



CHURCH PLANTING PROFILE SERIES

FINDING START-UP FACILITIES



FOR YOUR NEW CHURCH

By Mark Williams

© DCPI, 2000

INTRODUCTION

Often one of the biggest challenges in church planting is finding a start-up facility for the new church. Locating and securing the right building can be extremely difficult, frustrating, and sometimes a huge financial drain. And a new church often lives with the reality that they could lose their rented facility with only a month's notice. So the church planter knows that the carpet could be pulled out from under him and his church, and they would be "homeless."

While planting my first church, we were blessed with a good facility at a reasonable price. But because it was a public building, a few times a year we were preempted by other groups who had a prior rental agreement. On those weekends we had to move out so the flower or dog show could move in! Our facility went to the dogs! We were forced to meet in another location for the day, acutely aware that we were dependent on others for a roof over our heads.

We lived with that undependable situation for five years. Finally we had the opportunity to buy a church facility from a congregation that had died. We were thrilled to have our own place, but we also faced the challenges of a run-down facility in much need of renovation. Furthermore, the building was old-fashioned and communicated a different image from who we really were as a church: contemporary, young, and growing. People who visited were often looking for a more traditional congregation, instead of a contemporary group meeting in an older facility.

The "perfect" church facility doesn't exist. However, the goal of each church planter ought to be to get as close to the ideal as possible. This profile is designed to help you find the best possible solution to your new church facility needs.

This profile gives seven steps in finding the right start-up facility:

- | | |
|--|--------------|
| 1. Pray! | p. 2 |
| 2. Determine your minimal requirements. | p. 4 |
| 3. List potential facilities. | p. 7 |
| 4. Narrow your search by your "needs." | p. 9 |
| 5. Further narrow by your "wants." | p. 10 |
| 6. Lock in the location. | p. 13 |
| 7. Keep evaluating your facility. | p. 14 |

STEP ONE: PRAY!

Finding the right facility should be a priority prayer request from the beginning, from the moment you begin to envision your new church. Focus your own prayers on this matter, and quickly enlist others to join you.

Who to recruit to pray: You should involve your emerging core team, your mother and partner churches, your prayer team, your association of churches. Mobilize prayer through personal contacts, pastors' fellowships, denominational meetings, newsletters, email lists, and any other ways the Lord brings to mind.

What to pray for: Use the criteria listed in steps two and five below. In addition, pray:

- That you will be able to locate a facility quickly
- That you will be given favor with the persons in charge of the facility.
- That the Lord will protect your church wherever it meets.
- That the Lord will close the wrong doors and open the right ones.
- That you will have wisdom in the selection process.

How they can pray: Use creativity in asking others to pray for the needs of your church. Here are some ideas to stimulate your thinking:

Ask individuals to pray for your church home each time they do something related to their own home, like when they:

- Put the key in their own front door.
- Turn on a light in their home or apartment.
- Make a house payment.
- Entertain friends.
- Hold a group meeting.
- Make a special contribution to the building fund of their church.
- _____

I will ask individuals to pray in the following ways:

Churches could be asked to pray for your new facility:

- Whenever they hold a social activity in their church building.
- Each time they celebrate communion.
- During baptismal services, as they envision new people being won to Christ in your new church.
- On the first Sunday of the month.
- _____

I will ask churches to pray in the following ways:

The church planter and team can focus prayer for a facility when:

- Doing "drive-by praying" in the community.
- On a high place overlooking the city.
- On a prayer retreat as they dream of the kind of church that will be started and what it will look like.
- _____

My team and I will pray in the following ways:

Other ideas for prayer have been discussed elsewhere in this Profile.

Remember to keep facilities an ongoing prayer priority. Just because you have a good place, don't stop praying. You don't know when you may need to move in order to advance the Kingdom or have to move due to a problem with your current facility.

STEP TWO: DETERMINE YOUR MINIMAL REQUIREMENTS

What facility needs do you envision for the church that you plan to start? Different churches will have completely different needs. Your needs will be determined largely by the style of church you believe God wants you to start, by the size of your community, and by the number of people you hope to gather when the church begins.

The following will help you determine the minimal requirements for your emerging church.

FACILITY MINIMAL NEEDS:

Criterion #1 Auditorium:

Remember to plan for an auditorium that is big enough for your expected group. When a church auditorium facility is over 80% full, it limits the growth of the church because it is uncomfortable: having to search to find an open seat, not being able to sit together as a family, etc. Yes, a packed auditorium can be exciting occasionally. But when people are squeezed in each Sunday, there is a limiting factor called "sociological strangulation." Don't strangle your church with a facility that is too small.

At the same time, try not to secure a facility that you will rattle around in. Aim for an appropriate "critical mass" which is defined as the number of people it takes to feel like the meeting place is comfortably full. Ask others to help you figure out what that would be in a given situation.

ATTENDANCE ESTIMATES:

Number of adults you hope will attend your first service: _____

Number of adults you hope will be attending your services in three months: _____

Number of adults you hope will be attending your services in six months: _____

Number of adults you hope will be attending your services in 12 months: _____

SIZE ESTIMATES:

Needed auditorium seating size range for first service: _____ (Eg. 50 to 100 people.)

Needed auditorium seating size range needed in three months: _____

Needed auditorium seating size range needed in six months: _____

Needed auditorium seating size range needed in twelve months: _____

Criterion #2 Children's Space:

In many Western nations, children's ministries areas are vitally important. If this is not a concern for your context, then you may want to disregard this section. However, even if you don't plan to have a special place for children's classes, you should consider issues such as reserving an area in the back of the auditorium for children, a cry room, babies in diapers, sleep area in the auditorium...

For churches wanting to have children's classes:

- How many children do you expect? _____
- What ages/grade levels will you need space for? _____
- Number of children's classes excluding nursery: _____
- How many babies do you expect? _____
- Size of nursery area needed: _____

Conclusion: Minimum requirements for Children's Space (Classes and Nursery):

Criterion #3 Parking:

In Western nations, if people can't park their cars, oftentimes they won't be able or willing to come to the church. A church will only grow to the size of the parking available in many cases. Adequate parking is often not enough: you need excess parking if possible. The formula is usually one space for every 1.5 persons in North America.

Number of total people you hope will attend your first service: _____ divided by 1.5.
= _____ parking spaces needed.

Number of total people you hope will be attending your services in three months:
_____ divided by 1.5. = _____ parking spaces needed.

Number of total people you hope will be attending your services in six months: _____
divided by 1.5. = _____ parking spaces needed.

Number of total people you hope will be attending your services in 12 months: _____
divided by 1.5. = _____ parking spaces needed.

Criterion #4 Proximity to target:

You can have a fantastic facility, but if it is not within travel distance of the people you are trying to reach, it will do you no good. What is the travel distance you are looking for—by car, bus, subway, bicycle, foot, by...?

In the US, a rule of thumb is that people will generally be willing to drive twenty minutes to a church facility. In other cultures, the measure may be walking distance, or bus distance, scooter distance, and so on.

Expected mode(s) of transportation: _____

Travel time by your expected mode(s) of transportation: In the two columns below write the one, two or three modes of travel you expect people to use to come to your place of worship, and the amount of travel time you estimate they will be willing to spend.

MODE	TRAVEL TIME
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

STEP THREE: LIST POTENTIAL FACILITIES

Now it is time to survey your community and list as many potential places for meeting as you can. Have an open mind! You may need to think very creatively. Try to list at least fifteen facilities that you might look into later. At this point your goal is not to investigate the facilities or evaluate them, but simply to list them.

One fun way to do this is to get a van or bus and drive around the community with members of your core group. This time could be used to pray and envision your community coming to Christ.

Below is a list of facilities we have heard of being used as new church facilities. Not all of these are necessarily recommended but you can use them to stimulate your creativity.

1. Seventh Day Adventist Church
2. VFW hall
3. Funeral parlor
4. Outdoor amphitheater
5. Restaurant
6. Warehouse
7. Chicken coop
8. Tent
9. Bingo parlor
10. Lodge
11. Beach
12. Bank
13. Multipurpose community room
14. Hotel Conference Room
15. Movie theater
16. Senior Center
17. School: elementary, secondary, college, vocational school, nursery school, day care center
18. Christian campground
19. City Hall
20. Parks (either outdoors or in park buildings)
21. Barns
22. Churches during off hours
23. Armory
24. Home
25. Synagogue (very Biblical!)

List below the potential places your new church could meet. Try to list at least fifteen so you have a comprehensive list to work from:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____
11. _____
12. _____
13. _____
14. _____
15. _____
16. _____
17. _____
18. _____
19. _____
20. _____

STEP FOUR: NARROW YOUR SEARCH BY YOUR "NEEDS"

Now it is time to begin to narrow your search for a facility. Give a YES/NO evaluation for each potential facility based on the four criteria listed above in Step Two. Note: If each of the four areas is indeed a necessity, a "no" answer on any of the four will probably eliminate that location from consideration.

Name of Facility	Adequate Auditorium Seating	Adequate Number of Classrooms	Adequate Parking	Sufficient Proximity to Target	CONCLUSION	COMMENTS/ CONCLUSION
Libby School	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	NO	Could try for parking at neighboring business. Otherwise it won't work.
1.						
2.						
3.						
4.						
5.						
6.						
7.						
8.						
9.						
10.						
11.						
12.						
13.						
14.						
15.						
16.						
17.						
18.						
19.						
20.						

STEP FIVE: FURTHER NARROW BY YOUR "WANTS"

Philippians 4:19 promises "And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus" (NIV). Yet sometimes the Lord not only supplies our needs, but He gives us more. And since it is His church, allow Him to bless His work in whatever ways He will.

By completing Step Four you should have narrowed your list of potential facilities. Perhaps you're now considering only four or five. This step will help you select your top choice. The criteria will be "wants"—qualities that would significantly improve your facility as a meeting place for the new church.

FACILITY "WANTS" CRITERIA:

1. **Visibility/location:** It is helpful if a facility is highly visible and easy to locate. If the potential facility is on a main road, in a downtown area, or in a building that people in the community are familiar with, then it may rank high in this area on the chart below.
2. **Attractiveness:** Generally, beauty attracts people. However, if your facility is too "rich" looking for your target group, you may have a mismatch. So aim for a high attractiveness rating based on the viewpoint of your target audience. Beauty will include obvious and perhaps not-so-obvious considerations such as outside landscaping, darkness cf. lightness, smells from usage at other times, artwork that portrays themes contrary to your tastes, general cleanness, and so on.
3. **Fellowship Area:** Is there an area for after-service refreshments or even meals? Is there a kitchen available for your use? Is the fellowship area shaded for summer, or heated for cooler weather? Will it be noisy if preparation is going on during church meetings?
4. **Platform:** It is usually helpful for a church to have a raised platform and some leaders might even consider it extremely important. Is the platform area big enough to meet your needs for the first year or two? Portable risers might be an option, but it is far more helpful if a facility has its own platform.
5. **Equipment:** This might include items such as chairs and tables (both adult and children), a quality sound system, sinks, attractive lectern/pulpit, piano/keyboard, cooking equipment, etc. This can be a very important consideration. If you have to haul in 100 folding chairs, life can be very difficult. List below the equipment you will need as a church which might be available in a facility:

6. **Storage space:** As a "nomadic church," you are going to need to provide for storage space for everything you need on Sundays. It would be helpful if a facility has a secure storage space that is adequate for you to store all the needed supplies and equipment. If such a space is not available, you will have to compensate by: acquiring a trailer you can tow, creating portable storage units, building a storage unit on the property, renting an extra room or storage unit nearby, or whatever.

7. **Affordability:** Affordability might seem like a necessity, not just a "want." However, we would encourage you to trust God to supply what is needed for the best facility for your church's needs. If the facility is more expensive than you feel you can afford, try a creative approach. You might find a sponsor who will underwrite the need, or trade custodial services to lower the rent, or raise support from outside donors, or consider the facility your second option after the church grows a bit in its first facility, or reallocate budget money from another area to pay for the facility, or pray for a miracle!
8. **Spiritual factors:** Be sure to consider what other activities have happened in the facility that might cause it to be a place of spiritual oppression. "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph. 6:12, NIV). What might be the impact of using places such as a Masonic lodge, a bar, a cult-owned facility, a Veterans of Foreign Wars "lounge," a facility in close proximity to cultic groups? You must determine if you can sanctify it or if you are being a potential victim of a stronghold of the enemy. Pray earnestly to seek God's specific leading before selecting a facility that may have a spiritually questionable history. If you do end up renting such a place, be sure to schedule times of prayer throughout the facility, asking God to protect each room and area.
9. **Seating arrangement:** Some facilities have sufficient room in their auditorium, yet the seating arrangement is awkward or the chairs are uncomfortable. Or perhaps the seating is permanent (bolted to the floor, for example) and cannot be adapted to your needs. You may prefer a semi-circle for your worship service, but the facility gives you only the option of straight rows. You must determine the ideal for your church, and rate each facility based on the ideal. It is often helpful to have removable chairs so that you can set up only as many chairs as are needed, or even set up a few less than are needed in order to encourage people to sit in the front rows. Then you can experience the excitement of adding chairs as more people come in.
10. **Long term growth potential:** Another issue to consider is the length of time you may be able to use a particular facility. Does it have long term potential—a year, two years, five years? Or are you likely to grow out of the facility in the first three months? Some facilities have two or three potential meeting rooms that you can utilize depending on the size of your congregation.
11. **Long term stability (with flexibility):** The ideal is to have the use of a facility as long as you want it, and be able to leave without any hindrance whenever you need to. In general, it is probably wise for a church not to sign a long-term lease until it has been meeting for at least six months to a year. This will allow the leadership to gain a sense of its size and growth pattern. Otherwise you may be locked into a facility that is both too big and expensive, or too small for your congregation. Of course, the downside of a month-to-month rental agreement is that you could be forced to move out at any time with thirty days notice. So pray for and look for a facility you can leave when you need to, but will not ask you to move until you are ready!
12. **Usable at other times:** Where will your church meet for midweek services, classes, special events and so on? It is helpful to have a facility that can be used at other times. Is the facility available at other times? Is it a facility you would like to use at other times?

Use the following chart to evaluate each of the locations from your short list. Following the example of "Hometown Community Center," rate each facility based on each factor on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 = inadequate and 10 = excellent. After rating each factor find the total score and your top choice. Drop any criteria that do not apply to you. Circle any areas that are of particular importance to you.

FACILITY "WANTS" TABLE

	Hometown Community Center					
1. Visibility/Location	9					
2. Attractiveness	3					
3. Fellowship Area	6					
4. Platform	2					
5. Equipment	9					
6. Storage Space	5					
7. Affordability	5					
8. Spiritual Factors	1					
9. Seating Arrangement	2					
10. Long Term Growth Potential	8					
11. Long Term Stability (with Flexibility)	8					
12. Usable at Other Times	9					
TOTALS (OUT OF 120 POSSIBLE)	67					

STEP SIX: LOCK IN THE LOCATION

Your process of earnest prayer and careful evaluation has brought you to the point where you are ready to lock in your location.

But remember, you have not locked in a location until you have worked out rental details, signed an agreement, paid a deposit and the first month, worked out the issue of liability insurance and have the key in hand or custodian lined up to open for you. Be careful not to count on a particular facility until all the details have been worked out!

If possible, it is best to finalize these details and lock in the location long before your church will be using it. Use the following checklist to make sure you don't miss anything in securing a site for your church.

Checklist for Locking in a Facility:

- I have a signed rental agreement or lease with a clear understanding regarding:
 - The price to rent or lease.
 - The date we can start using the building.
 - The terms of the lease (month-to-month? Six months?)
 - Options for renewing the lease: When? What price?
 - Liability insurance—who provides it and how much?
 - Who opens the facility—do we get a key?
 - Will a custodian be there each time? If he is sick or doesn't show up how do we get in?
 - Who do we call in an emergency?
 - Who sets up and takes down the facilities before and after church?
 - Cleaning responsibilities—what we are responsible for?
 - The amount of notice necessary to terminate tenancy.
 - Who pays for utilities.
 - _____
- I have made a list of items that are broken (or in need of repair) before taking possession so that we are not blamed for things we didn't do.
- I have made sure photographs are taken so we remember how to put things back as we found them.
- I have finalized plans for storage at the facility or elsewhere.
- I have a means to transport the equipment that can't be stored there.
- I have a person to make sure the facility is in proper order before we leave each time.
- _____

STEP SEVEN: KEEP EVALUATING YOUR FACILITY

Winston Churchill said, "We shape our buildings and then our buildings shape us." One of the benefits of being a church without a permanent home is that you can change locations with less complication when your rented facility no longer meets your needs. You don't have to be shaped by a particular building!

Use this advantage to the best of your ability. How? By constantly evaluating and adapting your location.

Mark your calendar now for periodic facility evaluations—perhaps every three months. Hopefully the senior pastor can delegate this task, but he needs to make sure it is done. Use the following questions to help you with this process of evaluation.

QUESTIONS FOR ONGOING EVALUATION:

Expressing Thankfulness: You need to thank the ones who have allowed you to be in the facility, and the ones who could force an early exit from your facility. This will help increase the chances that you will not be asked to leave before you are ready to move on!

These influencers will often include: the administrator who must give approval for usage, the custodian(s), teachers whose rooms you are using, a school principal, etc. The question to ask yourself is, "Have I thanked the right people in the right ways with enough frequency?" You can express gratitude via letters, gifts, acts of service, flowers, equipment that can be added to the facility, and so on.

Who is the person responsible for this area? _____

Use the area below to record who you are thanking, when they have been shown gratitude and how.

Person to thank: _____

DATES	HOW THANKED
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Person to thank: _____

DATES	HOW THANKED
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Person to thank: _____

DATES	HOW THANKED
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Person to thank: _____

DATES	HOW THANKED
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Upkeep: How much are plants, equipment, staging, etc., becoming weathered and worn by moving each week? This is probably an area for outside eyes since we often don't notice worn and broken things around us after we see them a few times. We become accustomed to the way things are, and don't see what an outsider sees when first coming to our facility. Ask a friend, visiting pastor, unsaved neighbor, denominational leader, etc. to go through your facility on a Sunday morning and list all the areas that need attention.

Who is the person responsible for this area?: _____

Need

Person who will take care of it:

Upgrades: Another area to work on is the area of facility and equipment upgrades. Upgrades communicate that your church is moving forward. They provide freshness and variety to your location.

Who is the person responsible for this area?: _____

Suggested Upgrade

Person who will take care of it:

Future Plans: The last area to be working on is your plans for the next stages in your church's facility needs. You must be looking to the future and answering questions such as: How long can we stay in our current facility? Do I have a plan B if this facility falls through? Do we hope to own our own facility some day? What are our intermediate plans before owning our own place? How long do we want to be a transient "porta-church?"

In our experience, churches often follow the general stages below. Yet every church is different, and your facility use will depend on your area, available locations, finances, philosophy of ministry, and so on.

CONCLUSION:

The process of finding a facility starts with prayer, is driven by prayer and will be futile without prayer. Below is a suggested prayer that you and your team can begin to pray:

Dear Heavenly Father;

You are the LORD of the church—this church is Yours. Unless You build this church, we labor in vain.

Lord, I know that You are more concerned with Your church than I could ever be. Yet You have chosen us to do the legwork in finding a home for this Body. Lord, please guide us in this process and lead us to the right facility for our church at this time. Smooth the path before us and make Your will clearly known to us.

Please protect us from making unwise decisions. Protect those who come to the location that you lead us to. May many people come to salvation in the place(s) You lead us to.

Most of all we pray that we would please You in all that we do.

We pray in Jesus' precious name,

Amen.

1.800.255.0431
SERVICE@DCPI.ORG
WWW.DCPI.ORG

