

Funding a Church Plant: Conversation with a Church Planter

Troy Mini, home missionary with the Assemblies of God, recently spoke with AGTS Director of Development and Alumni Relations Paul Martinez about the process of raising funds for a church plant. He received his master's degree in theological studies from AGTS in 2003. Troy and his wife, Dawn, are itinerating this summer and plan to start a church in Boston.

Rapport: One of the most daunting challenges facing church planters today is funding. How are church planters raising funds?

Troy: I really think the best way to start a church is to be mothered. Often a mothering church will commit time, finances, and people. Having those extra people can become crucial for momentum at the beginning. If there is a strong church in your area, this is great. But you can't just go up to a pastor you don't know and spring your vision on him. With the pastor's permission, get involved in the church. Let them get to know you and get to know your heart. Then, when the pastor allows you to present your vision to the church, not only does your proposal have a better chance of being accepted, but you can also inspire individuals within the church who share your vision. The supporting church might send those people out with you to plant the new church.

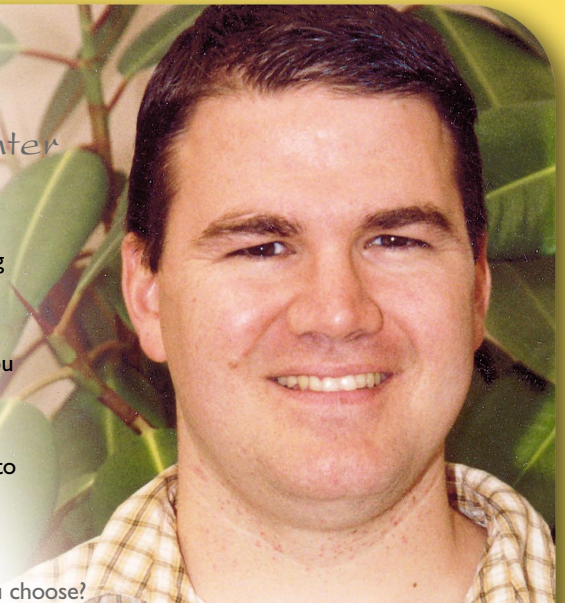
Another option would be district appointment. Some aggressive A/G districts have raised millions of dollars for church planting. There may be districts just waiting for a willing and qualified planter to express interest. They might

even link you up with a strong church in the area that could lend resources or people. Some districts will support you for up to three years. Find a district that is aggressive for church planting and is willing to get behind it with some finances.

Rapport: What method did you choose?

Troy: I felt home missions was most appropriate in my situation. As an itinerating missionary, you have the opportunity to share your vision with so many churches and individuals who can get on board with what you are doing. Some churches, in addition to supporting you monthly, might catch the vision for specific projects. I know of one situation where a church planter was sharing his vision for reaching Chicago with another church. He showed them pictures of the building in its current condition. The church caught his vision and decided to furnish the entire building. Individuals even invested in restoring all the bathrooms and gymnasium. So, there are benefits to sharing your vision with a broad base of people. Also, a broader base of support offers more security. If it takes a while for your church to get on its feet, churches and individuals who give smaller amounts of money are often more willing to continue supporting you than a single district or church that is bearing the entire financial burden.

Rapport : It seems like itineration might be an intimidating process. How did you get started?



Troy: Before we were actually appointed, we sat down to "name storm," so that we could hit the road immediately once we were appointed. We wrote down the name of every individual or church we could think of that might be interested in partnering with us. This gave us an idea of how many people and churches it would take to raise the kind of money needed to plant a church. Some people make the mistake of only seeking funds from churches and are on the road two years or more in some cases. But, individuals can be tapped into as well. There are a lot of people who would be more than willing to give to your ministry if you would just ask them. After writing down our list, we prayed about it.

Rapport: What did you do once you were appointed?

Troy: We began to call the people on the list. You have to be willing to get on the phone—we simply called and shared our vision, and we booked over 20 services in our first two weeks! I found that the best way is to schedule a face-to-face meeting. And, knowing how much stuff will cost can be helpful

when you're doing this. Just about every time I was able to sit down with a pastor or friend and tell them about what we were doing—showing them the need and pictures of the city—I came away with one more supporter. It was almost like you didn't even have to ask. We would share our vision and they would ask how they could help.

Rapport: How do you plan for the possibility that not everybody will follow through on their commitment?

Troy: Well, don't be shy about raising a healthy budget. If you are just going to raise the bare minimum you need to get by from week to week and one person pulls out, you are dead in the water. Here's the deal: I am moving to one of the most expensive cities in America with four kids. I have to plan for some people to pull out. The goal is to raise a budget that is healthy enough so that you and your family aren't begging for food six months into the process.

Rapport: Did you explore any grants or other non-traditional sources for funding?

Troy: I have in the past. We found that grant money is easily available for things like after school programs, but there can be strings attached. You could use the money for a bridge event—say a soup kitchen—at which you could invite people to come to church, but in many instances, you couldn't use it for promoting your church or a particular religion. You can use that kind of money to provide a service, but you just can't expect to use it for religious purposes. There might be some different programs out there now, especially with President Bush's new Faith Based Initiative program.

Rapport: How will you fund your ministry team?

Troy: I am believing God that we will be able to raise more than our personal budget. I'd like to think that we will be able to adequately take care of our

own. I want to be a blessing to the people who work with us. Realistically speaking, in the beginning, there will be sacrifice, but in time the church will pick up and will bless them.

Rapport: Any final thoughts?

Troy: Keep people informed. Information is crucial to people getting behind what you do. The more you communicate with them, the more likely they are to get behind your vision prayerfully and financially. Also, you have to be willing to make this a full-time ministry. Ministry doesn't begin when you plant the church; ministry begins the day you are appointed. You are not just soliciting funds; you are soliciting people that will pray for you and get behind your ministry. You are not just contacting people who will give you money; you are raising up ministry partners.

"I dream of an Assemblies of God that will recapture the culture of church planting that made it a great tool in God's hand, and I dream that we will plant new churches and replant failing churches in every community of our nation. For that reason I will advocate and push to use all of our resources to make church planting a primary focus at AGTS."

Joe Castleberry, Academic Dean, Installation Address, January 22, 2003