

This resource is designed to help pastors develop a better understanding about what we are looking for in a potential church planter. There are the twelve characteristics in our assessment process. In the same way that we use this resource as an assessment tool before releasing a church planter, this resource can be applied to the pre-assessing of potential planters in your church. Use this tool to help identify strengths, weaknesses and other areas where you want to help the potential planter grow. We hope you find this useful and are able to apply it to many potential planters!

Exercises a Sense of Call:

Clear Sense of Calling and Confirmation from Overseers

Church planting can be incredibly difficult. The decision to plant will often be deeply and sometimes painfully tested and often in the midst of hard times when growth is slow, leaders you've developed decide to leave and the next steps forward seem very unclear. It is during these times that the planter will only endure if they have the sure, unshakeable conviction that, "despite what I'm experiencing now, God has called me to this!"

Such a calling runs deeper than thinking church planting is just a "neat idea" or something you "try out" like you would a diet. In contrary, church planting is such an enormous venture that it requires a clarity of calling that, while not immune to doubt, provides the foundation for tenacity in the midst of adversity and disappointment. Wise pastors will do well to discern the depth and conviction of call in those they are considering sending out into the wilderness adventure of church planting.

Here are sample questions we ask to determine whether the potential church planter exercises a sense of call:

- What has led them to feel a call to pursue church planting? How have others confirmed their interest in church planting?
- What city, location, and/or type of target group do they anticipate ministering among? How does this fit with their upbringing, church experience, etc.?
- What makes them want to be a Vineyard church?
- What are some examples of times when they have taken initiative to begin and follow through with a project or ministry?
- What is their gut feeling or emotional response when they think about the risks involved in planting a church (i.e., finances, family, emotional stress, etc.)?

Possessing a Faith Driven Vision:

Has a Vision and Clear Philosophy of Ministry

As the God-given ability to "see" what could be, vision is an essential part of the spiritual gift of leadership. It is the necessary component needed to cast a compelling vision for a church that inspires others to want to join. It not only draws people to what lies ahead, however. Vision also communicates and clearly articulates the path to that destination. In that light, simply wanting to "plant a church" is not a "faith-driven, inspiring vision." You must ask the questions: "What kind of church? What will it look like? What kind of people will it reach? How will I gather people to get on board with that vision?" A church planter must not only be able to describe what kind of church they desire to plant, but they must be able to articulate it in a way that engenders faith, honors God, sell it to and inspire other to get on board. True faith-driven, inspiring vision will accomplish that.

Here are sample questions we ask to determine whether the potential church planter exercises a sense of call:

- What kind of church do they envision? How does this compare with their current/ past church experiences?
- Describe any experience they've had in organizing and leading teams of people?
- How have they inspired or excited people about an area of ministry or project in which they were involved (i.e., business or school project, small group, prayer team, mission trip, youth group, etc.)?
- How would they answer someone who's asking them "why plant a new church"?
- Describe the role that prayer, fasting, Bible study, etc have played in their life in overcoming individual or corporate challenges?

Disciple Making Skills:

Creates Opportunities to Develop Leaders and Give Ministry Away

The undeniable truth is, it takes a person with a certain mix of gifts and catalytic abilities to pull off planting a church. Among the most important qualities that they must possess is the ability to attract and lead other leaders. This entails not only the internal spiritual authority, but also the basic, pragmatic competence it takes to grow a church and attract, motivate and train others around them to lead, as well. If a church planter can lead people to Christ and nurture them, but at the same time cannot develop and lead leaders, he will not be able to build much more than a large home group. The church will never grow beyond what the church planter himself can directly oversee and lead.

Here are sample questions we ask to determine whether the potential church planter exercises a sense of call:

- What are the characteristics of a disciple and how would they build these characteristics into the life of a new believer?
- Give an example of the type of small groups they have led? How did they train and release other to serve in the group?
- How would they decide which areas of ministry individuals in a new church plant should participate in?
- Explain a time when they have had to correct or confront someone about an area in his or her life? What was it like for them?

People Gathering Skills:

The Ability to Gather People and Call them into Action

The process of gathering people happens in different ways in different people. Some accomplish that well through one-on-one conversations where their gifts and attractive qualities are best revealed. Others find that large groups where they can communicate, teach and cast vision is their natural arena for gathering people. Regardless of what facet is used to express this ability, having the skills to gather people is one of the most fundamental abilities required of a church planter. If the potential church planter experiences difficulties in being able to attract and gather people before planting a church, it is unlikely that they will be able to do it well once they've started.

Here are sample questions we ask to determine whether the potential church planter exercises a sense of call:

- In what ways have they gathered people to groups or projects in the past

- What plans would they have for gathering new people in a church plant?
- What ideas do they have about how they would assimilate newcomers into relationship with them and then get them involved in the church?
- To what degree does spending time with people give them energy or tire them? If married, are there differences between them and their spouse? How have they dealt with this in the past?
- How have they been vulnerable or transparent to help others feel free to do the same?

Healthy Communication Skills:

Applies Scripture in a Genuine and Effective Manner

A church planter needs to show the ability to communicate and apply Scripture in a compelling way. Keeping in mind that people have varying levels of skill and style in this area, requiring healthy communication skills does not mean requiring the planter to deliver “sermonic pyrotechnics” or have the verbal affluence of those leading America’s largest churches. Yet, it is clearly evident that church leadership is a communication-intensive enterprise and that healthy church culture is created through effective communication. Having this ability does not mean they are great and does not mean that they will improve significantly or even dramatically during their first few years of ministry. But it does mean that, as a pastor, they are first and foremost one who preaches the Word. And as Scripture unyieldingly recognizes, a pastor must be “able to teach” (1 Tim 3:2).

Here are sample questions we ask to determine whether the potential church planter exercises a sense of call:

- Explain what training or experience they’ve had in teaching or preaching? At what point is their progress in understanding and teaching the Bible?
- How would they describe their style of teaching? What are areas that they would like to improve? What’s the role of the Holy Spirit in teaching?
- How would they combine careful planning and listening to God to decide their topics and approach to weekly teaching?
- How well are they able to talk about their thoughts and feelings with others?
- What would they like a visitor to experience from the time they drive up until the time they leave their worship gathering? What values does each part of the gathering communicate?

Creative Evangelistic Skills:

Showing Significant Evidence of Gathering the Unchurched

The church planter must show evidence of being able to reach the unchurched, the prime people with whom we hope to build churches. As the Vineyard continues to “up the ante” in this area and intentionally wave the flag of evangelism, we want to identify those potential planters who have a lot of heart and at least some skills for growing churches by way of evangelism.

While core gifting and skill in evangelism vary from pastor to pastor, good news has been discovered by a study conducted by George Barna and included in his book, *Evangelism That Works* (Gospel Light Books, 1995). He found that churches growing by way of evangelism were led by senior pastors who do not have the spiritual gift of evangelism. This fascinating and liberating statistic revealed that to have effective evangelism, one must only be passionate about it, which overpowers any natural giftedness and is enough to motivate their churches to be evangelistically focused. They consistently find ways to make heroes out of the natural evangelists and gatherers who are part of their congregations and have worked hard to learn to communicate the gospel in relevant and

compelling ways to unbelievers who are coming to their Sunday services.

Here are sample questions we ask to determine whether the potential church planter exercises a sense of call:

- Tell me about the last time that they participated in leading someone to Jesus?
- Describe any experience they have had in training other to lead their friends to Jesus? What approach would they take in a church plant?
- What kinds of activities or strategies would they use to reach their target group?

Intentional Planning Skills:

Demonstrating the Self-Confidence to be a Lead Pastor

As church planting itself is a very large, long-term project, the church planter must show capabilities of being able to plan out such large, long-term projects in a prayerful and intentional way. Too often people begin a church plant only being able to envision and have clarity to pursue the first few steps without a big-picture idea of exactly what it is they're trying to build. It might also be that, while they have a big-picture vision, they may lack the abilities to strategically and measurably plan out concrete steps necessary to carry out that vision.

Similarly, some people have mistaken notions regarding the role of planning. Rather than recognizing the Biblical mandate for human plans done under the leading of the Holy Spirit, the counsel of others, in submission to the sovereignty of God, they take a more "mystical" or "spiritualist" approach which suggests that "planning" is somehow contrary to faith or walking in the Spirit. Our understanding, however, is that such an approach is neither wise nor Biblical and that the best planters are those who pray for God's direction ahead of time, plan prayerfully and then execute the plans.

Here are sample questions we ask to determine whether the potential church planter exercises a sense of call:

- How do they currently manage your own time? What have they found to be the best process for them in planning?
- How would they make decisions in church planting? How do they respond to opposition to their plans?
- Based on their needs, personality, and gifts what kinds of leaders do they need to place around them to be more effective?
- What would be their top priorities for the first two years of church planting?
- How good are they at seeking God for answers, asking for advice, and getting more training?

Financial Management Skills:

Debt Free and Self Disciplined Use of Money

Church planting doesn't require you to be a financial genius, but it does require that one knows how to handles money wisely, is out of debt and has a realistic understanding of the financial needs of a church plant in the beginning years. Debt or irresponsibility with money are prime "plant killers," as there are typically financial pressures that accompany the first few years of a church plant. Additionally, financial planning and management skills are a must. Many church planters overlook elements that require additional capital in the first year or two of the plant (i.e., buying a sound system, renting space, purchasing children's ministry supplies, paying for printing and advertising, obtaining necessary office and computer equipment, etc).

Here are sample questions we ask to determine whether the potential church planter exercises a sense of call:

- How do they approach budgeting and spending? What kind of budgeting or financial planning experience have they had?
- Has personal debt or controlling credit card spending ever been a problem for them? Please explain.
- How faithful and consistent would they say they are in tithing and giving generous offerings? How long have they been tithing?
- How comfortable would they say they are with teaching Biblical principles of giving and asking others to financially support the work to which God has called them?

Vineyard Values and Methods:

Understanding and Familiarity with Our Values and Methods

As the church planter desires to reproduce a Vineyard church, they must understand firsthand the essential values of the Vineyard church life. Vineyard values and methods include our theological commitments to be “empowered evangelicals” who are committed to conservative, evangelical theology, expository preaching and an emphasis on Scripture, evangelism, thoughtful discipleship as well as ministering the power of the Spirit and spiritual gifts.

A grasping of our style is also necessary, meaning an approach that avoids hype, believes that you can’t manufacture the work of the Holy Spirit who, with the church, is able, willing and free to break in and carry on his work in a non-spectacular, non-manipulative and surprising way. We follow hard after God and believe that his grace and mercy change people’s hearts more powerfully than human or religious “regulations.”

We value contemporary worship that connects people to God in ways that change us and reorient us. We value taking risks. We value ministry to the poor. We value leadership in the church as a result of functional reality, not a position or reward.

Here are sample questions we ask to determine whether the potential church planter exercises a sense of call:

- What exposure have they had to Vineyard values, styles, and methods?
- What values of the Vineyard are most important to them?
- Are they familiar with the Vineyard’s Theological and Philosophical Statements? To what extent do they agree with them?
- Describe their first experiences with the Vineyard. How well do they feel the Vineyard fits with who they are?
- What extent of experience have they had ministering in the gifts and power of the Holy Spirit? How comfortable are they in leading or training other to function in kingdom ministry?

Solid Marriage and Family or Healthy Singleness:

Family Involvement and Agreement in Ministry Roles

A married church planter must be in a solid marriage and with a spouse who supports and agrees to be involved some way in the church plant. The husband and wife need to be on the same page in regards to God’s calling for them and God’s timing for the things of their call. Waiting until there is solid and agreed footing for the couple is better than undertaking the church planting process and paying the consequences in the marriage and the church.

Here are sample questions we ask to determine whether the potential church planter exercises a sense of call:

- If married, how do they and their spouse use their gifts and talents to complement each other? (If single: How well developed are their friendships? Whom do they look to as a main sources of emotional support?)
- Rate themselves on their ability to make personal friends together. (If single: How well do they maintain healthy boundaries between themselves and persons of the opposite sex? Are there any unresolved sexual temptations that might lead them into moral failure?)
- To what degree does their spouse feel a call to church planting? Are there any issues with children that would make it difficult? (If single: How do their parents or other family members feel about the possibility of them planting a Vineyard church?)
- How would they assess their ability to pray together as a couple? (If single: How do they feel about planting a church as a single person?).

Emotional Maturity:

Adjusts to Changes, Challenges, and Correction

The church planter must have the tenacity and desire to adjust to changes, challenges and corrections. This means they have a track record of teachability, learning from their mistakes and attempting at it again. Do they have it in them to overcome failure and return? As changes, challenges, mistakes and failures are all one piece of the experience of church planting, these characteristics must be present for the planter to survive.

Here are sample questions we ask to determine whether the potential church planter exercises a sense of call:

- Have they ever had their integrity challenged or their motives questioned? If so, how did they handle it?
- How do they deal with people they feel are difficult? How have they handled someone quitting or not following through on a commitment?
- Explain a time when they received correction from one of their leaders. How did they respond?
- How do they handle crisis situations? To what degree are they able to maintain a positive attitude?
- What is one of the most painful experiences they've had? How has this affected their life?

Vital Spiritual Life:

Has a Personal Lifestyle of Worship and Intimacy with God

The planter has to have evidence of a strong lifestyle of worship and prayer, starting the plant with a depth of spiritual strength and at a spiritual “high point.” We should be cautious when someone deeply questions their faith, are in spiritual deserts or has not genuinely grasped the whole idea of intimacy with God.

The heart habits in which one learns to walk in God’s presence and hear God for themselves have to be developed to be sent out to plant. A vital spiritual life is, in fact, fundamental to all other components and the “well” out of which ministry must flow for years to come. If that well is dry or has never been dug properly, the spiritual resources so desperately needed in church planting will be inadequate to the task that will be required in the days ahead.

Here are sample questions we ask to determine whether the potential church planter exercises a sense of call:

- Describe their spiritual condition and their current relationship with God.

- How have they responded to emotionally, physically, or spiritual difficult seasons in their life?
- What spiritual disciplines have they practiced? As a general rule, how much time a day do they set aside for prayer, worship, and Bible study?
- How have they or will they balance ministry and their own spiritual growth?
- Is there any area of their life or character in which they are currently struggling with sin?