

## Approach to Church Planting

### *Table of Contents*

INTRODUCTION	1
1. THE THEOLOGICAL-MISSIOLOGICAL RATIONALE OF THE KINGDOM	3
2. THE CENTRALITY OF THE GOSPEL	6
3. CONTEXTUALIZATION FOR A "MISSIONARY ENCOUNTER"	6
4. THE STRATEGIC RATIONALE FOR PRIORITIZING SITES	7
5. IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY	8
Required Missiological Factors for Initiating a New Work	8
The Prioritization of Sites & the Allocation of WCPN Resources	8
The Identification of Sites	9
The Range of WCPN Resources for Church Planting	10
SUGGESTED READING	11

### *Introduction*

The WCPN tagline states the reason for our existence as "**Dreaming Dreams for the West.**" As we consider our approach to church planting it is important to flesh out more what those dreams are.

- We affirm that the church is central to God's redemptive purposes for the world. Through the church, God creates a "new humanity" that models the nature of the in-breaking kingdom of God for the world. Consequently, the health of the local church is foundationally important for the advance of the kingdom of God in world. This requires biblically faithful preaching and teaching, discipleship, counseling, educational, and other ministries within the local church.
- We affirm that churches have emphasized these critically important discipleship ministries in ways which have disconnected its nurture from its missional calling for the world. Consequently, "mission" has often been considered secondary or a sub-set of the church's calling. We affirm that discipleship and "nurture," to be faithful to the purpose of the church, must be done self-consciously within the broader missional calling of the church as the Body of Christ "sent" for the world as the Father has sent the Son.

- Therefore, we affirm that it is *insufficient* for our dreams to be focused merely on ecclesiastical extension—merely building the kingdom of the PCA in the West—as if our dreams will be realized if there is a PCA “flag” in every major city. Church planting has too often been focused on nothing more than institutional extension or to serve existing PCA members rather than as the establishment of new gospel-shaped missionary communities for the sake of the world.
- We affirm that the holistic nature of the gospel addresses the totality of the effects of the Fall, and our church ministries must reflect God’s concern for the world. Therefore, our dreams for the West are nothing short of seeing God’s kingdom realized in ever-increasing ways in the West as it is in heaven by seeing the gospel transform individuals, relationships, societies, and the cultures of our respective cities and regions. In this way, the church exists as a parable, pointer, and vanguard of the consummation—God’s future anticipated and exhibited (“already”) in the present time as it awaits the perfection of the final state (“not yet”). It seeks to make God’s invisible kingdom tangibly visible.

In sum, we believe that God works to bring renewal in the world primarily through the establishment, growth, and health of covenant communities that incarnate the gospel and hold out gospel hope to the issues of their context. This is not merely the presence of local churches *per se*, for it is possible for a local church institution to continue to exist in a location while failing to live out its calling and vocation in faithfulness to God’s kingdom mission. Rather, our dreams for the West entail the presence of churches which are clear about their reason for existence—to embody the nature of God’s kingdom and serve as agents of that kingdom to work for transformation of the broad range of sin’s effect in their context.

In order for these dreams to be realized, WCPN will work to establish “gospel of the kingdom”-focused churches throughout the region. What these churches look like in each case will be determined by their context, within the scope of our PCA polity. That is, intentional thought will be given to how a new church will address the brokenness, needs, and idols of its given context, gathering together a people who live out their allegiance to Christ in that context while creating missional ministries that address the brokenness, needs, and idols of the culture with the reality of Christ and His gospel.

Thus, **WCPN churches will be committed to:**

- **the mission of God’s kingdom in all its holistic breadth**
- **the centrality of the gospel**
- **critical contextualization<sup>1</sup> in order for the gospel to have a “missionary encounter” through the local church in its specific cultural context**

These commitments will require the consideration of a range of models for planting the church in any given location. WCPN is committed to identifying examples of different possible models for a given context.

Furthermore, WCPN will employ an approach that imitates the approach of the Apostle Paul by (1) giving primary focus to leading cultural, economic, and political centers within each region, and (2) encouraging the further extension of the gospel into the surrounding regions through the planting of daughter churches/sites in proximity to the mother church.

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<sup>1</sup> “Critical contextualization” is a term coined by Paul Hiebert to refer to appropriate forms of contextualization so that (a) the gospel is “at home” in any given culture while also (b) challenging the idols and sinful tendencies of the culture with the claims of Christ. Thus, “critical” contextualization seeks to avoid both the isolation that results from failing to contextualize (in reality, importing the applications of the gospel from a foreign culture) and syncretism.

WCPN will extend different levels of resources to different types of church planting sites:

- **“Principal Sites”**—The cultural, economic, and political centers of a given region will be identified. WCPN will place a high priority on understanding these sites, exert great care in recruiting an experienced church planter to target them, and commit the bulk of its financial resources toward enabling ministry to take hold and prosper by the Lord’s grace in these sites. There may be multiple Principal Sites within a major city or a single site in a smaller city that nevertheless exerts significant regional influence.
- **“Target Sites”**—Important sites to target for church planting based on a number of potential factors, but sites that do not carry the same cultural weight as the Principal Sites. WCPN will allocate available resources to Target Sites (a) when a qualified church planter is identified for them and (b) in such a way that it does not diminish our ability to target the Principal Sites.
- **“Extension Sites”**—Just as the gospel “rang out” to the surrounding areas from the principal locations where Paul went on his own missionary journeys (cf. 1 Thess 1:8), so we expect the same thing to happen in our day. While WCPN will take the primary lead in establishing works in Principal and Target sites, WCPN member churches will “fill in” a gospel presence by taking the lead in establishing Extension Sites within their proximity through the planting of daughter churches (or additional sites in a multi-site model). The primary way WCPN will resource these works is through coaching, consultation with the mother churches, and other non-financial factors.

The rest of this document seeks to unpack the rationale behind this summary and draw out implications for policy in order to achieve it.

## *1. The Theological-Missiological Rationale of the Kingdom*

Our understanding of the purpose for church planting must be grounded in the larger redemptive-historical themes of the Scriptures. As Reformed people, we readily find this grounding in the unfolding and interrelationship of a handful of biblical themes and their relationship with “the church.” These large, sweeping themes include:

- *missio Dei*
- kingdom of God
- covenant

***missio Dei (mission of God)***. The concept of *missio Dei* forces us to recognize that our mission, as the church (including church planting), finds its definition, meaning, purpose, and direction from God’s own mission. God’s mission is primary. It is derived from His very nature. God’s mission forms the church, and the church finds its life in being caught up in God’s mission for His glory. This has been the case throughout all of redemptive history, beginning with the creation of Adam and Eve in God’s image and their calling to walk with God and manifest the nature of His kingdom on earth through the Cultural Mandate, the calling of Abraham to be blessed and to see all the families of the earth blessed through him, the calling of Israel as a kingdom of priests and holy nation. All of these movements, of course, culminate in the incarnation and saving work of God Himself in Christ. But the story does not stop with Jesus’ earthly ministry, death, and resurrection. Jesus continues His mission through the church sent in the power of the Spirit. “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21). The *missio Dei* reminds the church that its very existence, let alone its specific ministries, is bound by the larger purposes of God’s mission. It is

“sent”—commissioned to a specific task. It is not free to substitute or reduce this task to a convenient or self-seeking subset of activities. It is not sufficient for the church to offer compelling religious programming in the competitive marketplace of religious services. This sending/commission calls the church to a ministry beyond itself for the sake of the world. It cannot be focused merely on institutional survival or extension. The goal of planting new churches is not to extend the institution of the church *per se*; it is to further participate and tangibly express God’s missional purposes for His creation.<sup>2</sup>

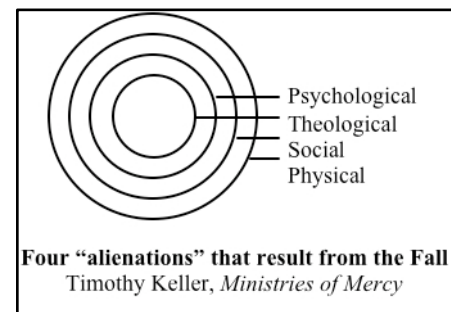
*Key Point: God is on mission, and He creates and calls the church up into His missionary purposes for His creation.*

**Kingdom of God.** In order to understand God’s mission, which defines all of God’s purposes for His creation, we must understand how the *missio Dei* relates to the kingdom of God. Simply put, God’s mission is to establish His kingdom on earth as it is in heaven for His own glory and for the good of all of creation. “Mission” relates to God’s purpose. “Kingdom” is its result.

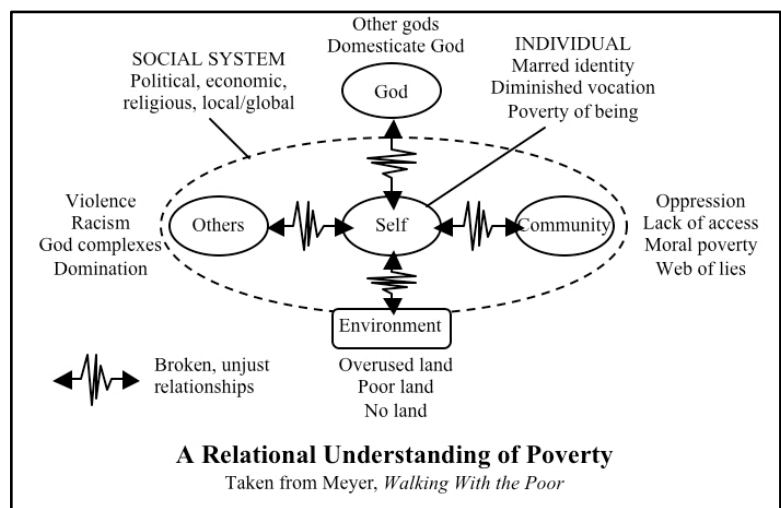
“Kingdom” is the organizing theme of the Bible and it has been understood in Reformed circles in terms of the progression of Creation—Fall—Redemption.

- God’s ideal world in creation reflected a cosmos in harmony with God. It was “very good.” Everything was as it ought to be—*shalom*.

- With the rebellion of our first parents and the entrance of sin into the creation, *shalom* was disrupted and guilt and corruption ensued. All of our relationships were severely damaged: with God, with ourselves, with others, and with the creation itself. Things are not the way they are supposed to be. (The figures on the right illustrate how two different authors have applied this concept to issues of mercy ministry in an attempt to draw out the holistic implications of the Fall.)



- Thankfully, God has not left us there; He graciously pursues His fallen creation. The Reformed Tradition has consistently stressed that “grace restores nature.” By this we mean that redemption is not some spiritual add-on to the creation; rather, it restores all that was lost in the Fall. Even if this is to a final state that is more glorious than the original creation, it is a renewal of all things to a consummated state of perfection. God’s redemptive purposes culminate in the sending of His Son to make all things new and extend the blessings of God’s reign “far as the curse is found” as



<sup>2</sup> For more on this theme, see John Flett (2010), Christopher Wright (2006), Craig Van Gelder (2000), Darrell Guder (1998), Georg Vicedom (1965). Full references are given in the Suggested Reading at the end of this document.

all things are brought together under one head, even Christ. The gospel is the solution, not only for the sin and guilt of individuals, but for everything that is wrong with the world. The gospel addresses those areas of corruption “already,” even if only in an anticipatory way—their fulfillment remains “not yet,” awaiting the return of Christ. Let there be no mistake though: God’s kingdom IS present, and it brings transformation through the blessings of the gospel in light of the already-reigning King of kings who sits enthroned in heaven with all authority in heaven and on earth. He has bound the strongman, and He is plundering the opposing kingdom, even now. The Future Age has broken into this Present Age. His kingdom is manifested in tangible ways even now as it awaits that future day.

In light of this, it is not sufficient to merely establish a new church institution where one did not previously exist. The church’s ministry—and the reason for starting new local churches—must be intentionally connected with God’s redemptive, kingdom purposes for His world. Johannes Verkuyl explains the significance of this kingdom perspective for the life and ministry of the church:

*What then is the kingdom? It is the creation which has achieved its goal. Chaos will be overcome, every antimessianic tendency will have been erased, and God’s liberating acts will have reached their final goal. The whole of the church’s deep and wide mission agenda must receive its focus and orientation in this kingdom perspective (Verkuyl 1979:168-169).<sup>3</sup>*

*Key Point: The “city” does not exist for the church, but the church for the city, and it is God’s means of making His invisible kingdom visible as it works for the transformation of all that is wrong in the community.*

**Covenant.** God administers His kingdom by means of covenant. Within the overarching Covenant of Grace that spans the time between the Fall and the Consummation, God enters into specific covenants given throughout redemptive-history in order to create a people in relationship with God and one another, form them in the reality of his kingdom as they live under His reign, and send them into the world for the sake of the world as ambassadors of His kingdom. This propulsion into the world for the sake of the world is even more explicit in after the resurrection. God’s people are a new humanity. Those in union with Christ by faith are united in a communion of the saints which is Christ’s Body. And as Jesus Himself was sent into the world to seek and save the lost, to pursue the sick and the broken, to offer the blessings of the kingdom in word and deed, so He sends His covenant people—the church—in the power of the Spirit to continue His ministry. Jesus has accomplished redemption. It is applied by the Spirit. But it is applied to more than individuals’ souls. God works in the world through the ministry of His people, commissioned and sent in the power of the Spirit. Andrew Kirk explains:

*God’s way of relating to his troubled world has been to seek out a community of people who will dedicate themselves to fulfilling his compassionate and liberating will for all, on behalf of all. The Bible uses the two words—‘covenant’ and ‘election’—to describe this action. God enters into a specific relationship with those he calls, entrusting them with the special responsibility of transmitting his word of salvation in Jesus Christ to all who will hear. Unfortunately, in the course of history, this relationship has been interpreted far too often as a special privilege or as a superior power, seducing the Church into imagining it has explicit rights and prerogatives within society (Kirk 2000:31).*

To be the church—God’s covenant people sent to continue Jesus’ mission in the power of the Spirit—is to be a community for others. Our desire in planting new churches is not

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<sup>3</sup> In addition to the sources cited under *missio Dei*, additional resources on the nature of the kingdom include Michael Williams (2005), Albert Wolters (2005), Bartholomew and Goheen (2004), Charles Van Engen (1993), Johannes Verkuyl (1979), Herman Ridderbos (1962), and Geerhardus Vos (1948).

merely to establish another “steeple” offering spiritual services to those affiliated with it— sound preaching and teaching, good friendships, discipleship opportunities, support, and encouragement. We trust all of those things will be present! In fact, a significant aspect of our missional calling is to embody the nature of the kingdom as an alternative community for a watching world. The health of the church and its people enable it to act as a “city on a hill,” demonstrating the healing and redemption that is available to the world. At the same time, it is critical that our churches realize the blessings they receive through the gospel and in the church cannot be kept to themselves if they are to be faithful to their Lord. They are also agents of the kingdom for the healing of the nations. We want to start new churches that will identify the areas of brokenness in a local community, call out a people for God from amongst that local context, form them for mission, and send them together and as scattered individuals and families for the sake of the broader city to the glory of God. This is how we understand what it means to be a “missional church.”<sup>4</sup>

*Key Point: New churches are “kingdom outposts” offering the holistic hope of the gospel for the spiritual, social, and cultural renewal of their cities, as well as for their own people.*

## 2. The Centrality of the Gospel

A proper understanding of the kingdom vision for the transformation of everything that is wrong with the world will leave us overwhelmed and crushed by our inability to begin to address the enormity of the task. Additionally, one could participate in this calling as a means of self-justification. Furthermore, it is all too easy to motivate people for participation through means of guilt, manipulation, or mere activism. WCPN churches recognize these tendencies, and turn to our only basis for standing before God and participating in His kingdom mission: the gospel.

The gospel will be our primary source of *motivation* for mission. It will be the primary source of *empowerment* for mission. And it will be the primary *means* by which the ministry advances. What God has done for us in Christ by grace and received by faith is the basis for our relationship with one another, is the paradigm for living in community,<sup>5</sup> and is the hope that we offer the world. It is the gospel that is the power of God for the transformation of individuals, communities, and cultures. Our churches will centrally emphasize the gospel in all we do.

## 3. Contextualization for a “Missionary Encounter”

The call to the church in every culture is to incarnate the gospel among the people of that culture in such a way that the gospel is “at home” there in the sense that it is not considered “foreign” (cf. Walls 1996:7-8). Furthermore, God is at work in every culture to extend his common grace for the common good. Many aspects of a culture are not intrinsically right or wrong; they are simply different expressions or approaches to ordering life. Culture is not, however, neutral. Because cultures are the collective creations of sinful

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<sup>4</sup> Properly understood, the term “missional” should not be necessary! All local churches should find their identity and calling from God’s kingdom mission. To add the modifier “missional” before “church” unfortunately acknowledges that not all churches base their self-understanding and vocation in this reality. WCPN is committed to plant churches that do not have a “missional axe to grind,” but who nonetheless are self-consciously intentional to understand their reason for being and all of their activity in terms of the *missio Dei*.

<sup>5</sup> Paul’s exhortations and imperatives for community life and relationships are grounded in the indicatives of the gospel. For example, “Forgive as the Lord forgave you” (Col 3:13), “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her...” (Eph 5:25), and countless others.

people, even when these people are Christian, every culture offers not only a structure for ordering life for the common good, but also is the corporate, communal expression of fallen humanity. Therefore, not only should the gospel be at home in every culture, there is an important sense in which the gospel is *never* at home in any culture (:8-9). These two principles are both essential aspects of the gospel, and they are in tension with one another.

Just as in his incarnation Jesus fully identified with humanity by being one of us and at the same time critiqued humanity by demonstrating a different kind of life, so too will the gospel always be calling the church in any culture to be different from the world around it, but it will do so in such a way that the church is not extracted from the culture, but rather expresses the gospel in appropriate cultural terms. Through this dynamic, the very presence of the church suggests an alternative way—a kingdom-shaped way—of living *within* the culture (Guder 1998:14; Shenk 1996:77). Thus, the church always must be “bicultural, conversant in the language and customs of the surrounding culture and living toward the language and ethics of the gospel” (Guder 1998:114). In so doing, the church will have a “missionary encounter” with its culture.

#### 4. *The Strategic Rationale for Prioritizing Sites*

The rationale for the prioritization of sites is based upon the biblical prioritization of cities for the mission of the church. It is already clear from the OT that the people of God were to build up Jerusalem and that the blessings of God were to flow through Jerusalem to the entire theocracy. When Jerusalem prospered, the nation prospered. Surprisingly, when Israel was carried into exile in Babylon they were not to cloister in order to maintain their identity as the people of God, but were to “work for the peace and prosperity of the pagan city” (Jer 29:6f). In other words, they were to engage and serve the city in every way. In fact, their prosperity was linked to the prosperity of the city. The pattern was not to fear and flee the city or to mine the city’s resources for their own sectarian purposes but to bring the resources of their unique relationship with God to serve and build up the city, as we have seen already from our exploration of the kingdom, above. As the city prospered so did the people of God and, by implication, the *missio Dei* to the world.

The importance of cities for the *missio Dei* gains even greater force as one moves from the OT to the NT. The book of Acts no longer focuses on a particular city (whether Jerusalem, Babylon, or any other particular pagan city), but now upon ALL the cities of the world. In fact, according to Acts, reaching the major cities (cultural centers) becomes crucial for reaching the world. So we see the Apostle Paul influenced by the Holy Spirit traveling to Athens (Acts 17), the intellectual capital of the Greco-Roman world; Corinth (Acts 18), the commercial capital of the empire; Ephesus (Acts 19), the religious center; and finally to Rome, the military and political capital of the world. John Stott concludes, “The book of Acts shows us that the gospel spread from radiating urban centers of influence at salient points throughout the Empire” (Stott 1990:293). But the question is, “Why”? Tim Keller, echoing Harvie Conn, provides an answer by speaking in terms of three urban crucialities (Keller 2009:6-7):

**1. Cultural Cruciality.** This is best summarized by the adage “Reach the city and you reach the countryside.” This is seen in Acts when Paul reaches specific individuals in the large urban centers who then evangelize other significant but smaller cities. In other words, reach the city and you reach the entire region. The opposite is not necessarily true. You may reach a particular countryside and fail to reach the cities or a region. “In the village, you might win the one or two lawyers to Christ, but if you wanted to win the legal profession, you need to go to the city where you have the law schools, the law journals

published, etc.” (ibid). This is all due to the critical cultural influences that cities exert on the rest of society.

**2. Global Cruciality.** The city is filled with people groups from all over the world. If you want to reach different nationalities at the same time, go to the city. Globalization, especially in the large cities, is more and more the reality. In most cases, the countryside is much more racially homogenous.

**3. Personal Cruciality.** The nature and demands of the city require people to be more interdependent and more open to change and therefore more open to the Gospel.

## *5. Implications for Policy*

### **Required Missiological Factors for Initiating a New Work**

The church planter will provide written rationale for why a new church is needed in a particular site on the basis of a site assessment/profile that takes into account:

- Demographic information, including the presence of other churches
- Identification of major areas of brokenness and need within the target community
- Personal observations and experiences in the target community addressing the need for a new church and what kind of church is needed for that site
- Identification of the typical idols that characterize the culture and ways in which the church will seek to embody an alternative lifestyle within the culture/community

The church planter will also articulate:

- An understanding of the church’s identity and calling in terms of joining in God’s mission to see His kingdom tangibly manifested in the community in a holistic manner
- Anticipated/preliminary ways in which the church will seek to address some range of the total holistic needs of the community with the redemption that flows from the gospel
- A philosophy of ministry in which the gospel and kingdom-prayer are central and people are equipped to be sent into the community to live all of life as kingdom ambassadors
- Clear commitments to mercy, justice, evangelism, and relationship priorities with the unchurched
- A commitment to indigenous expressions of church dynamics and practices

### **The Prioritization of Sites & the Allocation of WCPN Resources**

WCPN, through the work of its staff and Executive Committee, will prioritize recruitment, research, and funding for new works among Principal Sites. Site Profiles will be created for the Principal Sites (and as many of the Target Sites as possible), and prospective planters will be actively recruited for these sites.

All funding decisions will be decided upon on the basis of the “WCPN Church Planting & Funding Policy” with the understanding that prospective planters will be intentionally recruited and monies strategically set aside to be allocated to Principal Sites.

Even with these site priority distinctives, a readiness factor will also be considered. Because numerous variables come into play before a new work is actually begun (e.g. the prospective planter chooses another region, the funding doesn't come together, a prospective planter is not yet able to leave their current setting, etc.), WCPN will not wait on one particular site when another identified site is ready. This will prevent bottle-necking; therefore, under circumstances such as these, Target Sites may be funded before Principal Sites.

WCPN will not typically allocate financial resources to Extension Sites, entrusting the planting of churches for these sites to mother churches in the area.

WCPN support systems, however, will be allocated to assist in the planting of all types of sites within the network, regardless of whether or not the plant receives funding from WCPN (e.g., coaching, consultation with mother churches, concerted prayer, etc.).

## **The Identification of Sites**

WCPN will keep an official list of Strategic Cities in which Principal, Target, and Extension Sites are clearly designated. This list will guide the strategic planning and resource allocation for church planting.

All member churches are encouraged to consider potential sites for this list based on their understanding of their particular region, as well as the target geography of WCPN as a whole.

Any WCPN member church may make a motion to designate a Principal, Target, or Extension Site at any WCPN meeting, along with the rationale behind the suggestion. A site will be designated and placed on the Strategic Cities list on the basis of a simple majority vote.

The criteria for designating a site as a Principal Site should include at least the following:

1. Cultural Influence: Is this community a leading influence in the region?
2. Location: Does this community afford opportunities to plant other churches in surrounding areas? Is this community strategic for reaching a larger geographical area (e.g., a college community, cultural center, etc.)?
3. Population: Is there reasonable size and growth in the community to support another church?
4. Need: Is the community without an evangelical and Reformed church that is effectively reaching the area?<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> WCPN will take into account the Comity Agreement with other NAPARC member denominations by engaging in appropriate communication as appropriate when sites are selected. The presence of NAPARC member churches will be considered when making site selection, although, as stated above, missiological factors will be more important in selecting a site than church extension/parish issues.

## **The Range of WCPN Resources for Church Planting**

### **WCPN-Initiated Efforts:**

1. Recruiting: active recruitment of potential church planters for Principal and Target Sites
2. Fundraising: (1) through member contributions, (2) through interested individuals and churches throughout the country

### **WCPN Resources for Church Plants/Planters:<sup>7</sup>**

1. Coaching: conversations about the implementation of the church planting ministry
2. Shepherding: pastoral care and consistent prayer for the planter and his wife
3. Annual retreat: organization of the mandatory retreat for planters and their wives

### **WCPN Resources for WCPN Member Churches:**

1. Oversight/Reporting: feedback on the progress, issues, and activities of the network to member churches
2. Counsel: advice on the assessment of prospective daughter church planters for Extension Sites
3. Collaboration: sharing of perspective, best practices, and resources to encourage missional ministry and church planting

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<sup>7</sup> These resources are extended to all church plants who are members of the network regardless of whether or not they receive funding from WCPN.

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