

Grace Communion International

New Church Pathway

To provide a systematic process for starting new churches, GCI Church Multiplication Ministries (CMM) has developed the *New Church Pathway*. The *New Church Pathway* is designed to provide basic guidelines for church planting initiatives. It offers a brief description of the various stages involved in starting a new church and the resources provided by CMM to identify, train and support qualified leaders for new churches. The *New Church Pathway* also addresses the need for strategic planning and leader accountability. The *New Church Pathway* is built upon the following strategic components:

1. **Leader Assessment.** The assessment process helps prospective church plant leaders confirm whether or not they have the requisite leadership character and competencies for starting new churches.
2. **Leadership Training.** CMM leadership training programs provide the initial leadership training for starting a new church.
3. ***New Church Proposal.*** The leadership training process includes the development of a comprehensive strategic plan for starting a new church – a *New Church Proposal*.
4. **Ministry Coaching.** Ministry coaching provides support, guidance, and accountability for church leaders during the planning and start-up phases of starting a new church.

These four strategic components are integrated into the various phases of the *New Church Pathway* and are explained in greater detail later in this training course.

While the *New Church Pathway* involves a comprehensive preparation and training process, it is not intended to supplant the creative influence of the Holy Spirit or to interfere with the empowerment of people. Rather, it is designed to help church plant leaders join in the work of the Spirit by implementing processes that have been developed by extensive research and the experience of church planters and church planting training ministries.

Exploration Phase

When prospective church planting leaders begin to sense that the Holy Spirit is calling them to start a new church, the initial step along the *New Church Pathway* is exploration of their calling. Prospective planters should seek to confirm their calling to start a new church through prayer, Bible study, and counsel from friends, relatives, and church leaders. CMM recommends that at this stage of the process the prospective planter conduct an initial self-assessment. (This assessment may be downloaded from the CMM website: cmm.wcg.org.) At any time during this time of exploration, prospective church starters may contact the CMM resource team for assistance in discerning their calling and in taking the next steps along the pathway.

Pre-Assessment Phase

With affirmation by friends, family, and church leaders, prospective church starters complete a comprehensive Self-Assessment Inventory (provided by the CMM resource team) and schedule an Assessment Interview (explained below). CMM recommends that at this point prospective planters

conduct preliminary demographic research on the focus group or community they believe they are being called to serve.

This is also an opportune time to develop an initial financial plan including a rough budget estimate for starting a new church and an estimate of expenses for the first two years after launching. Potential financial supporters, including pastors and congregations, may be contacted at this time to solicit prayers and preliminary financial commitment. CMM advises that prospective church planters establish a relationship with a ministry coach to provide guidance, support, and accountability during the startup and launch phases of a new church. The role of a ministry coach is explained in Chapter 19.

Assessment

Prospective church plant leaders should participate in an Assessment Interview, conducted by a CMM Assessment Team. The goal of this interview is to help participants clarify and confirm their call to ministry and to determine the candidate's likelihood of successfully planting multiplying churches. The assessment team will help the prospective church plant leader design a personal development plan. The assessment process is described in more detail in Chapter 19.

Training

Prospective church plant leaders who are assessed and who reflect a high likelihood of success as a church planter should attend a *Church-Next Training* intensive. This program provides initial training to help participants understand the processes involved in starting healthy churches that make new disciples, multiply new ministries, and plant more new churches.

Proposal

After assessment and training, prospective church plant leaders develop a *New Church Proposal*. The proposal is a comprehensive strategic plan for starting a new church. The proposal development process is also described in Chapter 19.

Foundations

After the *New Church Proposal* has been approved by CMM, it is time for the church planter to begin to develop a launch team, raise funds, and implement a launch plan. At this point the new church usually begins to conduct public worship gatherings. These may entail a number of monthly "preview services" before the official launch, at which time weekly worship services are conducted.

Development

The new church grows and develops by engaging non-churched people, building believers, equipping workers, developing ministries, multiplying new leaders, and preparing to start another new church. Major fundraising efforts will likely continue for the first 1-3 years after the first weekly worship service. New church pastors continue to receive coaching as they participate in GCI ministry training programs including: New Pastor Training, Ambassador College of Christian Ministry, Grace Communion Seminary, district network meetings, and regional conferences.

Chartered Congregation

At a time determined through a collaborative process involving CMM and GCI Church Administration and Development-USA (approximately 6-12 months after the first weekly worship service), and as the new church provides evidence of functioning according to the church charter and standards outlined in *Church-Next Training*, the new church may be chartered by GCI. This collaborative process will help ensure that new churches reflect the vision and values of GCI, uphold the doctrines and ethics of GCI, have qualified leadership and effective ministries, and function according to the administrative policies and procedures of CAD.

This process will also contribute to the process of starting churches that are culturally relevant, that effectively evangelize their communities, and that develop plans to multiply new churches. The goal is to plant churches that will continue to start new churches, not to replicate non-multiplying congregations.

Multiplication

New churches should establish goals that will lead to starting another new church within 2-4 years after its first weekly worship service. CMM will provide consultation and resources to help ministry teams of new churches develop plans to start at least one new church within this time frame.