

REAP 3: Identify an area to plant into

Learning aim: identify the kind of plants in the network, the different strands in the network, and how different kinds of plants relate to their leaders and the network.

The deep background of REAP: leader-led church planting

We can think of two extremes in the stories of church planting. One is entirely institutional: a denomination, or a large church decides to plant a church. They plan where to plant, raise the money, put out a job description, perhaps look for a start-up congregation, and then look to hire someone. The leader only begins to lead once the church is running.

At the other end of the spectrum is someone with a call and a rucksack. They go somewhere, start talking to people, and after a while a church is formed. There is no denomination, possibly not a lot of money, no start-up congregation, and usually no building. The plant is entirely leader-led.

REAP was, and is, a training programme for leader-led church planting, but within a network. That said, we think of three kinds of church plant.

Three kinds of church plants in the Antioch Network

1. Engineered. This is where the Antioch Network says 'we should plant a church here' and then we usually pay a salary for someone to do it. We'll back people up with some funds, look for potential team members and usually steer them towards some fruitful practices. This doesn't sound a lot like leader-led planting. And in ways it's not. It's a start-up practice, designed to inject planters into the network in the early phases. Our Rochdale plants are examples of this. While this might continue for a little while, it's not the pattern we're looking to for the future.

2. Organic. This is where one or more congregations come together to plant as they grow. This is what we're aiming for as our main church planting method longer term. In this case the place to plant becomes obvious as the churches around it grow. The reason is that the sites will either be very local or they will evolve with existing networks. The sites for these churches will become obvious as the leadership emerges. The Longsight church was an example of this. The multiplication of churches in cities in New Testament times were often of this kind.

3. Spontaneous. This is where a leader steps forward to say 'can I plant here with you?' In this case the place to plant is the one on the leader's heart. The network will support the leader, but the actual idea is the leader's. The Radcliffe plants are of this kind. In the Bible, the Antioch and Samaritan church plants were of this kind.

There are of course, combinations of these kinds of plants. Perhaps not too many are purely organic, engineered, or spontaneous.

Different kinds of plant and how they look at where to plant

Our goal is to be a movement of church planting churches across Greater Manchester. We are driven by Jesus' command to make disciples. So our choice of church planting

sites will be shaped by that idea. The two tracks of the Antioch Network look slightly differently at how this happens.

Estates Ministry

Making disciples in places. Estates often have very strong communities. The gospel has to be plausible and life-changing in those places. But people have a strongly local mindset.

That means engineered church plants are likely to be based strongly on need. There may be little or no church work in an estate, or a locality. Antioch may set up a church because it wants to start spreading work over that area.

Organic plants are likely to be very local – moving short distances, building on existing relationships and family networks.

Spontaneous networks will see leaders step forward who may have relationships with people on a given estate or in a local area.

Key question: How did the decision to plant your church come about?

The diverse strand

The diverse strand of the network makes disciples more in networks than in specific places. That is, although places matter, they don't matter as much as friendship networks. The key role of the church is to disciple those networks.

Engineered plants: we like to plant in places where there are a lot of people; significant places where people gather and mix, where the gospel can be carried quickly. We will tend to engineer plants in town centres, and we are now looking at how to plant into the city centre.

Spontaneous plants: leaders come into the diverse side of the network often because they are called to plant cross culturally. These plants may well be concentrated nearer to other churches and ministries. South Manchester has a lot of churches, often working with students, and this has birthed a number of diverse plants.

Organic plants are likely to come not just out of geography, but also out of networks. Because people from different ethnic groups will often travel miles to join others in their community, that means that church plants can be based on existing connections, even when people don't live very near one another. In some ways, Paul and Barnabas' mission began this way. They went to the synagogues of Cyprus, where Barnabas had grown up. It was an organic/ spontaneous plant through a network.

Leader-led Church planting

Here are four things to consider when making a decision about where to plant:

1) Need

There are few disciples among a given group of people or in a given place. Paul wanted to preach in Spain because he wanted to make the good news known where it had never been heard. There is a huge positive challenge to church planting among completely

unreached people groups. It's exciting, it's motivating, but it can be tough. Unreached people groups tend to be unreached because either no Christian wants to live with them, or they've rejected the gospel. You have to be prepared to struggle in prayer and keep going back to God until that group opens up. Having said that, we are seeing increasing openness among some groups in Greater Manchester – Saudi Arabians for example!

2) Opportunity

Opportunity can be almost the opposite of need. It's where there are people who are open to the gospel and where you aim to disciple them effectively. For example, this has often included students, and some ethnic groups who are more open to the gospel than average. This is picking up low-hanging fruit. It's not a bad way to go – but you have to know what you intend to do with the fruit. It can be too easy to flock into the same areas as other churches, compete for market share and not ask how this will disciple the city.

Another factor in opportunity is your team. If there is a solid team of people who are living in an area who want something local – then you have an opportunity.

The Church of England places some importance on buildings – if there is a good vacant building, then there is an opportunity to plant. In Antioch, we don't place such a high emphasis on venues early on in the process. If the team is gathered around a clear vision, the venue will sort itself out.

3) Specific call

7 When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. 8 So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. 9 During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." 10 After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

In this passage from Acts, God prevents Paul and his companions from going where they originally intended (Bithynia) and sent them to where they had not intended – Macedonia. Sometimes the Lord gives a specific, clear vision to plant in a given place. This is how spontaneous plants may sometimes occur.

4) It makes sense

This sounds unspiritual, but it's not. We don't plant churches because of a specific vision from heaven: see the 'why do we plant churches' video on the training channel. We plant churches to grow leaders, to reach new areas and groups, and to help us reshape our churches around those who don't yet follow Jesus. Sometimes, when a church gets too big, we have to ask – where do we go next? You know you have to plant, but you're not yet sure where. This is often how organic plants will work.

How would you say that the decision to plant your church was made? How has that affected the team?

Things you can do at this stage

This a quick session on guidance. Here are some stories and examples of the way that God's call into an area can be sensed.

Prayer walking – as you spend time in an area, walking through it, watching people, you may get a sense of what God is calling you into. There is a threshold called the ‘sell your house threshold’. You are going to call team members to serve this area. Is the Lord calling you to stand before him praying for a breakthrough in that place. As you do this, you may well feel a sense of excitement about what God has for you next.

Learning to see opportunity – sometimes the opportunities in a place aren’t obvious. We’ll discuss this when we come onto evangelism networks in the ‘dream to reality’ phase. But sometimes, as you talk through what a place really looks like from God’s point of view, you begin to see opportunities that you couldn’t see before.

Talk with, and pray with people. There is an Arabic proverb: (choose) the companion before the road, and the neighbour before the house. This is a complex one – you might sense that God is calling you into work with another person, and that person affects your calling about where to plant. This happens. Paul and Barnabas went to Cyprus because Barnabas was from Cyprus, as far as we can tell. But.....people disappoint. Every plant, as we saw earlier, has both community and purpose. If you put too much emphasis on a ministry partnership you rely very heavily on another person’s call.

Reflect on your gifts, ministry and outlook. When I (John) first came back to England in 2009, I looked at a number of places where we might live and work. One of them was on a white estate in Bradford. The church was even led by someone who had followed me into a job on a white estate in Kent 25 years earlier. But it didn’t seem right – God had shaped me for a reason, given me a history and a heart for people moving and changing – and particularly for Africans, Arabs and Asians. So we took a non-job with no pay and moved into Manchester. Which, incidentally, is where I met Ben.

The legal stuff and communication with churches

We can deal with this here, rather than later, particularly for Antioch churches. At some point, Antioch, as an Anglican church planting network, needs to talk to the other Anglican ministers in the area.

This will happen in three stages.

Firstly, we put the word out if we’re clearly interested in working in a specific area. We’ll communicate clearly and openly about what we intend to do. This is, of course, just good communication with Christian brothers and sisters. But when we know more exactly where we’ll plant, it gets a little more formal.

At this point we move to the second stage, talking to the priest in charge of the parish we’re planting into. Usually they’re fine with us being there, but they can ask for us not to do things, or ask for a slightly closer partnership. That’s for us to agree with them.

The third stage will be very rare. If they say, definitely not, then we have to rethink. We can ask the bishop to override the opinion of the parish priest, or we can go somewhere else. In practice, few priests would be so hostile and the bishop would probably want to see a good reason for their refusal.

The important thing for Antioch planters is to communicate properly with other ministers in the area, and Anglican ministers in particular.