

Overview of SEND's 7 Church Planting Phases

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The goal of Church planting (CP) in SEND International is to establish reproducing churches among the unreached. The phases described in this document can serve as a guide map in this process.

First of all, what are we planting? While many definitions exist, let's start with this one: the local church is a group of believers led by spiritually qualified shepherds, affirming their relationship to the Lord and each other by observance of the Lord's Supper, committed to prayer and the authority of the Word of God in doctrine and practice, gathering regularly for worship and the study of the Word, practicing mutual ministry, and turned outward to the world in witness. We seek the planting of churches that:

1. Prioritize prayer in principle and practice, gathering regularly in worship, prayer, teaching and communion.
2. Accept the Bible as their final authority, true to the teaching of Christ in obedience and his gospel of grace.
3. Have recognized servant leaders who lead by example, equip and empower believers for ministry and network with other like-minded fellowships.
4. Are developing loving relationships and authentic community, mutually encouraging and challenging one another to live the truth and building one another up in love.
5. Are living as fellowships that demonstrate God's redemptive power in the world, being reconciled to God and to one another. Multiplication is evidence in every aspect of community life.
6. Are engaging the lost by living compelling lives and giving compelling invitations, seeing people come to faith, living out the gospel and inviting them into fellowships.
7. Are burdened to see the glory of God spread to all peoples in accordance with Acts 1:8.

Connect and Pray (C&P) Key:

"Presence" – Your relationship to this Contact (Familiar, Attender, Friend, Trust)

"Proclamation" – Sharing the Good News with this Contact (Dialog, Scripture/Story, Study, Follower)

"Maturity" – Steps toward becoming a mature, reproducing follower of Jesus. (Growing, Serving, Sharing, Leading and Reproducing)

The phases below are not so much intended to provide ready answers (church in a box), but help a group ask the right questions and prayerfully discern the specifics of establishing a church in their own context.

Phase 1: Seed – *Initiating presence by mobilizing prayer and the church planting team*

The mobilizing phase is comprised of all vital activities aimed at forming a CP team and preparing for its effectiveness in the CP location. Team spends much time in prayer, networking, building relationships, learning, developing circles of influence and looking for "men or women of peace" in the target area.

This will typically involve the C&P "Presence" level "Familiar" and probably initiate some "Proclamation" levels as well.

Threshold: Phase 1 ends and Phase 2 begins when target groups and strategies are confirmed, most of the CP team is settled in the community (when possible), and the team is ready to focus on evangelistic ministry.

Phase 2: Sowing – *Advancing proclamation by engaging the lost with the gospel*

The gospel message is contextualized into the local context. The whole team spends most of their ministry time abundantly sowing the gospel in word and deed both with individuals and connected groups. The goal of this phase is living out compelling lives and offering compelling invitations for people to become followers of Christ. Men or women of peace are identified and the gospel is shared within their group of contacts or friends.

The primary emphasis will be on "Proclamation" through its four C&P levels and will also probably involve some "Maturity". "Presence" will also expand to new contacts along with the Proclamation.

Threshold: The team is recognized as having moved to Phase 3 when members of the team are discipling a believer from the intended people group. The team continues to sow and break into new social networks, and model evangelism to the believers with multiplication at every phase.

Phase 3: Seedling – *Fostering maturity by discipling three or more believers from the target group*

The team works with young believers to establish them in Christ, in obedience to the word and in discipling others right from the start. Progress is made toward gathering the believers in appropriate ways. All three aspects, “Presence”, “Proclamation” and “Maturity” will advance at this point with various contacts. The primary emphasis of the team will be on the “Maturity” of the key contacts from “Growing” through “Sharing”.

Threshold: The team moves to Phase 4 once there is a fellowship group of three or more new believers of the people group regularly meeting together. However, discipling never stops.

Phase 4: Young Plant - *Gathering believers together into a local covenant community*

Work continues with the new community of faith, especially with emerging leaders, in order for them to grow in personal and corporate *koinonia* maturity. Often peacemaking becomes crucial here and group decision dynamics are tested. Leaders (influencers) emerge and the fellowship grows numerically.

All three aspects, “Presence”, “Proclamation” and “Maturity” will advance with your contacts as well as with local emerging leaders and their next generation disciples. This phase culminates with the believing community covenanting to be a local fellowship.

Threshold: Phase 4 ends and Phase 5 begins when the fellowship reaches critical mass in both breadth and depth. This looks different in different contexts but represents a sustainable number of core family units.

Phase 5: Fruit bearing - *Developing servant leaders and potential elders*

Never minister alone but model servant leadership to disciple local leaders. The group begins to own evangelism, shepherding, mutual care that was expressed in the covenant. The church planters intentionally take a lower profile in the fellowship through the process of modeling, assisting, watching and leaving.

While all three aspects, “Presence”, “Proclamation” and “Maturity” continue, the first two, Presence and Proclamation, will likely wane in the life of the church planter, while the greatest emphasis and prayer is placed on the emerging leaders and the Maturity of their next generation contacts. The phase culminates with public installation of elders, who would likely be the ones God has used most in helping others along the maturity process.

Threshold: Phase 6 begins with the ordination of two or more elders from the people group in the church (or network of house churches) and the new church has embraced a Great Commission vision.

Phase 6: Mature Seed – *The church is under indigenous leadership*

The church is now led by those who belong to the people group and are permanent residents in the area. The church planters (CP’ers) may still be involved in some of the outreach and training ministries of the church, but the pastoring and primary leadership roles in the church are filled by those who have been chosen by the new church.

The “Presence” and “Proclamation” activities will continue to decrease by the CP’er, unless they are done to help train and equip local church members. The CP’er supports the new leaders as needed to help them succeed in their new roles as leaders and as these in turn develop other leaders. This would be done in a way that focuses the attention and authority on the new leaders, not the CP’ers. During this phase, the church planters move on to serve in another area (possibly another church plant).

Threshold: Phase 7 begins when the church sends out some of their own people to plant another church, either in their local area or cross-culturally.

Phase 7: Reproducing - *The established church moves toward Acts 1:8 reproduction*

Focus is now fully on helping the church(es) become reproductive in planting daughter churches and moving toward a CP movement. The CP’er prays for and carries the church in their heart, occasionally visiting the CP if possible. The church looks to penetrate other cohesive social networks laboring for a wider spread of the gospel, with emphasis on church reproduction in other locations both in their own culture and cross-culturally. The new churches engage in the next generation of Presence, Proclamation and Maturity through the respective levels.

Threshold: In a sense, this phase never ends, as the ministry has hopefully ignited a spreading of the gospel and multiplication of disciples making disciples and churches planting churches which joins the movement of God reaching to the ends of the earth.