

Mistakes and Lessons in Church Planting

There are a lot of lessons learned in the field of church planting from the last 20-30 years in Europe. In this session we will share some of the lessons and reflect on their significance in our own contexts.

Øivind Augland is a pastor and church planter with the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church of Norway. He is a leader of the national network for church planting in Norway and works with training and networking for church planting in Scandinavia and the Baltic states. Øivind developed the M4 church planting training materials. He is founder and owner of Xpand Norway and Persolog Norway. Øivind's call in life is to bring people from all nations, generations and denominations to work side-by-side in extending the kingdom of God (Nehemiah 3:1f). Øivind is married to Linda and they have four children.

1. Not in rebellion or arrogance – but with a servant's heart: The attitudes a church planter has can be decisive for the future of a new church. A church planted with a mind polluted by pride, arrogance and rebellion can only bear bad fruit. Leaders who are angry or rebellious – those who want to plant a new church because they think they can do it better or want to make their mother church look bad—are not ready to plant a new church. We are called to bless and not to curse, to walk in faith and forgiveness – not in accusation.

2. Relationship and discipleship first: Not programs, not buildings, but people come first. Church planting is about people, not activities. Our goal should always be sharing the gospel with others, leading them to Christ and discipling them to become mature in their lives and ministry. Quality programs are good, but they must be seen as a means and not the end in church planting.

3. Not alone – but together: You have to prioritize and create good teams to bring out the diversity of spiritual gifts that are required to start a healthy community. A single individual with an extraordinary combination of talents and gifts is not enough. Character goes before charisma. Gifts will cease, but love never fails.¹ This is important to think about when you search for team members. Loving relationships between the members in the core team is a strong and healthy foundation for the work of evangelism. People are invited into a fellowship where they see the gospel in flesh and blood, lived out in our relationships. This is the kind of fellowship where discipleship can happen.

¹ 1 Corinthians 13

4. Relevance and faithfulness: It is very important to create churches that are relevant to people outside of the church. Church planting is all about making the gospel relevant in any given context. But the desire for relevance can also become a stumbling block. We must never compromise the gospel in our search for relevance. When we wish to identify with the culture, we must be sure that our motivation originates from the right attitudes. We can have the greatest dreams and plans, but if we're not truly humble and faithful in our attitude toward the Word of God, we are sure to fail.² Our desire to be relevant to our audience must never replace an uncompromising faithfulness to the gospel and honesty about what it truly costs to follow Christ.

5. You can't get away from it – family comes first: The church is described as the family of God, and a well-functioning family is one of the best role models for a new fellowship. Our families need to be in the position to demonstrate how we grow in the Word of God, how we speak grace and truth to each other, and how to love our neighbors in word and action. But if our family situation is filled with strife, there is a good chance that the church plant will be, also. Devotion to the church is not an excuse for troubles in the family—a church planter can never hide behind his or her church activities. A healthy church planter is a healthy husband and father, wife and mother. An ailing marriage and a poorly functioning family can never be justified by our commitment to the ministry.

² Proverbs 16:8