



THE GREAT

*The risks, rewards (and, yes,
routine) of church planting*

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOURNEY GROUP

UNKNOWN

EACH OF US HAS STOOD ON A LEDGE —

at some point in our Christian faith—and wondered about this idea of stepping off. *Will it hurt? Is this really where God wants me? Did He perhaps just want me to stand here for a while and consider the view?* ¶ We've approached our particular faith ledges and considered turning back. After all, the unknown is so . . . unknown. But over the years we've learned that if God is behind the idea, then it's not unknown to Him, and He's there to catch us as we leap. ¶ In this issue, we introduce you to several fellow EFCA leaders who are involved in the risk-rewards business of church planting. No two church plants are the same—neither the planning that launched them nor the demographics that define them. Yet each was birthed out of a passion. And for each, a typical month includes exhilarating mountaintop experiences mixed with ledges of the great unknown, plus simple, ordinary (often mundane) *life*. ¶ As you read, consider your own leaps of faith—as well as your own day-to-day faithfulness—and commit to pray for our brothers and sisters who are stepping into the church-planting unknown and watching God do great things. ■

GO TO THE WEB ////

To learn more about church planting and read more stories about EFCA church planters, visit www.efca.org/startchurches.



ADVENTURES CHURCH PLANTING

The everyday realities of an extraordinary calling BY KRISTEN KIMMEL



Perhaps someone should create a reality television show following the lives of church planters—displaying the day-to-day adventure of missional living, mixed with out-on-a-ledge faith.

Imagine the ratings as viewers become caught up in the undeniable sense of calling, the escalating momentum and the

hold-your-breath wonder at watching new life unfold?

Those viewers might lose interest, however, if the displays of God's glory are intermixed with too many shots of pastors doing "ordinary" things—discussing fund-raising ideas or taking out the trash after a community gathering.

It might be hard to grasp the romance of God wooing His church, when the day-to-day details don't seem quite *romantic*.

Some duties of a church-planting couple can, in fact, feel disenchanting. Pastor Cabot Ashwill¹ acknowledges that "the days are long and sometimes discouraging." Yet he also affirms that those same days are "punctuated by brilliant bursts of God-moments."

In these moments of grace and beauty, church planters are reminded that behind the scenes, God is at work—and that is more than enough to keep them tuned-in to their calling of growing the kingdom. So, what does living out this calling *really* look like?

PREPARING FOR THE PREMIERE

The EFCA offers tools to prepare pastors for the church-planting experience, including its Boot Camp: an intensive, five-day training covering major issues that church planters will face in their first year.*

When preparing to plant *Nueva Vida* in Georgetown, Texas, Marcelo and Rachael Lamas² attended boot camp with the goal of learning how to raise financial support. "It was a great blessing,"

Marcelo says. "It gave us the tools we needed to share our calling without fear."

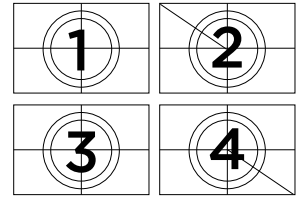
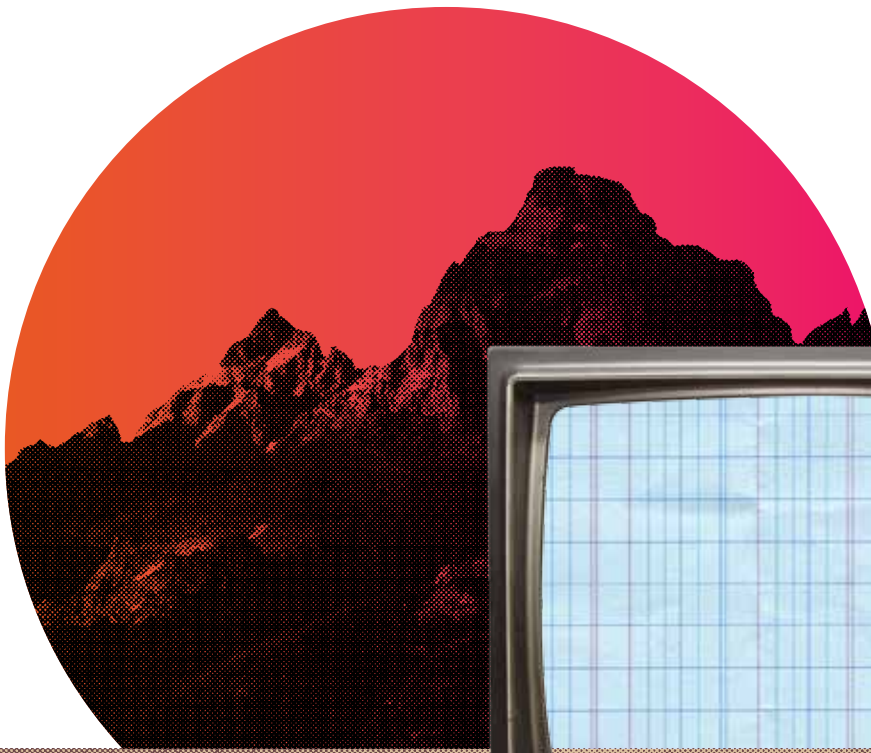
Still, a great part of being ready is being flexible. Marcelo and Rachael have had to adapt much of their expectations from that training, since their largely immigrant target community is so different from that of many in the EFCA.

Tim Culling³, pastor of Restoration Church in Long Beach, Calif., says that even with great training and great prayer, anyone who claims to feel fully prepared for a church plant is either "lying, crazy or divine."

He compares the process to that of having a baby: "You can dream about it, spend time with those who have kids, read about it and babysit for friends. But when you take the baby home from the hospital—that's when the learning really begins."

*"If Apple had an
iChurchPlant
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chased it. Twice."*

— T I M C U L L I N G



SET DESIGN & OTHER LOGISTICS

Onlookers might assume that the first community-wide meeting of a church is its initial step. But long before a church can convene, many faith-filled strides have already been taken.

For some planters, the first step is a physical relocation. Cabot and Asia Ashwill moved from California to Spring Grove, Ill., to plant LifeSpring Community Church. Before moving their four children 2,200 miles, they took a family poll:

Do you want to move to Illinois? Six nos.

Do you believe God is calling us to move there to church plant? Five yeses and one “I don’t know” (from their 7-year-old).

Will you go? Six yeses.

For any church planter, the list of to-dos quickly grows: developing teaching tools and outreach methods, advertising, sermon prep, scheduling, budgeting, settling legal issues, and securing needed funds.

In the beginning stages, according to Tim Culling, most of these duties fall on the church-planting couple⁴. “You have to learn how to navigate various worlds,” he says. “The web-site world; the nonprofit status world: 501(c)3, EIN, tax laws, payroll; the marketing world: Photoshop, Pages, Word Art.

“If Apple® had an iChurchPlant application, I would have purchased it. Twice.”

Thankfully, pastoral couples don’t have to face the to-do list alone;

the establishment of a core leadership team is vital. Together, they decide how and where the church body will gather and launch, as well as its core values and commitments.

Of course, pastors and leadership teams must balance these decision-making and logistical tasks with their main purpose: sharing God’s love with their community.

CASTING CALL

Between small groups, mentoring, outreach events, leadership meetings and simply being part of the community, most church-plant pastors list “spending time with people” as a top priority in their day.

To Cabot, this is the most natural way to form the new church. “Church-planting is simply an expression of the gospel in the community,” he explains, adding that most visitors come to the church because of a *relationship*, not because of great preaching or programming.

Tim says that *every* venue has to be seen as a missional opportunity. On average, he spends two days intentionally connecting with the city of Long Beach, either by visiting other pastors and congregation members, volunteering with a local rescue mission, or studying in coffee shops.

Often, when new churches introduce themselves to their neighbors, God opens doors—literally and figuratively. A “chance” conversation at a coffee shop resulted in a new meeting space for Restoration

Church, just when they needed it.

When members of LifeSpring sang Christmas carols to their neighbors, they were met with both surprise and enthusiasm. One man even invited the entire group into his house for a break from the cold. And then, months later, Cabot was able to share the gospel with one of the caroling households.

In addition to Bible studies and children's clubs as a way to meet and serve their neighbors, *Nueva Vida*'s leaders have explored outreaches unique to their own community: English as a Second Language classes and immigration clinics.

Yet what do church planters do when, for some reason, the doors remain shut? *Nueva Vida*'s ESL class was well-attended, for example, but few joined a Bible study offered afterward. And when a small, new church seems to stay small and new, discouragement can start to set in.

“THIS IS JUST A TEST . . .”

“Every Monday since we started, I print up my resignation,” Tim says, half joking. “In the early stages, it's tough to keep moving ahead with so few visible results.”

Tim remembers one Sunday when only eight people showed up to Restoration's gathering—including himself, his wife, Julie, his in-laws and his sister-in-law. All the next week, he found himself thinking, *Can I still get a job at an established church?*

Losing funding, struggling to find personal time, seeking affordable locations with adequate space or finding enough people to fill the space you *have* . . . day after day, church planters face the fact that challenges are many—and resources few.

The Lamases faced unique challenges planting a first-generation Hispanic church, in addition to legal issues related to immigration. For example, their Spanish-speaking congregation comes from a variety of countries, causing dialect differences that hinder communication. Many in the immigrant community also take on multiple jobs so they can support their families, leaving little time for church involvement.

Then, as if struggles *within* a church plant aren't trying enough, there is *life* itself. Seven months after the launch of *Nueva Vida*, Rachael started experiencing pain when feeding their new baby. When she was diagnosed with breast cancer, both she and Marcelo were devastated.

Chemotherapy took a toll on Rachael's body, but she never stopped her work with *Nueva Vida*. Still, with so much else going on, the couple feared that the momentum of their church plant would decrease.

“But God surprised us,” Marcelo says. “He sent even more people to our church, and we grew more than we expected. The people in the church were encouraged to see Rachael's faithfulness to the Lord; they saw God in my wife's life.”

THE EMMYS (OR, WHAT MAKES IT WORTH IT)

Despite the challenges, and many times *through* them, God's displays the glory of His coming kingdom.

“I feel blessed and encouraged every week,” Marcelo says. “When I see my community involved in ministry, when I see people give their friends the chance to hear the gospel, when I share the Word of God and I see people hungry for God, so ready to be fed—this amazes me.”

Tim agrees: “The change that God is bringing about in people's lives is definitely the joy that keeps us going.”

He remembers preaching on Jesus' choosing of the 12 disciples one Sunday morning. As he commented on how the disciples were an unlikely group to entrust with Jesus' mission for the world, he remembers: “I looked at the group we had gathered that night: various colors, various backgrounds; some living in shelters, others in South Orange County—and yet, we were all together for the gospel. It was beautiful.”

In January, God more than doubled the people involved with LifeSpring—from the initial seven families to 17 families. LifeSpring leadership then started fasting and praying that, by summer, God would add seven more families who don't know the Lord.

Soon after they started praying, a neighbor of Cabot's who had not been to church in 30 years asked Cabot how he could reconnect with God. Within weeks, other church members began relaying stories of spiritual interest and spiritual fruit. “[We're] on an adventure with God,” Cabot says. “He has been doing amazing things.”

Church planters understand that even the most ordinary daily realities—the meetings over coffee with new friends, the leadership meetings, the umpteenth chair set up for a Sunday service—are part of a grandiose movement, more dramatic than any TV show.

In this missional perspective they affirm that God is indeed director of their adventure. A “reality” well worth watching, but one even more exciting to participate in. ■

¹Cabot and Asia Ashwill planted LifeSpring Community Church in Spring Grove, Ill. (lifespringefc.org). First public service is planned for September 2010. Attendance as of May 2010: 100. ²Marcelo and Rachael Lamas planted Nueva Vida Church in Georgetown, Texas (www.invg.org). First public service: January 2009. Attendance as of May 2010: 60-65. ³Tim and Julie Culling planted Restoration Church in Long Beach, Calif. (www.restorationlb.org). First public service: October 2009. Attendance as of May 2010: 45. ⁴In a church plant initiated by lay people, these tasks are divvied up differently (see “No Ordinary People” on page 18). For a look at the variety of models that church plants can follow, visit www.efcatoday.org.

Kristen Kimmel is a writer and project manager with Journey Group, in Charlottesville, Va.



To learn more about church planting in the EFCA, including the training offered in a Boot Camp, visit www.efca.org/startchurches.

“We're on an
adventure
with God.”

— C A B O T A S H W I L L

LISTEN TO THE HUM

The road of the church-planting journey BY REGINA ROBINSON

I WAS 15 YEARS OLD WHEN I LEARNED TO DRIVE.

I had intently listened as Daddy taught my three older sisters how to recognize the hum of the engine while shifting the gears, handling the steering wheel, transitioning the foot pedals and eyeing the road.

My moment finally came. The minute I sat behind the wheel, I realized, *Driving a stick shift is complicated—there's so much to pay attention to at once!*

Fast-forward through 14 years of education, ministry, then marriage. I had enjoyed serving as a college professor and associate dean, while Jua, my husband, pursued his seminary education.

As we prayed for next ministry steps, we sensed God compelling us to be missional in a difficult environment in need of the gospel. And we knew that we were drawn to young adults seeking to live out a biblical worldview and evangelize their generation. So we sought church-planting training and kept listening.

Fast-forward again, this time to 2006, and this time to the city God pointed to, as we prayed and followed His open doors: Boston.

We began to build community in this infant ministry named Heart Change Fellowship. Our excitement grew as we prayed, shared meals, answered intriguing questions and cast vision to Boston's brilliant young adults.

But we experienced some jerky fits-and-starts too. In the early months of planting, we were discouraged by conflict with ministry partners, and by folks who initially agreed to get on board but changed minds and moved in a different direction.

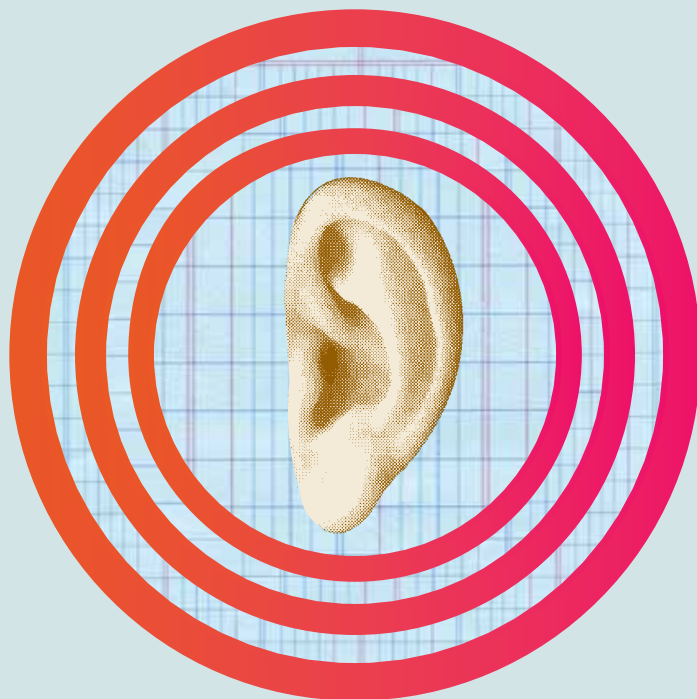
I wrote in my journal at the time, *Lord, you often subtract before you add. Look at Gideon and his army. You know what you are doing. As hurt as my heart feels, Lord, please bring who you will and not who I want!*

On the personal side, we drove through another valley of disappointment when I became pregnant and found out that our son would be born with medical complications and Down Syndrome.

A bump in the road indeed. We had speechless, grief-filled days. Church planting was put on pause, emotionally. Yet I could not ignore the voice and hand of God. His voice clearly spoke: "Be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10).

Josiah was born in July 2007, and his life has changed ours. Such change has brought perspective to our so-called Boston ministry plan. Josiah has increased our faith-filled resilience and desperate dependence on Jesus, who solely sustains us.

Josiah had open-heart surgery in July 2008. With his physical surgery came a spiritually surgical repair on our hearts as we saw



God breathe hope, encouragement, and peace into our family and ministry's health.

It's 2010, and thanks be to God for His faithful hand—guiding us through conflict to sweet reconciliation, and from engaging with religious consumers to nurturing disciple-making co-laborers. What great joy has evolved from persevering through pain. The gentle hum of the Holy Spirit was heard in the midst of our hardship.

Church planting is filled with many interrelated parts that require shifting, eyeing, maneuvering and listening. I have learned to not just squeeze the brake or release the clutch during this church-planting journey. Instead, I must *move* when God says so, *grow* as He wills and *be still* when He commands. Ministry His way is the adventure I long for. ■

Regina Robinson, mom of three and EFCA RESOUND leader in New England, serves as worship director at Heart Change Fellowship in Boston, where her husband, Jua, is lead pastor. Regina also passionately advocates for families of children with special needs as a parent liaison for Boston's largest Early Intervention Center.

TAKE ME OUT TO THE BALL GAME

Utilizing the strengths and encouragement of a church-planting coach



o church planter can afford to go it alone. In addition to committed lay leadership (see “No Ordinary People” on page 18), more and more of the EFCA’s pioneer planters are relying on the wisdom and come-alongside camaraderie of a coach.

EFCA Today interviewed U.S. coach Dave Page and international coaching team Gene and Linda Wilson. Each plays a strategic role in encouraging and equipping EFCA church planters.

Why are coaches/mentors so valuable to church planters?

Dave: Last summer I hiked to the top of Half Dome in Yosemite with my two teenagers. It’s a strenuous, 20-mile hike. Starting a church is a lot like climbing to the top of Half Dome. I wouldn’t recommend doing it alone. You must train and prepare.

I sought out a guide who had hiked Half Dome many times. He shared with me what to wear, what to bring, a strategy for the hike and what to avoid. I felt well prepared, and the experience turned out to be one of the most challenging and exciting adventures I’ve ever embarked on—just like starting a church.

Gene and Linda: You also don’t have to be in full-time ministry to be a coach. We encourage pastors to tithe their time to coach a pastor or a planter. It helps raise up a new generation of workers.

What type of skills/personalities are most valuable to the role of church-planting coach?

Gene: I see five primary qualities: 1) knowledge and track record; 2) caring more about their planters and their work than some corporate agenda; 3) good at listening and gifted in discernment, because good diagnosis is fundamental; 4) skilled at building relationships;

5) committed to developing, empowering and releasing others for kingdom fruitfulness.

Tell us your story: What brought each of you to this point and this role?

Dave: When I was 29, I felt God calling me to start a church. My wife, Carrie, and I were newlyweds, and we had no idea what we were doing. I figured I better find someone who had done it successfully. I sought out a coach/mentor.

I met Rick Warren at an evangelism conference. We hit it off, and he said that Saddleback Church would sponsor my new plant. Rick met with me and seven other church planters once a month for two years. Every other month, Carrie and seven other pastors’ wives would meet with Kay Warren in her home.

This training proved invaluable to both Carrie and me. I want to return the lessons I learned to other church planters. Carrie has been a great encouragement to many church planters’ wives and church planters as well, alongside her full-time job assisting in a special-education classroom.

After I’d planted three Saddleback churches, God led me to the EFCA. I was hired as director of church planting for EFCA West in 2007. I facilitate coaching networks of 10-12 guys who meet once a month for leadership development, and we have started 19 churches in the last two years.

Gene and Linda: We met in college, fell in love and decided to serve God where there were few churches. After seminary (Trinity Evangelical Divinity School), we went to Quebec to plant churches among French Canadians and served there for 18 years.

We learned a lot the hard way. Which is one reason we have such a heart to come alongside church planters. Then in 2000 we were asked to become church-planting coaches for Latin America. That meant new languages, cultures and a traveling ministry.

Gene developed the church-planting course for the Latin America Training Network and worked with leaders to develop church planting

in 10 countries. The key to lasting impact is having Latino coaches in each country. So with the help of many friends and churches, we launched a coaching movement that has produced church-planting coaches and contextualized training. In 2009 Gene became Reach-Global's church-planting director.

Tell us what's happening internationally that might surprise our American church planters?

Gene and Linda: We are often surprised by who makes it and who doesn't. Some theologically trained pastors who have been effective leaders in the United States don't make it because they don't have the patience to build relationships and earn a hearing for the gospel in another language and culture.

On the other hand, we have a friend from Florida who, as a single woman, has been an effective pioneer church planter in the macho Venezuelan culture. She is on her eighth church plant. She has learned to find a model Christian home and then work with and through that family and other national believers. This year we are helping her broaden her influence by mentoring women church planters from Peru and Colombia.

What's one of the most misunderstood aspects of church planting?

Dave: Church planting is so much bigger than any one church. It's about God's kingdom. I encourage pastors to enlarge their vision. Ephesians 3:10 tells us that God has chosen the church to make known

His manifold wisdom. I believe the planting of new churches is God's primary strategy and means for reaching a lost world.

If an existing church can't afford to start a church, then partner with another church or two. A good place to begin is to take a recent church planter in your community out to lunch and encourage him.

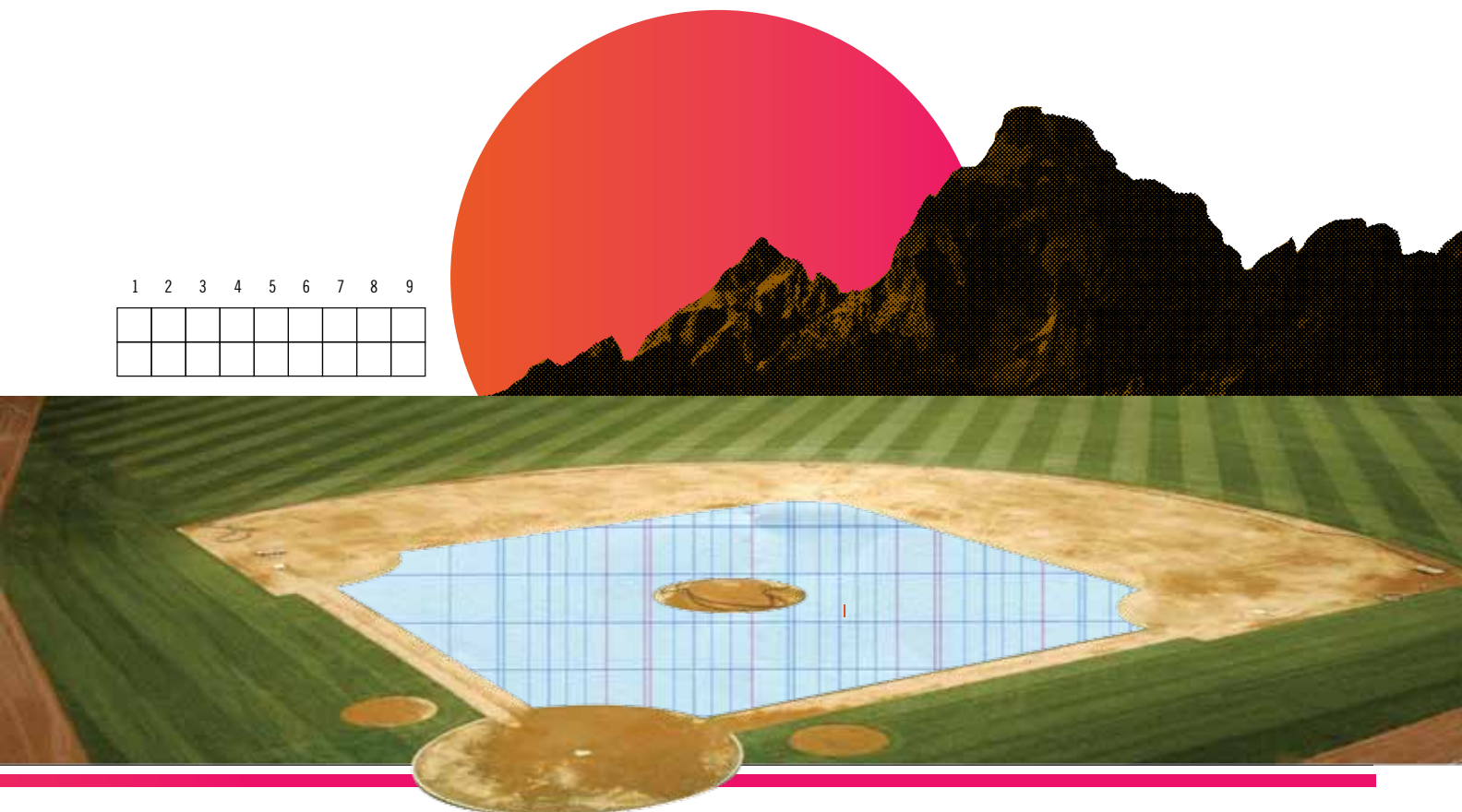
Gene and Linda: Many think that church planting is only for theologically trained pastors. Most churches in the Western world are started by these specially trained servants. Yet any fully devoted disciple of Jesus is a candidate to be part of a church-planting team. Pastors are great once the flock is gathered; but initially it takes people who are well connected, who understand how the Average Joe thinks, who love Jesus and love people. A nearby pastor can advise and coach these "lay" witnesses. Later the new church can call its own pastor.

Dave: Planting a church is a lonely endeavor, and having a team helps not only to carry the load but also with the loneliness factor. As I say, church planting is a team sport not an individual sport. Some would say it's also a contact sport!

The transformation that takes place as a result of the gospel and the planting of new churches is unbelievable. As a friend of mine says, "I am addicted to changed lives." ■

Be on the lookout for the December 2010 release of Global Church Planting: Biblical principles and best practices for multiplication, by Gene Wilson and Craig Ott (Baker Publishing Group).

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NO ORDINARY PEOPLE

The powerful lay leadership behind successful church plants

BY DIANE J. MCDUGALL

THERE'S NOTHING COOKIE-CUTTER about church planting. From one plant to another, the history is different, the community is different, the approach is different and, of course, the people are different. But in each case, the church wouldn't root itself and grow if it weren't for mature, committed lay leadership.

Jim and Imagene Biers serve on the leadership team at Hills View EFC in Piedmont, S.D. It's the second EFCA church the Bierses have helped launch—both without a pastor initially at the helm.

That's right: Before calling a pastor to Hills View, the Bierses—and seven core families—chose a name for the church, rented a building, defined core values and held public services for seven months. All with lay leadership.*

The core team brought multiple qualities to make it all happen: leadership and communication skills, cooperation, the ability to listen, a heart to serve, and—to be honest—marketing skills. But despite that impressive list, Jim says, “God has a way of using ordinary people with the heart to further God's kingdom.”

Seven months into the process, the team recruited its own pastor. “Ron McLaughlin was a pharmaceutical salesman,” Jim explains, “a lay person with a pastor's heart. He was one of several men who had filled our pulpit while we were in the process of finding a pastor.”

“During our review of possible candidates, the leadership team talked about Ron. So I called Ron and asked if he would consider being our pastor.”

Ron recognized the caliber of the team he had stepped into, so he simply empowered them to keep leading alongside him as he shepherded the church family.

And they have. Despite holding full-time jobs themselves, both Jim and Imagene are significantly involved at Hills View. Jim is moderator and facilitator at all leadership and church-wide meetings. Imagene, a trained biblical counselor, teaches classes for women. Together, they model hospitality by hosting life groups and other church functions in their home.

“I love the openness of starting a new church,” Imagene says. “We're so glad to have people show up, that we don't reject them as they come through the door.”

“Being a leader in a church plant sometimes means that you mop a floor or clean up after a potluck dinner, but group cooperation bonds people together. My role isn't so much about building a church as it is about growing a family.”

Yet even the heady oneness of being part of a new family cannot erase the day-to-day challenges. “Just setting up and taking down chairs can become a burden,” Imagene admits. “Sometimes I desire to go back to a church where I had it easier. Added to this is a large sacrifice of time and the grief of leaving friends behind to make new ones.”

“But when we see God at work in lives as a result of a church plant, we know true joy.”

Perhaps not every lay leader in every church plant is as deeply invested as the Bierses. But without a doubt, those who commit to this wonderful spiritual “birth” are invaluable players in bringing God's vision for their community to life. ■

**Although there was no church-planting pastor at the helm, Hills View still had some amazing coaching support. Fellow EFCA pastors had initially recognized the need for an evangelical congregation in Piedmont. Veteran church-planting coach Bruce Redmond and Pastor Mark Crossman, of nearby Southern Hills EFC, recruited Jim and Imagene Biers and also sent out fliers into the community to look for more interest. Bruce and Mark coached the initial leadership team for two months before transitioning out of the three-year launch process.*

“My role isn't so much about building a church as it is about growing a family.”

— I M A G E N E B I E R S