

Christian Leadership 3 – Week 9

Strategies for Home Church Planting

Original paper by Dennis McCallum

I. THE NEED FOR PLANTING STRATEGIES

Do HCs just “happen”? Do we as leaders just go about our own basic front line work – evang & discipleship & out pops a plant somewhere down the road?

Nobody knows how house churches multiplied within a city in New Testament times, but they must have done so. [probably didn't have min charts – yet likely at least thought in those terms] This is because no church buildings or references to church buildings have been found dating from the apostolic period [the earliest identified building, built to hold a church, was in Dura Europus Syria - ~235 AD]. BUT HOW GO FROM 1 TO 2 HCs? or 2 to 3?

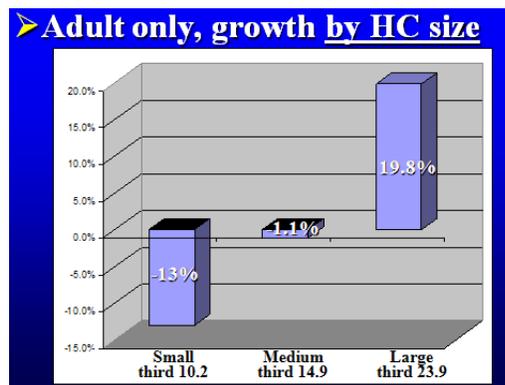
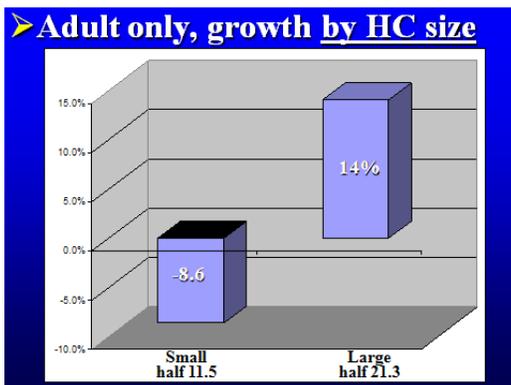
Instead, we find frequent references to house churches (Rom. 16:3; 1 Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15; Philemon 1-2; Acts 2:46; 5:42; Acts 20:20), usually in conjunction with public space (like the schoolroom of Tyrannus, Acts 19:9).

The natural limitation on group size imposed by meeting in houses is conducive to several features of vibrant church life envisioned in the New Testament.

Staying in homes would dictate that Home Churches remain relatively small, which would facilitate body life and real community.

For us, naturally, in all of these, making sure you have a place to hold & grow the new home church is key.

Let's look at four approaches to planting a home church.



II. GENERAL APPROACHES TO PLANTING

[4 different types]

A. The Conventional Method

1. Definition and Theory

In this method, the leadership, teachers, and workers of the home church are divided as evenly as possible, hopefully along existing lines of influence in the home church.

For instance, if you have two couples leading together, each couple takes their disciples and related friends, groups, ministry houses, and guests, and adds new leadership as needed before parting ways.

This model promotes equality between the groups in terms of experience.

The results have, so far, been good.

In adult ministry, this is probably the most common method; I think that is going to change though.

2. **Preparation** (most of these if not all, apply to all plant approaches)

Must think ahead before planting cells which you should do along plant lines.

To even recognize the potential for a conventional plant (any plant really) you must have a strong discipling network. We need to see people growing in their ministry to one another. This part of the Great Commission must never be compromised.

The next leaders need to be prayerfully discerned as soon as possible. Sometimes you have a good idea of who they are even before the present plant. This takes substantial prayer & often times counsel. It requires having a vision for where a person would be if the Lord has His way w/ them.

An inordinate focus on their sins – commission & omission – will stifle vision & pro-active discipleship.

Get them into leaders meetings as soon as you are fairly certain

Communicate that this is not a guarantee that they will lead

Help them process how to appropriate the Spirit's power to embrace the additional sacrifices leaders make.

Leaders need to be discipling the next leaders. Occasionally we find groups where leaders are looking to someone to lead on the plant, but no leader is discipling that person. I'm not sure how they'd develop apart from that.

Home church leaders could suffer major disruption of long-standing relationships with conventional plants. While we must be the most willing to sacrifice in this manner, we also need to be careful (EG. my experience planting off the Fojas'). In-depth relationships and spiritual community support are just as important for leaders as for non-leaders.

To avoid such hazards, leaders in a conventional church plant should plan ahead carefully. The leaders need to build deeply into relationships with others (usually those they are discipling) who will accompany them in the new church, because they won't have their former fellow-leaders with them anymore.

Normally, both sides would recognize new home church leaders only when they are ready to plant in order to keep the focus on home church planting.

Exceptions would include spouses, where one spouse is a leader and the other is not, or a clear need for more home church leaders in the current home church.

You should see that there is sufficient evangelism & discipleship going on on both sides of the plant before you send them off.

Once we have a likely plant plan, I start keeping stats for each half of the plant at least a year in advance. It helps me see what any given night would look like for both sides of the plant if

we had planted. Sometimes we feel real big – mid 30's – but see that 22 from one side & the other only 13.

3. Transition

After the leaders decide how they will plant, be sure everyone decides which side they will attend before the actual plant to avoid a lopsided division or “church-tasting.”

- We think people should be taught that an important basis for deciding where to go is where they can be used by God the most – that is, where they are needed.
- Other criteria could include relational history and ministry investment.

Remember, however, we can't replicate churches and at the same time stay with everything and everyone with whom we have invested.

In cases where ministry spheres are clearly defined b/c of consistent attention to discipleship throughout the cycle, most will decide based on the relationships. A leader in this situation can predict very closely where people will decide.

Leadership teams I've led with usually handle this by:

- i. 1st deciding how the leaders will plant (one of these 4 approaches)
- ii. Then privately asking the people they are in discipling relationships with: “We are going to plant the church with leaders going this & that way. Based on that, please pray about what side of the plant you'd decide to be on & get back to me. From that information you'll know where close to half, if not more, of the HC is going.
- iii. Then put that up on a white board in a worker meeting - and present the plan as you see it & the commitments so far.
- iv. Ask the remaining people to review that & let the leadership know what side you'd like to be on.

Let them know that on the one hand you won't tell anyone where they have to go – on the other hand you may try to persuade them differently if you believe the other side would benefit from their presence (EG. Bosekers).

Normally, the church plant should be known to all for months in advance, if not a year or more. But we should never try to compel people to go to a particular home church against their will.

Today, Xenos requires a senior leader be named for new home churches. Your sphere leader & sphere team will help you decide who this should be for both groups.

B. The Mission Planting Model

1. Definition and Theory

In the Mission Planting Church model, the leaders of the original home church stay together, while sending out an all-new leadership team with their own home church.

A little riskier b/c of the less experience.

In theory this model has much to commend it, because the new leaders get the opportunity to take the next step in ministry maturity—taking responsibility for their own home church.

Yet the potential to form a whole new team who gradually learns to unify around one purpose is a powerful replication. [I loved it; it was how Dennis sent Furnos, Abrams, & us out] Our first! I love them. A greater sense of adventure; at least for me drives me to my knees a little more quickly (b/c they were shaking so badly!!! – tell story).

This experience sometimes bears out the theory that some people won't learn to swim until the water gets too deep for wading.

On the other hand, be sure the new leaders actually have the ministry power to do the job. The mission model results in a somewhat higher proportion of failures, so try to be sure the new leaders are ready.

Also, the new church should plan on remaining in a mentoring relationship with the parent church for a period of months (3 to 6 months or more is typical). The parent church, in consultation with their oversight leaders, should decide when they are no longer needed.

Finally, if the mission church looks shaky, sphere leaders may call on the planting church to "warrant" the new plant (agree to take them back in, in total if failed). So planting a failing church is a major waste of time and effort.

2. Preparation

The size of the mission church should be *more than* adequate.

Try to build a "church within a church" ASAP

The new leadership should have been sitting in on leader's meetings for at least a period of months learning how to lead a home church, how to think about ministry, and how to relate to other leaders.

Stay w/ them afterward – having combined leaders meetings every few months for a period of time – maybe 1/month or ev other. Stay in relational contact.

3. Building Composition

Adequate evangelistic and discipleship potential must be sent out with the new leaders (this is true of any planting model). Their sphere of ministry should show ability to attract and win new people, and to counsel, teach, and disciple the old.

It requires learning to appreciate one another's gifts & talents & temperaments.

Potential upcoming leaders should be present in both churches. The ideal scenario is to have potential leaders present in each cell. These should be known and agreed on by all.

If there are risks, the original team should be the more willing to absorb them (EG. size of the 2 churches).

The new home church should also take some fringe people, but should not be saddled with too many problem people.

The assumption is that the parent home church leaders will be able to rebuild even after suffering heavy personnel loss. Normally, the formation and respecting of ministry spheres will automatically lead to these results.

C. Cooperative Planting

1. Definition and Theory

This is when two or more HC's cooperate to plant an additional church. The most common is when 2 HCs each send off a couple of leaders w/ the pod of folk they disciple & these two pods come together to form a HC.

Remember our discovery of healthy HCs and their size? This must be taken into account – what will the size of each group be (attending) after the plants *and* can the house hold them?

COOP PLANTS → GET 2 GROUPS UP TO 30 – PULL 10 O.O. EACH w/ a couple to lead – NEED A HOUSE JUST FOR 20-30

Very common among college groups but not as much with adult.

My thoughts on why: as get older, less flexible; as get older tend to want to take fewer risks & as a result the mission is less our driver than our comfort in relationships.

I believe cooperative plants test our mettle on whether His mission is 1st & foremost in our hearts b/c of the less relational connection. Must trust that unity *really IS* based on His Spirit & being “intent on one purpose”. Challenges the world’s definition of closeness being “natural affinity.” That’s nice when there, but is not the basis of our love & unity according to the bible

2. Procedure

- a. The sphere leadership should be approached first with a *proposal*, or with a *request* for help. The home church leaders must demonstrate **1)** real need or opportunity, **2)** that the people they propose to send include good workers and members, and **3)** that only a reasonable number of marginally involved people are being sent to join the new group.
- b. Bad news when have to veto a bad plant plan when weren’t consulted
- c. Your sphere leadership will undertake a search for a suitable home church before that home church’s leaders are approached. This is to prevent friction between home churches as well as wasted time.

It is not our policy to have home churches canvassing the fellowship for “three for two” arrangements, as this would waste much time, and cause unnecessary stress on the part of home church leaders.

Besides, one home church is rarely in a position to assess what is happening in another, still less the overall needs of the fellowship.

- d. If the sphere leadership finds a possible home church partner, they will ask the other group if they are interested. If the proposed partner church is interested, negotiations can begin.
- e. The sphere leadership should be informed of the outcome of the negotiations or they may be involved.
- f. When everyone agrees, the workers and members of the home churches should be approached. All who join the planting attempt must agree freely to go. Leaders should avoid compelling people to go on the planting attempt. We may plead and persuade, but not pressure.
- g. Before the plant, make sure the people from both sides who will be in the new group meet with each other socially and in other ways, so the first meeting of the new church is not the first time they meet each other. Try to build community before going out.

D. Planting From Scratch

A. Definition and Theory

This usually comes from a bush group expanding into a HC (EG: K2 in Den’s sphere – had a bush group going – as they won people, some workers were sent from another HC & they became a HC!)

I’d love to see an Int’l bush group in our HC turn into this! Mayners are trying to get a bush group going in their n’hood – would love to see the Lord do His thing through that, too.

B. Procedure

Usually win someone who is a big bridge – tell them to invite their friends & get something going!

Must keep this vision alive & focused.

How you make a decision whether to transition a bush group into a home church &/or when to do so comes from applying the other principles of having a healthy HC. We looked at various evaluation tools several weeks ago – you’d want to see that bush group having grown into a healthy HC by those parameters before “ordaining it” a full-fledged HC.

III. PREPARING TO PLANT

A. Deciding on a Church Planting Model

Who makes the decision about which model to follow?

This decision is made by the home church leaders *in consultation with* sphere leaders. The church’s policy is to extend freedom of choice to home church leaders in this area, provided that reasonable requirements for survival of both new churches are present. Also, the option being chosen should not cause excessive delays in planting.

First, determine whether the original leaders want to continue working together.

If one or more leaders prefer the challenge of starting a new home church with their own disciples, they are allowed to, given the same provisions as above (including approval from the sphere leaders).

Even in cases where the leaders of a given home church are unable to agree, this basic right of the worker to stay with his/her work remains with few exceptions EG: Merk wanted Walkers to stay w/ them instead of Mission plant → I deferred based on this principle; I didn’t think God’s hands were tied if it didn’t come down as I wanted)._

(escape clause – it allows you to plant out with your disciples instead of have to stay with your coleaders.

It should be obvious that if you intend to plant a Mission Church, or a cooperative plant “three for two” home church, the new leaders must also be willing to play their part.

However, the decision for how to plant should be made by the home church leaders and sphere leadership, not by potential leaders or members.

It would definitely be erroneous to put the decision up for a vote in the home church, because the result would be confusion and dissension. Instead, the leaders should arrive at a solid defensible position in agreement & consul with sphere leader, and then present it to the opinion leaders in the group, and finally to the whole church with full persuasion.

B. Assembling a New Home Church Leadership Team

Types of composition to avoid:

The all-passive leadership.

The all-aggressive leadership is much less common, but no less problematic than the all-passive.

Need an agitator – s.o. who regularly thinks about the mission of the HC & willing to speak up; can be learned.

Other factors that need to be checked for balance are:

- [GIFTING not in original: PELT – pastoral, evangelism, leadership, teaching; it is ideal if there is someone gifted in leadership on each side of the plant – in fact in our present case, we are sending one couple off w/ the plant just b/c the guy is gifted in leadership. I would LOVE to work with him as a fellow-leader through another cycle, but it would be selfish. We'd have a powerful leadership team & the other side would have experience & great relationships, wisdom & discernment. But they'd be missing a gifted leader.

THAT SAID – do not hear me saying you HAVE to have the gift of leadership present on every leadership team for a group to succeed in the Great Commission; the Lord's hands are not tied to our gift composition. We'd have to absorb quite a few good leadership teams and their HCs if that were the case.

- All w/ active evang & discipleship ministry
- All w/ high quality personal time w/ the Lord in prayer & Word (beyond teaching prep)
- Subjective vs. objective leaders.
- Male vs. female strength.
- Make sure leaders-to-be are good givers
- If married – should be raising both up almost w/o exception. Maybe after years & years of working on it the one spouse is recalcitrant – I can see that as long as there is no sign of resentment nor holding them back.
- Leaders who are “stay at home” or are depth-oriented (tribal) in their relating, vs. those who tend to enjoy outreach and new relationships (diffuse).
- Leaders and members strong in evangelism, vs. those strong in pastoring and discipleship.

(Note: Many of these factors will automatically be balanced if the aggressive-passive balance is present.)

In addition:

Some of the proposed new home church leaders may not qualify in the opinion of the sphere leadership at the time planned. Make sure they qualify well in advance of the proposed date for planting. Leaders require the character requirements for a deacon in 1 Tim. 3.

Marriages and likely marriages will have to be considered, especially if they involve leaders. Sphere leaders will resist plans to establish only one spouse as a servant team member, or home church leader, because of the very poor record of such arrangements in the past.

Timing

When the home church is already at a size that calls for a planting attempt soon, we have to weigh the dangers of poor leadership composition against those of overcrowding, zero growth, and demoralization if we wait until we are able to provide leaders of both types. We are always right to wait for planting if leaders lack biblical character qualities.

[I've become more picky on this front & quality personal time w/ God in His Word & prayer → have made mistakes by ignoring character problems w/ppl who are also very active in ministry → can't think of a time it has turned out well].

Overplanting is also a proven danger – groups are impatient to plant, and move forward without adequate size or leadership quality.

Also, leaders should consider the time of year when planning home church planting attempt. Certain times of the year are better than others. The most questionable times are late November and December, and spring. The best times are late summer/early fall and early winter after the holidays [our most frequent]. Spring might be tough [unless solid plans to actively engage the lost – corporate events & clear evidence of many ppl investing in & witnessing to the lost]

Consult the past history of your own group to discover if your group doesn't fit these norms.

C. Time Needed to Plant a Church

We doubt that very many can be adequate home church leaders in the modern western setting when less than three years old in the Lord. In rare cases, we are prepared to bring in one team member who may be as young as two years in the Lord (e.g. a spouse of an older believer). Most Christians will need over four years of rapid spiritual growth, learning, & experience before they will be ready.

This position does not square well with the example of Paul, who apparently regularly installed leaders who were younger than three years, and sometimes less than two years. However, Paul may have been drawing from a base of mature believing Jews and God-fearing Gentiles. The same is sometimes true today when true Christians transfer in from other churches.

Another limiting factor in our culture is the sophistication of fortifications raised up against the knowledge of Christ in the modern west. Also, the failure of family in the west and widespread drug use and sexual immorality are factors that leave young people often needing more time to grow before leading.

~~Student home churches should plan on 2 years, or even longer for their first church.~~

IV. COMMON OBSTACLES

The object of a plan and process of planting, moving from one meeting to two meetings, is to be edifying and motivating. With adequate preparation, you can usually avoid any of the likely problems, and make planting a time of high excitement and vision.

A. Lack of understanding

The members don't understand the reasons for, or the importance of, church planting. You should tackle this problem well in advance through a process of careful instruction. [and regularly resurface this in HC, cells, & discipleship; we make certain every Worker Meeting topic is somehow explicitly tied into God's mission to grow & plant us] Ideally, the group has seen planting as its goal since the time of the last plant.

We should explain that, "In this fellowship, we use the strategy of home church planting, in much the same way as the New Testament Church did, and it has had striking success..." There is a logistical issue that can't be ignored & you need to point out or ask, "What will happen to the size of our HC if the Lord fulfills the Great Commission through us?"

Point out that the home church's prayers to God (that he would grant growth) have been answered. Comment that, "We are excited to realize that the job we embarked on three (?) years ago has finally been completed!"

Argue that the most exciting part of home church growth is now at hand—an opportunity for new workers to step forward and fulfill their role in the Body of Christ.

You may want to warn against an antigrowth mentality that might come from seeking its own comfort as a higher priority than effectively reaching the lost – which would be hampered by not planting.

Explain the various components of the planting effort, remembering how foreign some aspects might seem to those who are not accustomed to growth through home church replication.

Explain the advance of the church in light of the biblical concept of spiritual warfare. Point out the high stakes in the war.

B. Disturbing supportive relationships

If you have built clear ministry spheres through solid discipleship, this problem should be at a minimum.

First, the two home churches are not moving to separate cities, so they will be able to see friends from the other side as often as desired. Weekly they will see them in Central Teaching, as well as classes and other activities.

The adjustment will be easier than they think. Those who have been involved in church planting are able to point out that they were expecting to be depressed etc...

It is reasonable and appropriate to suffering loss for the sake of the gospel. If Paul had never left some friends, we probably would not be believers today, etc.

Also, both partner groups in a plant should continue to pray for the other group.

C. Adjusting to smaller meetings with less outreach

Members may have trouble adjusting to a new meeting place and/or the suddenly small home church meetings.

Simply warn people in cell groups, worker's meeting and/or home church that the smaller meetings will call for a higher level of involvement.

The amount of outreach in each of the new home churches may be reduced after division for the simple reason that there are only half as many people actively witnessing. You want to see both halves of the church investing substantially in the lost in their lives & witnessing to them before planting. Try to have the new home church hit the ground running, and be sure early opportunities for follow-up are not wasted.

Invite friends, "We're starting a new home bible study next week..."

V. THE HARVEST MEETING

Plan to use the last meeting of the combined home church as a special "Harvest Meeting."

A good way to do this is to combine a short talk by a teacher with several testimonies: Convert, Worker that caught fire, ['gem of God' – someone who was radically transformed by Him during this cycle], maybe someone who feared the last plant

e.g. "This home church began eleven years ago with fewer than thirty people. Now, there are nine home churches with over 400 people involved. Over 2/3 of the 370 new people are people converted through the home church!

If we do no more than continue at the same rate, in eleven years from now this home church family will have 133 home churches with 5,320 people and over 3000 new Christians!"

Home church leaders should generously praise the members for the tremendous job they did in the previous home church.

And stress the necessity of every member of the Body contributing their share if this goal is to be reached (Eph. 4:15-16). The home church leaders should communicate that they really believe in the idea of a replicating church planting movement and that they cannot make it without the workers.

Remind them that Satan prefers this time for attack. Point out the most likely areas where vigilance is needed.

Point out that the church planting attempt includes risks, and may fail. Point out that if it does fail, you will reunite and try again. (See below on failure)

You should verbally recognize the new leaders at this time:

Give a suitable presentation on the nature of leadership aimed to teach new people why aspiring to home church leadership is a good thing. Texts such as Mk. 10:40-44 and John 10:1-15 are very suitable here.

Young believers will hopefully conclude that they too are called to serve and later be recognized as leaders.

Call on members to show respect for the new leaders just as they did for the old ones. Paul consistently did this (1 Cor.16:15-16 & parallels).

Some groups lay hands on the new leaders and pray for them at this time. [ME: I was shaking head to toe when Den/Holly put hands on Chris & I]

VI. FAILURE IN CHURCH PLANTING

Regardless of how much we prepare, home church planting always contains the risk of failure. This is a reasonable risk, and if you handle it in a godly way, failure will do little or no harm. [one in last 2 years – lose people when do no matter how hard try...]

A. Attitudes

The first thing to realize is that failure is not the end of the world. Any time Christian workers go out to work, they must realize that failure is a distinct possibility. However, the grace of God enables us to face failure with courage and humility. Anyone who is too ego-involved or legalistic to risk having to admit failure is ill-suited to Christian work. To take our ID from the fruit is to walk on sacred ground – He alone bears the fruit & He alone gets the glory.

If our members have a naive mentality in this area we should speak to it early on...

Discontinuing an unfruitful group should be viewed as a good way to renew morale and gain confidence through reorganization and retooling. It is sometimes the shortest path to fruitfulness.

In cases of failure, the leadership should point out certain truths to the work force of both home churches:

God has not been unfaithful, nor has anything unusual or catastrophic occurred. Instead, they need to understand that a Christian ministry project was attempted and it failed. Anyone who has ever tried to witness and had their message rejected should be able to understand failure in ministry.

We have no promise in Scripture of perpetual success, only eventual victory.

Further, the home church will now be called on to bend to the task of ministry and eventually to try again!

The immature may have certain negative tendencies that need to be countered by the mature. [We've seen groups, even leaders, blame others – the leaders that planted them 'they never prepared me'; the sphere leaders 'they should have never approved this']

Failure could lead to a sense of guilt and failure that is unacceptable to the ego-involved and the legalistic mentality.

Therefore, they will seek ways of shifting the burden of blame and guilt off self, and onto others. Leaders will often discover feelings of hate and recriminations at such a time, and should be prepared to counsel and teach the young a true attitude of Christian grace.

Don't underestimate the extent of temptation in this area and hence relax vigilance, giving opportunity to the devil.

The leaders of failed home churches are particularly vulnerable to accusation at this time.

B. Recovery

Who determines when a church has failed?

The fact that a failure has occurred should be determined by the sphere leader.

[Patch: I am VERY hesitant to dissolve groups – I tracked 9 dissolved HCs over a 4 year period. I tracked every member by name. There were 174 members at time of dissolution – only 82 of them made it into a home church after dissolution – less than ½. The evil one plucked 92 of them – ya, some may have found other churches than Xenos, but we don't know that. This is why I FAR prefer combining a group that is chronically struggling, not dissolving.]

We should never jump to the conclusion that a church has failed when it is only being tested and sifted. Such temporary reversals are to be expected as a normal feature of Christian work. Unless we teach members to expect this beforehand, the work force of struggling home churches will tend to lose their composure during times of adversity. Avoid hysteria.

In this fellowship, we have a safety net of other home churches to fall back on in time of distress.

Recombination of home churches has proven to be an effective answer to the problem of failed home churches.

When failure occurs, we have a safety net of other home churches. The sending, or sister, home church is usually responsible to help the failed church through recombination or other acceptable means.

In some cases, leadership may call for recombination with a home church other than the sister or sending home church in order to better serve the strategic needs of the moment and/or to avoid problems. This is especially likely if the plant happened many years earlier.

In most situations, the leaders will need to step down from leadership (but not from the Servant Team) at the time of recombination. This is necessary in order to prevent proliferation of leaders without proliferation of home churches. Every leader should be willing to forsake the title of home church leader if necessary for the benefit of the home church.

Transfers are good work!! Should be the default bias of HCs to take 'em in. Taking in transfer paper [HANDOUT].

Perhaps related to some failures: wrong perspective about taking in transfers. Transfers are good work!! Should be the default bias of HCs to take 'em in. Taking in transfer paper [HANDOUT].

CONCLUSION

The multiplication of home churches poses a mortal threat to the kingdom of Satan. No one knows this better than the enemy himself. Yet, in spite of the most vicious counterattacks, the church should be able to continue to advance by the grace and power of God if prayerful planning and sound principles animate their actions.