPIT) of SRPC.

The Church Plant Initiatives Team was formed for this and works under the authority of the Elders. We really do want your interaction so please talk with one of us. CPIT members are: Ken Edwards, Bruce McCloy, Andrew Conrad, Michelle Conrad, Jonathan Bowman, Cosmas Phiri, Christy Phiri, Bill Laun, Kitty Laun, Daniel Jordan, and Kimberly Jordan.

Some of the responsibilities of the Church Plant Initiatives Team include:

- 1) Pray for direction and wisdom regarding God's plan and where Spirit is moving
- 2) Identify gifted SRPC resources to lead or help with assessment
- 3) Research central VA demographics: church locations, denominations, people groups
- 4) Develop target areas for in need of the gospel
- 5) Coordinate with officers on necessary SRPC resources to cultivate new congregations
- 6) Visit other church plants to see best practices and extend greetings from SRPC. Create a network with other churches that are actively planting to pray together, celebrate God's work and learn from others.
- 7) Explore various methodologies for beginning new congregations
 - a. Daughter church with group sent out from SRPC and they are on their own
 - b. Coalition of churches starting one in overlapping area
 - c. Satellite church
 - d. Multi-site church
 - e. New affinity group on current premises (different language congregation)

We are indebted to the work of Tim Keller and Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan, NY, West End Presbyterian Church in Richmond, VA, and Mission to North America.

APPENDIX A – Target Areas for Possible Church Plants

Target areas for church planting in central Virginia are determined by various factors. Some factors are:

- Where is the Holy Spirit leading?
- Need for new churches in the area. What percent of people are unchurched?
- Strategic centers of influence. Paul planted churches in influential areas for spreading the gospel.
- Member families who are outreach oriented and might make up a core group in the area
- Church Planter vision and gifts
- Potential for affinity in a church planting network and movement
- Opportunities and resources God presents to us.

At this time (June 2020), these seem to be the places (in alphabetical order) rising to the surface in which we could plant churches.

- Amelia County – we have a number of families in Amelia and support Young Life which has made a big impact in the county across ethnic lines. Young Life’s oversight committee and the club of high school kids is demographically representative of the county. We have several families and an active and growing community group here.
- Chester – located on the eastern side of the county and near I-95, this area could draw from changing demographics in the county and could be a combined effort of a few churches. It could also be a step toward churches in Colonial Heights and Petersburg.
- Farmville – located in the counties of Prince Edward and Cumberland, it also is the home to Longwood University and Hampden-Sydney College (with enrollments of 4,911 and 1,072 students respectively). We currently have two families living there who are meeting with others in that area to pray about a church being started.

How can you help? Let us know if...

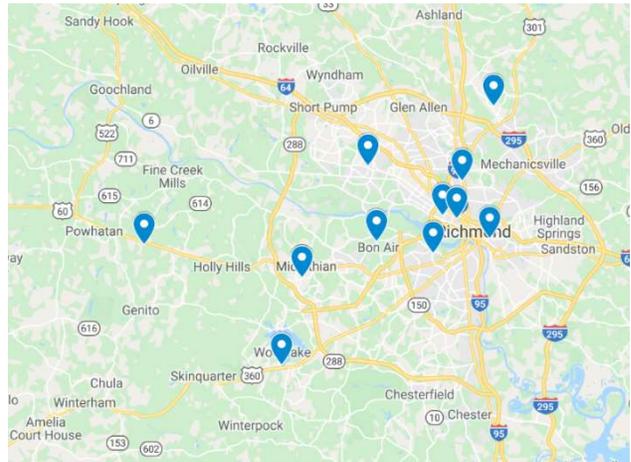
- you live in one of these areas and are interested in being part of a church plant.
- you know people living in these areas who may be interested in a church plant.
- you have other potential resources for those areas (facility usage, business connections, etc.)

You can contact Pastor Andrew at the church office (804-412-8112 or andrew@springrunpc.org) or any member of the Church Plant Initiatives Team.

APPENDIX B – Metro Richmond Church Planting Network

The network includes the following churches:

- 1) Stony Point Reformed Presbyterian Church (1969) Bon Air
- 2) Sycamore Presbyterian Church (1980) Midlothian
- 3) All Saints Reformed Presbyterian Church (1984) Fan District
- 4) West End Presbyterian Church (1993) Henrico
- 5) Grace Community Presbyterian Church (2005) Hanover
- 6) Spring Run Presbyterian Church (2006) Midlothian
- 7) City Church of Richmond (2007) Richmond
- 8) Sudan Christian Fellowship (2008) at WEPC
- 9) Evergreen Community Church (2009) Powhatan
- 10) Iglesia Hispana (2010) at WEPC
- 11) Ray of Hope Nepalese Fellowship (2011) at WEPC
- 12) Northside Church of Richmond (2011) Northside Richmond
- 13) Crown & Joy Presbyterian Church (2014) Southside Richmond
- 14) Iglesia Hispana (2016) at Sycamore
- 15) Church Hill Presbyterian (2019) East End Richmond
- 16) Frank Matthews, Hispanic Development Coordinator



Pray for increasing partnerships in church planting globally. SRPC's Missions Committee's network includes:

- 1) Barcelona Church Planting with Serge (Barcelona, Spain)
- 2) New Life Suwarta Sangat with Serge (Harrow, London, UK)
- 3) International Partnerships in cooperation with City to City (Ukraine)
- 4) Bangalore Presbyterian Church (Bangalore, India)
- 5) Equipping Leaders International (Malawi and Uganda and India)
- 6) Pastor and Church Planter Training with Mission to the World (Capetown, South Africa)