



Mennonite
Mission
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The mission agency of
Mennonite Church USA

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Missio Dei

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No purse, no bag, no sandals

A profile of Mennonite
church planters, 1990-2005

Conrad L. Kanagy



Series editor
James R. Krabill

Missio Dei is published by Mennonite Mission Network to invite reflection and dialogue about God's mission in today's world. Some features in the series focus primarily on the biblical and theological foundations of the mission task. Others present ministry case studies or personal stories of attempts to be faithful to Christ's call. Perspectives represented reflect the passion and commitment of the agency: to declare in word and demonstrate in life the whole gospel of Jesus Christ, "across the street, all through the marketplaces, and around the world."

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Mennonite Mission Network, the mission agency of Mennonite Church USA, exists to lead, mobilize and equip the church to participate in holistic witness to Jesus Christ in a broken world. With offices in Elkhart, Ind.; Newton, Kan.; and Harrisonburg, Va.; the Mission Network supports ministries in more than 55 countries and 31 U.S. states.

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A profile of Mennonite church planters, 1990-2005

Conrad L. Kanagy

Introduction

In 2005, the church-planting team of Mennonite Mission Network initiated a study of Mennonite church planters. Led by staff member Karl McKinney and Arthur McPhee, associate professor of Intercultural Studies at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary (Elkhart, Ind.), the goal of the original project was to document the experiences of Mennonite church planters, identifying variables that affected success or failure.

The departure of both McKinney and McPhee from their respective roles with Mission Network and AMBS eventually resulted in a partnership with Lancaster Mennonite Conference to complete the project, directed by Conrad L. Kanagy and managed by Laura Livengood. Other partners included Virginia Mennonite Missions and Eastern Mennonite Missions.

Expected outcomes of the revised project included:

- Discovering effective and innovative church-planting practices.
- Identifying church-planting resourcing deficits.
- Understanding how Anabaptist identity, theology and Mennonite affiliation impact new congregations.
- Assessing whether new congregations (1) made new disciples and/or (2) provided an alternative for transplanted Mennonites and other Christians.
- Developing practices to enhance making new disciples.
- Collaborating efforts of national, area conference, and cluster/district personnel.

- Building bridges between the church-planting experiences of mainstream and marginal Mennonites.

A survey—including in-depth interviews—of church planters was one component of the overall project. The report found in the following pages of this booklet attempts to summarize the findings of the survey with the expectation that they will contribute to the continued development of the outcomes identified above.

The term “church planting” typically refers to initiatives to develop new congregations, fellowships, or house churches/simple churches. The language of church planting has been critiqued by some as too agrarian and less relevant than other labels for new church starts or emerging communities of faith. For purposes of this study, however, the terms of church plant, church planting, and church planter will be utilized as a concession to the familiar, even while recognizing that the label stands for many varieties of new and emerging churches.

Time line and methodology

In 2005–06, the church-planting team of Mennonite Mission Network created and received feedback on a church-planter survey and interview questionnaire. The team also requested the names and contact information of church planters from area conferences across Mennonite Church USA. In 2007, Conrad Kanagy and Laura Livengood revised both instruments (survey and interview) and once again requested information about church planters from MC USA area conferences.

People from across the denomination were then enlisted to assist in pre-testing the survey instrument. These included Joe Rosa (Lancaster Conference), Karl Landis (Lancaster Conference), Josef Berthold (Lancaster Conference), Lena Brown (Lancaster Conference), David Boshart (Central Plains District), Dean Heisey (Mennonite Mission Network), Walter Sawatzky (Eastern Mennonite Missions), Ed Bontrager (Virginia Mennonite Missions), and Jeff Wright (Pacific Southwest Conference).

In August 2007, 143 English-language questionnaires and 44 Spanish questionnaires were sent out with a \$5 incentive to return them. Two follow-up post card reminders were also mailed that month. The following month, yet another round of questionnaires was mailed to non-respondents. From September to December, 22

church-planter interviews were conducted by phone, each 30–60 minutes in length.

The sampling was non-probability, meaning that the names of church planters were gathered through means other than random selection from a database of Mennonite church planters, since no such list existed at the time. The non-probability techniques of this study are often referred to as “snowball” or “purposive” sampling, in which the researcher relies upon others—in this case, church planters and area conference leaders among others—to suggest possible names. While every effort was made to develop an exhaustive list of Mennonite church planters, it is likely that some were missed in the process.² The final list of church planters represented 187 people.

The design of the survey instrument was based on questions developed by Mennonite Mission Network staff in 2005-06, questions from the Mennonite Member Profile 2006,³ new questions constructed by Conrad Kanagy, and questions adapted from a study of church planters by Ed Stetzer and Phillip Connor.⁴ As indicated earlier, substantial pre-testing of the instrument also occurred.

Of the 187 questionnaires distributed by mail, 19 were returned from people who either were not church planters or did not fit the criteria outlined above. Forty-three individuals either did not return a survey or refused to participate. Five surveys were returned for invalid addresses. This led to an adjusted response rate of 74 percent—a rate substantially high for a mail survey.

Survey respondents represented 18 Mennonite Church USA area conferences. They are listed alphabetically here, followed by the percentage they each represent of total survey participants:⁵ Allegheny (4), Atlantic Coast (3), Central District (3), Central Plains (3), Eastern District (2), Franconia (7), Gulf States (1), Illinois (5), Lancaster (25), Mountain States (1), New York (2), Ohio (4), Pacific Northwest (4), Pacific Southwest (5), South Central (8), Southeast (5), Virginia (12) and Western District (6).

The term “church planting” typically refers to initiatives to develop new congregations, fellowships, or house churches/ simple churches.

In addition to these surveys, Conrad Kanagy and Laura Livengood also conducted 22 interviews with church planters. Of the 22 interviewees, 21 had participated in the survey. Forty-five percent of those interviewed were from the eastern United States, 23 percent from the Midwest, 5 percent from the South, and 23 percent from the West.⁶ A summary of the interview findings is available upon request from Mennonite Mission Network.

Those interviewed represented 12 Mennonite Church USA area conferences. They are listed here alphabetically, followed in each case by the percentage they represent of total interview participants: Allegheny (9), Atlantic Coast (9), Central District (9), Central Plains (5), Illinois (5), Lancaster (23), New York (5), Ohio (9), Pacific Northwest (9), Pacific Southwest (9), South Central (5) and Southeast (5).

Other demographic information of the interviewees and survey respondents includes:

		Survey %	Interview %
Gender	Male	88	95
	Female	13	5
Age	30-39	15	9
	40-49	23	36
	50-59	41	45
	60-69	21	9
Race/Ethnicity	White/Caucasian	57	59
	Latino/Hispanic	22	14
	African American/Black	9	9
	Asian or Pacific Islander	8	14
	Other	3	5

Survey findings

The following report summarizes the quantitative data collected through the survey of 120 church planters and is outlined according to the four sections of the questionnaire: (1) demographic information; (2) the call to church planting; (3) planting the church; and (4) theology and practice. The report concludes with the author's reflections on some of the implications of the findings.

1. Demographics

Several demographic generalizations from the survey include:

- A large proportion of Mennonite church planters are Racial/Ethnic.
- Church planters are highly educated and a majority have some Mennonite education.
- Mennonite church planters are predominantly male and nearly all are married.
- More than one-half of the planters were baptized in a congregation that was not Mennonite, and nearly two-thirds have been members of an “other than Mennonite” church.

The average age of the 120 church planters in the profile was 51 years, with the highest proportion of planters (38 percent) between the ages of 46–55 years. Nine percent were between the ages of 26–35, 19 percent between 36–45, 26 percent between 56–65, and 8 percent over the age of 65 years. Only 28 percent of the planters were 45 years of age or younger.

Table 1

Age of church planters

26–35	9%
36–45	19%
46–55	38%
56–65	26%
65+	8%

Respondents were asked to indicate their race and ethnicity, checking all that applied from a list of six possible choices plus “Other.” Forty-four percent of the church planters were Racial/Ethnic and 57 percent were Anglo.⁷ Of the total, nine percent were African American/Black, 8 percent were Asian or Pacific Islander, 2 percent were American Indian/Native American, 22 percent were Latino/Hispanic, and 3 percent were Mixed Racial/Ethnic or Other. Nearly 88 percent of the planters were male and 13 percent were female, and almost all were married (96 percent).

Table 2

Race and ethnicity of respondents

Anglo	57%
Latino/Hispanic	22%
African American/Black	9%
Asian or Pacific Islander	8%
Mixed Racial/Ethnic or Other	3%
American Indian/Native American	2%

Forty-nine percent of Mennonite church planters were baptized in a Mennonite congregation, with 51 percent baptized in an “other than Mennonite” denomination. Ten percent were baptized in mainline denominations, 22 percent in evangelical/fundamentalist denominations, 9 percent in charismatic/Pentecostal denominations, 4 percent in other Anabaptist denominations, 4 percent as Roman Catholics, and 4 percent in other denominations.

Table 3

Denomination originally baptized in

Mennonite	49%
Evangelical/Fundamentalist	22%
Mainline	10%
Charismatic/Pentecostal	9%
Roman Catholic	4%
Other	4%
Other Anabaptist	4%

Sixty percent of church planters in the sample have been members of an “other than Mennonite” denomination at some point in their lives, again with the following distribution: 40 percent in evangelical/fundamentalist denominations, 27 percent in charismatic/Pentecostal denominations, 16 percent in mainline denominations, 10 percent in

other Anabaptist denominations, 4 percent other denominations, and 3 percent Roman Catholic. Eighteen percent of the church planters indicated that they were currently not a member of a congregation in Mennonite Church USA.

Table 4

Church planters who have been members of an “other than Mennonite” denomination

Evangelical/Fundamentalist	40%
Charismatic/Pentecostal	27%
Mainline	16%
Other Anabaptist	10%
Other	4%
Roman Catholic	3%

Only 13 percent of the sample had less than a high-school education and 70 percent had at least a college degree. Forty-eight percent had a master’s degree or equivalent, with 13 percent having a doctorate or equivalent advanced degree. Sixty percent of the sample had attended a Mennonite-related college or seminary.

2. The call to plant

Summary of important findings about the call of church planters:

- On average, four years elapsed from the time a planter received a call to plant and actually became involved in a church plant.
- Most of those in the sample (90 percent) have been the pastor or leader of a church plant.
- The majority of Mennonite church planters are not paid for their church-planting efforts.
- Nearly three-quarters of church planters are bivocational and represent a wide range of occupations. They work an average of 36 hours per week in this other occupation.
- Financial support for church planters who receive income for their efforts comes largely from their own congregation or other congregations.

- Just over one-half of planters (56 percent) have received training for church planting. Of these, slightly more than one-half received that training from a seminary or Bible college.

The average age of respondents when they received their call to plant a church was 34 years. On average, they were 38 years old when they began planting a church, with nearly four years (3.6) between the time of call and actual church-planting activity.

Ninety percent of those sampled indicated that they had been involved in church planting as a pastor or leader of a church, 31 percent as a church-planting coach, and 21 percent provided resources for church planting.⁸

Table 5

Type of church planting involvements

Pastor or leader of a church plant	90%
Church planting coach	31%
Provided resources for a church plant	21%

Just over one-third of the sample (38 percent) are currently receiving income for their church-planting work, and of these, 41 percent are employed full-time in church planting. Clearly, most Mennonite church planters are not employed full-time in church planting and a majority receive no income as part of their service.⁹ In fact, only 16 percent of the sample are employed full-time as church planters and 23 percent are employed part-time.

Among those earning income as a church planter, the vast majority (62 percent) received at least some of their financial support from the sponsoring congregation that was being planted. Another 11 percent received support from one or several different congregations other than the church plant. Twenty-seven percent received support from a Mennonite area conference, 11 percent from a mission agency, 10 percent from individuals, and 18 percent from other sources.

Table 6

Source of financial income for church planter

Congregation being planted	62%
Mennonite area conference	27%
Other sources	18%
One or several different congregations (other than the church plant)	11%
Mission agency	11%
Individuals	10%

Current church planters spend an average of almost 23 hours per week in church-planting efforts. Nearly 41 percent spend 10 or fewer hours per week in church planting, 19 percent spend between 10 and 20 hours, 15 percent between 20 and 30 hours, 9 percent between 30 and 40 hours, and 15 percent more than 40 hours weekly. Sixty percent of church planters work 20 or fewer hours weekly in church-planting efforts, and 25 percent spend 30 or more hours in such efforts.

Table 7

Average hours per week spent in church-planting work

More than 40 hours	15%
30-40 hours	9%
20-30 hours	15%
10-20 hours	19%
10 or fewer hours	41%

Three quarters (74 percent) of the sample are bivocational, working at other jobs in addition to church planting. These planters spend an average of 36 hours weekly in these other occupations. The list of occupations below, not inclusive of all occupations of church planters in the sample, gives a flavor for the diversity of people who are engaged in church planting:

- Building maintenance
- College professor

- Insurance sales
- Café/restaurant owner
- Community house manager
- Apartment building manager
- Bishop/pastor
- Construction/carpenter
- Machine operator
- Locksmith
- Graduate student
- Bus driver
- Electrical/maintenance
- Psychiatric caregiver
- Graphic and Web site designer
- Chemical process technician
- Prison chaplain
- Professional driver
- Electrical/mechanical
- Glass blower
- Church consultant
- Realtor
- Air-conditioning mechanic
- Nonprofit agency
- Social worker/therapist
- Translator
- Tailor
- Optometrist
- Lawyer
- Veterinarian

One-half of church planters have helped to plant a single church since 1990. Twenty percent have helped to plant two churches, and 29 percent have helped to plant three or more churches since 1990.¹⁰

Table 8

Number of churches planted per church planter

1 church	50%
2 churches	20%
3 or more churches	29%

Fifty-six percent of church planters have received specific training for church planting, but 40 percent have not (3 percent not sure). Of those who received such training, 53 percent received this training in seminary or Bible college, 46 percent through a training course provided by a nondenominational or parachurch organization, 36 percent through a denomination or sponsoring church, 11 percent as part of an internship, and 5 percent through other training opportunities.

Table 9

Kinds of church-planting training received

Seminary or Bible college	53%
Training course provided by a nondenominational or parachurch organization	46%
Denomination or sponsoring church	36%
Internship	11%
Other training opportunities	5%

When asked about their current interest in church planting, 35 percent of the sample indicated that they would be willing to move to another community in order to plant a church, and 48 percent said they would be willing to help plant a church if they did not have to move. Seven percent said they would only contribute money to church planting and 10 percent said they were not interested in planting churches. All told, 83 percent of the sample indicated they would be willing at this point in their lives to help plant a church, beyond giving only money.

Table 10

Current interest in church planting

Willing to move to another community in order to plant a church	35%
Willing to help plant a church if they did not have to move	48%
Can only contribute money to church planting	7%
Not interested in church planting	10%

3. Planting the church

Summary findings from this section on planting the church include:

- About two-thirds of planters utilized specific models, however loosely identified, in their church-planting efforts.
- Most planters live fewer than 10 miles from their church plant and more than one-half have moved in order to plant a church.
- Nearly two-thirds relied upon their own sense of direction and the needs of the community in deciding where to plant a church; less than one-fourth depended on an agency or denomination for direction.
- Most church planters have worked with a team and just over one-half have had a mentor or coach.
- The three top priorities in church planting were making disciples, sound Bible teaching, and embracing all people.
- The four top activities in church planting were servant evangelism, prayer walking, evangelistic visitation, and outreach Bible studies.
- Among the greatest challenges that church planters faced were leadership development, lack of support from area conferences and the denomination, multiple time commitments, financial struggles, and challenges in discipling new believers.
- Just over one-half of planters said it is very important that their congregation remain part of Mennonite Church USA and nearly 75 percent said it is at least fairly important.
- Just over 40 percent of the planters agreed that the work of Mennonite Mission Network is very important to them.
- One-third do not believe or are not sure that church planting is important to Mennonite Mission Network.
- From a list of priorities for Mennonite mission agencies, church planters clearly prioritize global evangelism and church planting.

Respondents were asked a number of questions about their experiences of church planting. Sixty-eight percent indicated that their church-planting efforts were based on specific “models” of church planting. When asked about the models used, they indicated the following:

- Fifty-two percent utilized ministry-based models where churches go into the community for the purpose of drawing people to the gospel.
- Thirty-nine percent of the church planters targeted a particular racial or ethnic group.
- Thirty-five percent emphasized relational models such as a cell or house church.
- Twenty-two percent were programmatic in orientation, utilizing a variety of programs such as Sunday school or organized visitation.
- Eleven percent identified their model as “purpose-driven.”
- Six percent intentionally targeted seekers.
- Four percent used affinity models, bringing people together around leisure activities or occupations.
- Five percent utilized other approaches.

More than one-half of the planters had moved at some point in their lives in order to plant a church. In their most recent church plants, 34 percent lived one mile or less from the church, 18 percent two to three miles, 24 percent four to 10 miles, and 24 percent more than 10 miles from the church plant.

Table 11

Church planters’ distance from church plant

1 mile or less	34%
2–3 miles	18%
4–10 miles	24%
More than 10 miles	24%

When asked how they decided where to plant a church, 24 percent relied upon an assignment from their denomination or agency. Sixty-three percent noted “a personal sense of direction” in their location decision. Sixty-three percent also indicated that the needs of the local

community dictated where they chose to plant a church. Two percent said that other factors influenced location decisions.

Table 12

Determining location of church plants

A personal sense of direction	63%
Needs of local community	63%
Assignment from denomination or agency	24%
Other factors	2%

Eighty percent of church planters undertook their church-planting efforts with a team of people. Just over one-half of church planters had a mentor or coach.

Church planters were asked the source of funding for their church-planting work other than their income as church planters, a question asked previously. Mennonite area conferences were the greatest source of financial support for church planters, with 37 percent citing such support. Twenty-six percent received financial support from another church or churches, 25 percent from a Mennonite mission agency, and 25 percent from interested individuals. One-quarter never received any such financial support for their church-planting work.

Table 13

Source of funding for church plants

Mennonite area conferences	37%
Another church or churches	26%
Mennonite mission agency	25%
Interested individuals	25%
Never received any such financial support	25%

Respondents were asked to prioritize a list of tasks according to the priority they gave such activities while being involved in church planting. The five activities that church planters noted as having top priority were:

- Making disciples of Jesus (67 percent)
- Offering sound Bible teaching (57 percent)
- Inviting and embracing all people (48 percent)
- Creating dynamic worship (44 percent)
- Evangelizing unreached people (42 percent)

A second set of priorities clustered together as the following:

- Equipping new believers for ministry (38 percent)
- Knowing the local community and surrounding area (38 percent)
- Presenting a visible, contrast community witness within the local community (34 percent)
- Providing small groups, cell groups, or life groups (33 percent)
- Presenting an alternative church in contrast to other churches in the area (33 percent)

A final group of seven priorities received the lowest support:

- Offering leadership development and formation opportunities (28 percent)
- Nurturing an Anabaptist witness (24 percent)
- Attracting or ministering to a specific audience or group (21 percent)
- Serving the social and material needs of the local community (19 percent)
- Emphasizing numerical growth (12 percent)
- Providing a place for people who are already Mennonite (11 percent)
- Creating relationships with churches of other denominations (3 percent)

Church planters marked the types of outreach activities that were part of their church-planting efforts:

- Servant evangelism (51 percent)
- Prayer walking (47 percent)
- Evangelistic visitation for identifying prospects (45 percent)
- Outreach Bible studies (43 percent)
- Mail invitations to services, programs, events (39 percent)
- Door-to-door or cold-call evangelism (37 percent)

- Children's special events (36 percent)
- Ministry evangelism such as food banks, shelters (36 percent)
- Revival meetings (31 percent)
- Children's weekday ministries (21 percent)
- Block party (19 percent)

The church planters in our sample have helped to plant 353 churches since 1990, including one planter who said they had helped with 60 plants. Of these, 318 remain in existence and 171 are part of Mennonite Church USA.¹¹

While no question directly addressed church plant failures, respondents were asked to describe “the three greatest challenges” they faced in their church-planting efforts. Their responses clustered around issues of leadership development, funding and finances, personal and family challenges, working with new believers and church members, and lack of support and understanding in the broader church.

When discussing leadership issues, planters mentioned challenges such as developing vision and direction, developing and maintaining identity, assembling the right team, finding and training leaders, and addressing leadership conflicts. Financial struggles were often mentioned as a challenge both personally and in funding the activities of the church plant. When discussing their personal and family lives, planters noted loneliness, discouragement, burnout, and multiple time commitments as bivocational church planters.

Church planters faced the following challenges in working with new members: addictions, personal crises, baggage and high maintenance lifestyles, high turnover and transition of members, difficulty in discipling, creating a sense of community, integrating long-time Mennonites with new believers, and conflicts among members.

Planters were critical of their area conferences and the denomination, as well as other Mennonite congregations from whom they felt a lack of understanding and passion for church planting. As a result, planters felt alienated and marginalized relative to the larger church. Area conferences were critiqued for not providing sufficient support or vision for church planting. Support was often described in terms of finances, prayer, resources and coaching.

At the same time, it is “very important” for 51 percent of church planters that their congregation be part of Mennonite Church USA.

For another 21 percent, being part of Mennonite Church USA is “fairly important.” Forty-two percent of the planters indicated that the work of Mennonite Mission Network is “very important” to them, while another 27 percent said that it is “fairly important” (six percent said they were not familiar with Mennonite Mission Network). Fifty percent of the respondents believe that church planting is very important to Mennonite Mission Network, but 33 percent are either not sure or do not believe church planting is important to the Network.

When asked about the three highest priorities for Mennonite mission agencies, church planters ranked global evangelism and church planting highest (70 percent), followed by supporting congregations in the United States (57 percent), and urban ministry in the United States (48 percent). After these three, none of the other possibilities (supporting local congregations abroad, community and economic development, peacemaking and reconciliation, providing opportunities for voluntary service, or witness through mass media) had percentages of more than 31 percent.

Table 14

Highest priorities for Mennonite mission agencies

Global evangelism and church planting	70%
Supporting congregations in the United States	57%
Urban ministry in the United States	48%

4. Theology and practice

The final section of the survey asked church planters about their religious beliefs and practices. Important findings from this section include:

- Mennonite church planters are very affirming of the charismatic gifts of the Holy Spirit.
- Almost nine out of 10 church planters call themselves Anabaptist and/or Mennonite.
- Nearly all have heard the term missional and most feel favorably toward it.
- Most church planters pray daily and three-fifths read their Bible daily.
- Church planters are very active in speaking to others about their faith, trying to convert others to faith in Christ, and in inviting non-Christians to church.

- Most church planters believe that denominations have some relevance, though they are more highly committed to their congregation and area conference than the denomination.
- Most church planters are aware of the term missional and favor it, and most appear to embrace some of the key assumptions of a missional theology.

When asked about the charismatic gifts of the Holy Spirit, 84 percent of the respondents believe that these gifts are genuine gifts of God's Spirit to some Christians. Only 8 percent said these gifts largely reflect human emotions.

From a list of seven religious descriptors (Anabaptist, Evangelical, Mennonite, Charismatic/Pentecostal, Spiritual, Fundamentalist, and Mainline Protestant), planters were asked to identify the two that best described their religious beliefs. Sixty-eight percent identified Anabaptist, 38 percent Evangelical, 32 percent Mennonite, 28 percent Charismatic/Pentecostal, 13 percent Spiritual, 3 percent Fundamentalist, and 3 percent Other. Eighty-six percent of the planters identified either Mennonite or Anabaptist as one of their two key words. No one identified Mainline Protestant.

Table 15

Religious descriptors for church planters

Anabaptist	68%
Evangelical	38%
Mennonite	32%
Charismatic/Pentecostal	28%
Spiritual	13%
Fundamentalist	3%
Mainline Protestant	0%
Other	3%

One-half of church planters responded that both testaments of the Bible have equal authority, while 48 percent said the New Testament has the highest authority.

Sixty-six percent are very familiar with the word missional, 21 percent are somewhat familiar, and 6 percent not very familiar. Only 8 percent had never heard of the term. Of those who had heard the term, 42 percent felt very favorably about missional language and assumptions, and another 43 percent felt somewhat favorable.

Table 16

“Missional”

Very familiar with the word “missional”	66%
Somewhat familiar with “missional”	21%
Not very familiar with “missional”	6%
Never heard of “missional”	8%

When asked about devotional practices, 91 percent of church planters pray daily and 60 percent read or study the Bible on their own each day. Ninety percent of church planters are involved in a small group for discussion, prayer or Bible study several times a month or more.

Table 17

Devotional practices of church planters

Pray daily	91%
Involved in a small group for discussion, prayer or Bible study several times a month or more	90%
Read or study the Bible on their own each day	60%

In terms of evangelistic and outreach practices, 97 percent speak about their faith to persons outside their church or family once a month or more, 75 percent try to convert others to faith in Christ once a month or more, and 82 percent invite non-Christians to attend services or activities at their church once a month or more.

Table 18

Evangelistic practices of church planters

Speak about their faith to persons outside their church or family	97%
Invite non-Christians to attend services or activities at their church	82%
Try to convert others to faith in Christ	75%

Eighty-two percent of church planters agree that distinctive Mennonite beliefs are important to them. However, fewer (61 percent) agree that Mennonite teachings more accurately reflect the word of God than the teachings of other denominations. Only 25 percent agree that church denominations do not matter and only 19 percent agree that the organized church does not matter.

Table 19

Beliefs of church planters

Distinctive Mennonite beliefs are important	82%
Mennonite teachings more accurately reflect the word of God than the teachings of other denominations	61%
Church denominations do not matter	25%
The organized church does not matter	19%

When asked to indicate their personal commitment to different levels of the church, 86 percent indicated very strong commitment to their local congregation, 34 percent very strong commitment to the broader church, 33 percent to their area conference, and 29 percent to Mennonite Church USA. When planters who are not part of Mennonite Church USA are excluded, the findings change to 86 percent to congregation, 39 percent to area conference, 31 percent to Mennonite Church USA, and 35 percent to the broader Christian church.

Table 20

Mennonite Church USA church planters' commitments to:

Local congregation	86%
Area conference	39%
Broader church	35%
Mennonite Church USA	31%

Church planters generally embrace missional understandings. Sixty percent agree that the Christian church in North America has largely abandoned its mission to the world, and 68 percent agree that God's Spirit is working as much in the world as in the church. In addition, 97 percent agree that congregations are as much the church when sent into their neighborhoods during the week as when gathered for worship. Eighty-nine percent agree that while the church is a sign of God's kingdom, God's kingdom extends beyond the church.

Table 21

More beliefs of church planters

Congregations are as much the church when sent into their neighborhoods during the week as when gathered for worship	97%
While the church is a sign of God's kingdom, God's kingdom extends beyond the church	89%
God's Spirit is working as much in the world as in the church	68%
The church in North America has largely abandoned its mission to the world	60%

Epilogue: Author's reflections on Luke 10

After this, the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!' And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: The kingdom of God has come near. I tell you, on that day it will be more tolerable for Sodom than for that town.'"

The seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, in your name, even the demons submit to us!" He said to them, "I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

At that same hour Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will" (10:1-12, 17-21).

As I sifted through dozens of pages of interview responses and analyzed the survey data from 120 church planters, my mind kept returning to the commission of the "seventy" in Luke 10. Jesus' instructions to these "church-planting pioneers" were demanding but simple. In this chapter, Jesus set forth principles for God's mission that I frequently heard in the responses of the Mennonite church planters in this study. The following are my own reflections and observations.

“The harvest is plentiful”

Perhaps because we are prone to forget, Jesus felt a need to remind the seventy of the abundant harvest that awaits them—that they were called to labor in a field where too few others will ever join them. Mennonite church planters live with a powerful sense of their call to labor in God’s harvest. They continually invoke that call, recognizing that they have been sent with the gospel of Jesus Christ into a world in need. Remembering that call appears to ground these planters in God’s story and God’s reality, enabling them to address the challenges and dangers of that call.

“Ask the Lord of the harvest”

Early on, Jesus reminds the seventy of the need for prayer—specifically prayer that laborers would be sent into the harvest. Mennonite church planters frequently mention prayer as critical to fulfilling their mission to the world. Prayer provides direction for decision-making. They count on prayer for protection from spiritual opposition. Prayer gives comfort and courage in the midst of challenges. They wish for prayer warriors to support them in their efforts.

“Like lambs into the midst of wolves”

Jesus clarifies the context of the call—the seventy are sent out from places of security into a world of uncertainty and even danger. The vulnerability of many of the Mennonite church planters was clear—in economic, spiritual and social terms. Mennonite church planters have a low profile on the margins of the broader church, outside organizational, geographical and political centers of the denomination. These individuals and their families often left the comfort and security of their homes and congregations for the sake of joining God’s mission to the world. Their stories confirmed the reality that God’s Spirit so often moves more on the periphery of the church and the world than in the centers of political and religious power, security and comfort.

“No purse, no bag, no sandals”

Jesus tells his disciples that they won’t need a lot of stuff to fulfill their call to God’s mission. One of my greatest surprises among those I interviewed was the relative lack of emphasis on funding, education, and sophisticated church-planting tools. Instead, I heard more about

the need for prayer, relationships and obedience. Jesus seems to be suggesting in Luke 10 that in the economy of God's mission to the world, less is usually more. And like the seventy then, Mennonite church planters give ample evidence of doing more with less.

"Greet no one on the road"

Jesus seems concerned that these newly commissioned seventy get on with the mission without distracting conversations along the way. The focus and clarity of their call was often in evidence among Mennonite church planters. Independent and entrepreneurial, they are steadfast in their commitment to fulfill God's mission.

"First say, 'Peace to this house!'"

The message of the seventy was to be a simple one—to speak the healing presence of God to those whose homes they would enter. Mennonite church planters are committed to an Anabaptist perspective of peace and justice, and recognize the necessity of this theological understanding for the precarious nature of their work. For these church planters, Anabaptist theology is not primarily in their heads; rather, it is lived out in the daily rough and tumble of their experiences in God's mission. Some expressed concern that the radical nature of Christ's peace is being lost among other Mennonites who are being co-opted by the larger culture and society. These planters reveal that Anabaptist theology is most faithfully forged and maintained in the daily life of the cross.

"The kingdom of God has come near"

Along with the message of shalom, the seventy were to proclaim the nearness of God's kingdom, brought near by the coming of the Messiah who was sending them. Mennonite church planters live with a keen sense of God's kingdom come in Christ. Many talk freely about their relationship with and calling by Jesus. I remember few, if any, conversations with planters about the controversial social and moral issues often debated in the broader church, suggesting that getting on with God's mission tends to make irrelevant many of the issues that otherwise divide and immobilize God's people.

“Remain in the same house”

Jesus asks that the seventy be hosted by those to whom they are sent. Many Mennonite church planters have moved in order to plant new churches, and many remain willing to move. They understand the necessity of entering and staying in a community in order to develop relationships—hosted by that community.

“I watched Satan fall”

Jesus seems to suggest a connection between getting on with God’s mission to the world and the falling of Satan from heaven. That is, the principalities and powers are undone by the simple act of obediently joining God’s mission to the world. Mennonite church planters live with a sense of the spiritual struggle that they joined in signing up for God’s mission. Their desire for prayer is undoubtedly related to the spiritual struggle in which they are engaged.

“Hidden from the wise and the intelligent”

Apparently, the revelation of God’s kingdom favors those with less education and sophistication, or at least those for whom knowledge and education do not get in the way of faithful obedience to God’s call. The kingdom and the world are best served by those with child-like eyes of faith and hearts of obedience. As mentioned previously, I heard relatively little from church planters about education or complex strategies for church planting. I heard more about the importance of listening to God, taking risks, and simply doing the next thing. In fact, I was struck by the number of times I heard planters admit that they did not always know what they were doing.

In conclusion

The lives and ministries of Mennonite church planters mirror in many ways the concise but demanding instructions given by Jesus to the “seventy” in Luke 10. Perhaps more than anything else, I was impressed that in the end, the mission of God depends on individuals who have heard God’s call, responded in obedience, and laid down their lives for the sake of the world that “God so loved.”

Endnotes

1. In an article entitled “Why Plant Churches?” at www.travelersrest.wordpress.com/2008/07/22/why-plant-churches/ (accessed on July 23, 2008).
2. A few persons were included who are no longer part of Mennonite Church USA, but have been active in church planting as early as 1990.
3. *Mennonite Member Profile 2006* was a study of nearly 3,000 members and pastors who are part of congregations in Mennonite Church USA. Part of a three-denominational study, *Mennonite Member Profile 2006* was directed by Conrad L. Kanagy.
4. For further information about the items from Stetzer and Connor, see the *Research Report of the Church Plant Survivability and Health Study* (2007) by Ed Stetzer and Phillip Connor.
5. Some planters had dual area conference affiliation and were counted for both.
6. One church planter who we interviewed now resides in Canada, even while working at church planting in the United States.
7. Racial/Ethnic is a self-designation by groups within Mennonite Church USA whose members are African American, Latino/Hispanic, Native American, Asian and “other than Anglo.”
8. This question, like some others, asked respondents to “check all that apply,” so that the total percentage in a table like this one may be greater than 100 percent. In a number of other questions where response categories were mutually exclusive, rounding leads to tables that may not quite add to or may be slightly greater than 100 percent.
9. These findings include seven individuals who indicated that they are currently not engaged (spending zero hours per week) in church-planting efforts.
10. One planter indicated that they have helped to plant 60 churches since 1990.
11. It is likely that the number of 353 churches includes duplicates, where more than one planter helped with the same church. In addition, it is possible that some of these were planted outside of the United States. Survey respondents were given instructions that “their answers . . . should reflect their experiences of church planting in a North American context.” Several planters were excluded from the analysis because their church-planting experiences were completely outside the United States.

Questions for reflection and discussion

- 1 What surprised or impressed you most in the pages of this report?
- 2 Which five words would you choose to summarize the “profile” of church planters presented here?
- 3 Have you personally been involved in a church-planting effort? How did your experience compare with or contrast to what is recounted in this study?
- 4 Did this report make you wonder whether you fit the profile of what makes for an effective church planter? Or did it confirm that this calling is definitely *not* for you? Explain why.
- 5 Seventy-four percent of the people featured here are bi-vocational, working an average of 36 hours weekly at jobs other than planting churches. What would happen if *all* of God’s people were this passionate about sharing their faith?
- 6 Stanley Green, in his Foreword, asks whether it is appropriate to “expend energy and devote resources to planting more churches” when the American landscape is already well endowed with places of worship. How would you answer this question?
- 7 In partial response to Green’s question, Lyle Schaller is cited as observing that “churches more than 20 years old gain most of their new members from people moving from other congregations.” Has this been the experience of *your* home congregation? Do you consider this a convincing argument for the planting of new churches where reportedly 60–80 percent of new members come from “outside any worshiping community?”
- 8 In Luke 10, Jesus sent out 70 workers with specific instructions to “carry no purse, no bag, and no sandals.” Do you think these words apply only to “mission” workers? Or—in a missional church—does this also apply to *all* members of the Body. If the latter is true, what does this say about the kind of lifestyle Jesus’ disciples are called to lead?

For further reading

- CHILCOTE, Paul W., and WARNER, Lacey C., eds., *The Study of Evangelism: Exploring a Missional Practice of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).
- *Church Planters Toolkit*. This resource is described at <http://www.churchsmart.com/store/viewItem.asp?idProduct=1007>.
- COLE, Neil, *Organic Church Planting* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005).
- GREEN, Michael, and MCGRATH, Alister, *How Shall We Reach Them?* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995).
- KANAGY, Conrad L., *Road Signs for the Journey: A Profile of Mennonite Church USA* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 2007).
- MURRAY, Stuart, *Church Planting: Laying Foundations* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 2001).
- ORTBERG, John, *Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003).
- STETZER, Ed, *Planting Missional Churches* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2006).
- STETZER, Ed, and CONNER, Phillip, *Research Report of the Church Plant Survivability and Health Study* (Center for Missional Research of the North American Mission Board, 2007).
- STONE, Bryan, *Evangelism after Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2007).
- For church planting assessment, see <http://www.churchplanting4me.org> or the resources available at Ashland Seminary, Midwest Ministry (www.midwestministry.org).
- For church planting coaching, consider CoachNet at <http://www.coachnet.org/en/node/145>.

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- No. 16 Alan Kreider, *Tongue Screws and Testimony* (2008).*
- No. 17 Conrad L. Kanagy, *No Purse, No Bag, No Sandals: A Profile of Mennonite Church Planters, 1990-2005* (2008).*

*Available in Spanish.

No purse, no bag, no sandals

A profile of Mennonite church planters, 1990-2005

Conrad L. Kanagy

“In the end,” writes Conrad Kanagy, “the mission of God depends on individuals who have heard God’s call, responded in obedience, and laid down their lives for the sake of the world that ‘God so loved.’”

It is with these words that Kanagy concludes his study of 120 Mennonite church planters who, over a period of 15 years, worked tirelessly to bring into existence several hundred new communities of faith.

Who were these people? What was the nature of their calling? How did they go about their work? And what religious beliefs and practices informed the ministries that emerged from their efforts? These are the key questions that the author attempted to uncover in this fascinating research project that will most certainly challenge the church to greater faithfulness in witness for years to come.

Conrad L. Kanagy is associate professor of Sociology at Elizabethtown (Pa.) College and former pastor of Elizabethtown Mennonite Church. He is a staff consultant to Lancaster Mennonite Conference and author of Road Signs for the Journey: A Profile of Mennonite Church USA (2007).



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