

Preparing the ground

Too many church plants are launched before the ground is properly prepared. What do we need to do before we are ready for a public launch? How does one know when the time is right for a launch? How long should we allow for a preparation period? What activities might one engage in prior to the launch? Are there ever occasions when the soil is simply too poor to work with and how might we know?

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1. The first priority is to understand the culture.

A. We are dealing here with a European context.

Features of the European landscape:

- a) post- Christian
- b) historically divided between Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox pasts. These different pasts influence the present.
- c) post modern
- d) post secular

B. We can characterize this context as open by cautious and skeptical.

C. There are exceptions to this overall picture:

- a) Many immigrant communities
- b) Marginalised groups such as the Romany communities
- c) Needy groups such as drug users

2. The second need is to recruit the team. I don't wish to say too much about the team in this context because I am giving a separate talk on this subject. For the moment I just want to point out that there is a difference between a team and a workgroup. All teams need to produce work but not all workgroups are teams.

3. The third need is for the team to be trained.
 - A. Training needs to be in relation to the cultural and sub-cultural group that you have identified and are trying to reach.
 - B. Practical training needs to result in a strategy being formed.
 - C. In one sense training never ends but effective training needs to include a strong element of action/ reflection in the process.
4. Preparation activities
 - A. Identifying people of peace
 - B. Assessing needs
 - C. Creating small group meetings
 - D. Holding occasional events/ celebrations
 - E. Locating appropriate premises related to planting strategy
 - F. Prayer

Conclusion

There are very few situations in the west that are completely unreachable even though the sowing time may be longer than in many areas of high receptivity. The key is not whether a church can be planted so much as being realistic as to whether you and your team are able to plant a church. That assessment will critically depend on you making some converts who are insiders in the culture and who have the capacity to influence other of their contemporaries.

