

Creating Church Multiplication Networks

You want to promote church networks within your sphere, to see churches communicating with one another, supporting one another, feeling like they're part of a team. You want to see them learning from each other's successes and failures, mourning with those who mourn and rejoicing with those who rejoice. Yet that's not your reality.

You can see amazing thing happening in one church, but none of the other churches seem to know about it. Each congregation seems disconnected from the others, unconcerned about what is going on elsewhere. In some cases, churches are being planted, but they don't feel connected to a network of churches, only to the parent church. Planters are feeling disconnected, unsupported. It's not a unified movement. For a movement, connection is needed, connection to something larger than oneself, something that reaches beyond an individual church: Networks.

What is a network?



A missional network is a supportive, connectional environment to facilitate personal spiritual growth and the accomplishment of biblical mission. Most effective biblical ministry comes out of teams or communities. We were never designed to be in this alone—we were designed to give and receive support from others. Missional networks are learning communities focused on accomplishing the mission together.

Networks create a space for participants to gather and ask the following questions:

- What are others doing?
- What can I learn from them?
- What can I offer them?
- How can we support each other?
- What are the next steps?

In the case of a church planting movement, networks can be created among church planters, among parent church pastors, among the spouses of planters, or any other involved party that has a need for encouragement and support from peers. Networks between these groups will all look a bit different, but some general principles will apply to all of them.

Essential network qualities

Creating effective networks is not just a matter of gathering good people in the room. Certain conditions will optimize the learning and the helpfulness of the network.

1. Size
The ideal size for a network is one coach + three pastors or planters. This structure allows for peer coaching with triads and individual coaching as needed, as well as allowing enough air time for full participation from each member.
2. Frequency
Networks should meet at least once a month for consistency. Ideally, network meetings are face-to-face, but when geography presents a barrier meetings can be held via conference call. Generally networks run for about year—the amount of time needed to meet a particular goal, such as planting a church or parenting a church. They can be renewed or reorganized on an as-needed basis.
3. Personalized coaching
Networks will not sustain themselves without coaching to add value. Participants need to feel helped by their participation. They need to receive real support and gain practical insights from their mutual learnings. Only involve the number of churches that you have coaching to support. Coached networks provide the necessary infrastructure and support to prepare, catalyze, guide, and resource for authentic change and biblical mission.
4. Adult learning
Adult learning settings differ from traditional classroom methods in several important ways. Adult learning takes place within a relational setting, is based on a recognized need, and identifies the immediate usefulness of new ideas that are presented. Participants also have more decision-making ability and control over the process, taking more responsibility for their own learning. Reflection and connection to hands-on practice also form important components.
5. Relational rather than content driven
One of the greatest temptations with networks is to fill the time with content, forcing networks to fulfill the additional role of training. Although learning is certainly one of the functions of networks, it is a different kind of learning than the content-downloading often associated with training. Learning takes place naturally in networks by allowing the space for participants to share ideas, ask questions, and engage with one another around areas of mutual need and challenge.
6. Peer relationships
Peer relationships are the most attractive part of a network for pastoral leaders. There is nothing like a roomful of people who are sharing the risk, joy and adventure of planting churches. Planters need to connect with other planters. Spouses need to connect with other spouses. Parent church pastors need to connect with other parent church pastors. Each of these groups will have different concerns and will find it most helpful to talk with each other about those concerns. “What did you do when...?” Be sure to allow plenty of time for personal interaction, remembering that people are more important than content.

7. Missional purpose

Although networks are not primarily about fellowship, they incorporate it. And although they are not primarily about learning, they incorporate that too. Ultimately, networks are about mission. They are designed to create a regular, intentional context for people to spur one another on toward the mission, whatever branch of church multiplication that may be. Although there can be many different types of networks at all levels of a church multiplication movement, every network must have a clear purpose, clear commitments and clear outcomes.

8. Covenants

Clear commitments brings us to the subject of covenants. Covenants set clear expectations, goals, and commitments for the network. A good covenant outlines the basics of network life and the common courtesies everyone will follow. It also identifies the positive behaviors that will mark network life-- the boundaries within which network life and learning will occur. In addition, covenants can cover the mechanics of your network: when and how often you will meet, locations, etc.

9. Reproducibility

As the church multiplication movement grows, network participants will need to be on the lookout for others-- new planters, new spouses, new parent church pastors—who could benefit by participation in a network as well. Networks need to be reformed at least every year or so in order to make room for new members. Coaches will also need to be reproduced in order for each new network to have a coach.

10. Focused prayer

Aim for spending 30% of the network time in prayer. Each network meeting should include a significant time of prayer. Prayer keeps the focus where it needs to be—on God, on the harvest, on the mission. Times of prayer also allow network participants to support one another through prayer and encourage one another to develop in their practice of spiritual disciplines.

Examples of networks that work

New church incubators were our prototype network. Since then, we've accumulated more than 15 years of additional experience with other types of networks and looked at how each type functions. A few specific examples are listed below.

- NCI (New Church Incubators) for church planters in the first year of their planting process
- NCD (Natural Church Development) networks for pastors and church health teams going through the NCD process
- CPN (Church Parenting Networks) for healthy churches wanting to multiply
- Coach Clusters to cultivate coaching excellence and resource a movement

Reflection and action planning for building networks

To implement networks well, you'll need to do some reflection around what outcomes you're trying to accomplish and then ensure that action planning is done in accordance with those goals.

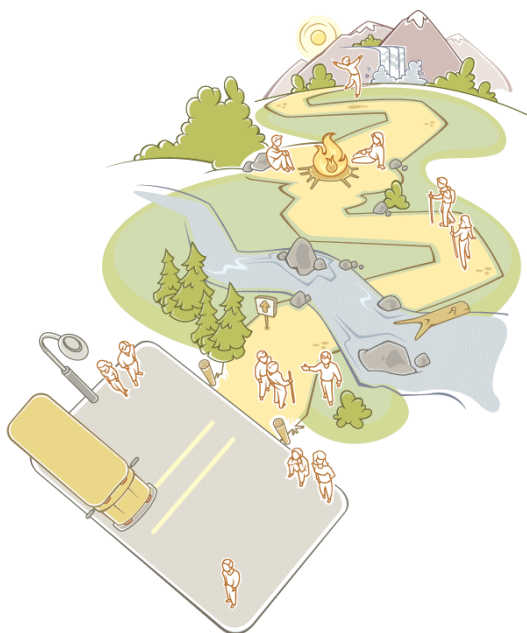
If we were walking alongside a leader who wanted to start networks, here are some of the coaching questions we'd ask and process together....

- Who are you seeking to reach?
- What do you want to accomplish?
- How will you deliver coaching?
- How will networks function as part of a larger resourcing system for your movement?

This last question leads us into the next section... what the larger process looks like and how CoachNet can help with that larger process.

How networks fit into the bigger picture

None of us wants networks for the sake of networks. We want networks for the sake of biblical mission. We have embarked on a journey toward creating a church multiplication movement... and networks play a crucial role in us reaching our destination. They are part of our overall resourcing system for church multiplication, part of a larger delivery system. Let's take a look at what that larger resourcing system looks like:



The destination of our path is the creation of a church multiplication movement. To get there, we must first decide to leave the parking lot. We'll also need to invite others—planters, intercessors, coaches, trainers, whoever is needed—to journey along with us. The cost must be counted and the commitment must be made to leave the parking lot and arrive at the trailhead. At the trailhead, we participate in an initial orientation. Questions will need to be addressed: What will this journey look like? What will happen once we get started? What resources will be available along the way? Who will go with us?

After the orientation, the journey begins. Church planters begin hiking the trail, with coaches serving as their guides, walking alongside them. They provide hands-on

training, resources, and help in areas of struggle. Eventually the planters find their pace and begin making real progress. Milestones are passed, challenges are addressed, all while the coach continues walking alongside, ensuring that the needed resources flow in at the appropriate times.

With this level of effort and progress, rest stops are essential—places to rehydrate, rest, celebrate, check in with other hikers, and gain strength for the parts of the journey yet ahead. That's where networks come in. They function as the campfire circles. Planters exchange ideas and tips for the path ahead. They encourage one another to keep pressing on. As they journey on together, there is celebration as milestones are reached. And finally, the destination—church multiplication—and the beginning of a new cycle, a new path, and new networks.

For networks to work, they need to be part of a larger resourcing system to form a comprehensive, integrated whole. Resources will need to be fed into the system at the right times along the way. CoachNet has the resources and structures to help you create a fully functional resourcing system for church multiplication.

Resources for creating networks



CoachNet is all about connectedness – connecting church multiplication leaders to each other and to the resources they need for their journey. We're here to help you resource your church multiplication movement. Resources can provide a framework that allows networks to accomplish their intended purpose and support those who are committed to traveling down the same path together. Some of the resources below may be helpful to you as you create networks to support your church multiplication movement.

CoachNet's website was designed to support a church multiplication movement:

- CompuCoach resources: thousands of pages of information, worksheets, checklists, and coaching guides on topics surrounding church planting, leadership development, and coaching.
- Online coaching tool: providing a tracking and follow-up system to help coaches turn dreams into reality
- CoachNet's online church planter course material can also be used as the framework for network conversations as planters are walked through the process of planting a church. We developed a series of principle-based courses involving the 10 Steps to Church Planting.
- Planter Community: join this FREE network to stay up-to-date on the latest talk in the church planting world. You'll receive a periodic newsletter, and you can participate in forums to discuss topics of interest.

- CoachNet's networks: can serve as a platform for you to connect with other leaders. You can discuss topics through forums and post news. We have networks for church planters and teams. You can also create a private, internal online network for your organization using CN's functionality. Contact us for help in getting these networks set up.

If you're a network leader, you shouldn't be without the C2M2 network materials. Here's just some of what's included:

- The New Church Incubator (NCI) material on CoachNet includes 20 curriculum units for church planter networks on topics such as personal spirituality, core values, ministry systems, etc. that can be used in any order, according to the needs of the planters involved.
- Church Parenting Network (PCN) material to help link parent churches together in supportive networks
- Intensive church planter training materials. This training approach is one way to launch a network. We provide updated pre-service training for planters using adult learning styles and connecting planters to coaches. This short-term intensive network leads to other connections down the road as the new churches get started.

You may have been engaged in church planting and multiplication for many years. You may have pieces of the overall resourcing system that are fully functional, but we'd challenge you to do an audit. Try to connect all the dots, and take a hard look at what's really working and what isn't. In addition to our online capability, CoachNet offers:

- coaching
- consulting
- coach certification training

We'd love to come alongside and help you in the process of growing towards comprehensive excellence in resourcing and networking as you engage in a church multiplication movement. We'd be glad to help you design your own system... one that works for *your* people in *your* ministry context.

CoachNet International Ministries

1-888-318-7920

support@coachnet.org

www.coachnet.org