



**ASSOCIATION FOR
EPISCOPAL DEACONS**
ENGAGING THE DIAKONIA OF ALL BELIEVERS

Open Space Notes 2020

CHURCH PLANT

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The concept of a church plant is typically a church planted in an empty space. The difference with the church plant discussed is that there was already a congregation in place, although small, dwindling, and in financial difficulty. The diocese of New York has a program of church revitalization and that's what this church plant was initiated. St. Peter's Chelsea was selected because of its location in Manhattan which was seen as a prime factor in projected success.

The vestry decided, rather than just make the decision to go with this, they would bring it out to the parish. Because the parishioners were few and mostly very long tenured parishioners who had great loyalty and stake in the future of Saint Peter's, it was brought to them in a series of meetings explaining the church plant concept and actually introducing them to the new priest. This resulted in there being no surprise factor when this all happened.

The impact of the church plant was obvious from the beginning. We grew from an average of 12 to 20 parishioners on a Sunday 45 to 75 parishioners on a Sunday. We grew from having two children and a babysitter to a full Sunday school with 15 children.

Here's the structure - the Diocese identified a priest and large parishes to support the plant. The priest is assigned and parishioners from her church and sponsoring churches commit to coming along. These are people with the missionary hearts who are willing to leave their parish and travel to another parish to help build it up. It is building the church of Jesus Christ rather than their own parish. The commitment to the church plant is three years.

The question arises "what happens when these people leave after the three years?" Here's how that works: Currently there are around ten of the original parishioners still in regular attendance. Plus the 20 people brought in with the plant. So that's 30. But our average attendance is 45-75. So we are attracting more people but the vitality we are showing. If that 45-75 becomes 80-100 in three years and then the 20 church plant people leave, that's still great growth and a successful plant.

Implications for a deacon - it's easy to get lost in this. Be sure to have clear guidelines from your Bishop about your role and be sure there is clear communication and understanding with the "planted priest" about your role and expectations. Perhaps a specific deacons covenant addressing the church plant and accompanying issues. Be open and ready to embrace change.

Conversation around keeping original parishioners engaged and bringing new congregations into an appreciation of all the assets of the church plant parish.