



**A process and
conversation guide
for sending pastors,
church planters, and
teams**

STRATEGIC PLANNING



STRATEGIC

Relating to the identification of long-term goals, plans, and objectives and the means of achieving them.

In the context of church planting, it describes an intentional effort to discover, develop, and pursue a God-given vision for a city.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

Being strategic means consistently making those core directional choices that will best move you toward your hoped-for future . . . being strategic is a learnable skill and involves learning to think in specific, patterned ways and then acting based on that thinking.

-Erika Anderson

FOUR PHASES

This resource is designed to help you process and think through the various phases leading up to the launch of a new church. It is also designed to serve as a discussion guide for sending pastors, church planters, and church planting teams. As you gather your team, use this resource to spark critical conversations about how to best start and sustain a new church in your city.

It can be helpful to view the church planting process through the lens of four progressive phases. In each phase, there are benchmarks that when attained lead to greater success in the next phase. For our purposes, we identify these four phases as follows:

Phase 1 - Preparation

In this phase, the church planting family or team prepares for the church planting journey. Some of the benchmarks in this phase, in no particular order, may be:

- In-depth prayer and fasting.
- Receiving spiritual counsel and guidance.
- The identification of a city and a target area.
- The research of city demographics.

- The development of church values, leadership identity, and a mission statement.
- The development of a church name, logo, and branding guide.
- The formation of the church's legal structure (articles of incorporation, bylaws, constitution, etc.).
- The opening of a bank account in the name of the new church and the establishment of accounting protocols.
- The development of a fundraising plan.

Depending on the timeline one follows, this phase may be anywhere between one to two years before the official launch of the church.

- In this first phase, the spiritual focus is on **vision discovery**.

The goal is to discover a calling for your city and to receive affirmation of that calling. This happens in the context of focused prayer, Spirit-led self-discovery, and wise counsel. Like Abraham, you may not have all the details figured out. Yet, trust that when God gives you a calling He will also give you the assurance you need to step forward in faith.

- *By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. Hebrews 11:8.*

Understanding that every great endeavor in the Kingdom has both a spiritual and a practical element, it is important in this phase to begin writing down the vision God has given you. It doesn't have to be perfect, but it does have to be *written down*. Think in terms of practical goals you want to achieve in the beginning. As you prepare to plant, take time to consider exactly what kind of church it will be. As God admonished in Habakkuk 2:2, "Write the vision and make it plain." As a church planter, you will need to become skilled at articulating the vision of your new church to the unchurched living in your city and to those who may desire to fund your church or partner with you.

As we discuss phase two of the church planting process in the next section, we will unpack the various parts of a **strategic launch plan**. For now, however, use the space below to begin articulating the vision God has given you for your church in your city.

The prompts and questions below can serve as points for personal reflection or be used in the context of group discussion. If you are a sending pastor, you are encouraged to talk about these things with the church planting teams you hope to send out from your church.

If you are the lead church planter, it may be difficult to envision a fully-formed church at such an early stage in the planting process. Even so, it is important to begin cultivating the vision God has placed in your heart. Prayerfully, begin to think these things through and discuss them with key members of your team.

What is the target city in which we hope to plant? If it is a larger city, is there a target location within the metro area that we are most attracted to?

What is the life, culture, or dynamic of this city or target area?

What is the "customer profile" of an average person living in your city? After researching city demographics (average age, family structure, income level, racial identity, etc.) what needs or concerns are felt by the average family living in the city?

What would attract an unchurched person to the church we hope to start? What needs may possibly bring an unchurched person through the doors of a new church plant?

What is the larger story or narrative of our new church that we hope will draw a person in? What value will the church provide to the city? How will the church meet the needs of people living in the city or target area?

When an unchurched person attends a small group, interest meeting, or start-up event what do we want them to feel or experience?

How do we hope to articulate the core values, leadership identity, and mission statement of the church?

Do we have an idea for a church name or branding style? What do we want this name to represent in our city? How do we hope it will connect to the needs of the unchurched?

Phase 2 - Pre-Launch

In this second phase, the church planting family or team works to formalize the structures, ministry strategies, and systems that will support and sustain the future church. Some of the benchmarks in this phase, in no particular order, may be:

- The development of a strategic launch plan.
- The recruitment and training of a launch team.
- Team prayer meetings.
- The start of small groups.
- The creation of a contact/interest list.
- A series of interest meetings.
- A schedule of preview or start-up services.
- The formalization of a church launch timeline.
- The assignment of key roles and job descriptions.
- The development of a discipleship pipeline or growth track.

Depending on the timeline one follows, this phase may be anywhere between six months to one year before the official launch of the church.

- In this second phase, the spiritual focus is on **vision clarity**.

The goal is to clarify the vision God has given you for your church. In this phase, it is vital to add critical detail to your vision and begin taking big steps forward to achieve that vision. On the day of your official launch, you will need to have spiritual momentum, team engagement, and community interest working in your favor.

- This critical phase has the most potential to increase the reach and impact of your future launch.

Understanding this, don't get in a rush. Instead, be strategic with your time, personnel, and available resources. Identify the essential benchmarks for your team and work hard to reach them.

In this phase of the church planting process, the first thing you should complete is the build-out of a **strategic launch plan**.

A clear mission and a compelling vision for a new church should result in a strategic launch plan. The strategic launch plan captures the mission and vision of your church and answers the questions of where you are going and how you'll get there.

- The outcome of a well-implemented strategic launch plan is the alignment of the people, resources, and processes toward the accomplishment of your vision.
- Strategic planning in the launch of a new church is the spiritual discipline of listening to God's voice and obeying His direction.

A strategic launch plan establishes the "critical path" that the planter and team will take in the launch of the church. It creates alignment among team members and ensures everyone is following the same "map" for growth. A launch plan helps everyone to understand the target that the team is striving to reach (Philippians 3:14).

As you develop your own strategic launch plan, it is recommended that you review and discuss a few examples from other church plants to gain perspective, ideas, and points of reference.

THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

