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The Brand New Incredibly Old and Enduringly Faithful Concept of Church Planting

Thursday, March 26, 2009

Give Fred Barnes credit. He knows a good idea when he sees one. Writing for the “[Houses of Worship](#)” column of *The Wall Street Journal*, Barnes tells the story of how he and his wife came to leave The Falls Church near Washington, DC and then to join another congregation.

Barnes, one of the nation’s best-known journalists, makes clear that he and his wife were not leaving The Falls Church out of a sense of frustration or disappointment. “We didn’t leave in anger. We didn’t have political or theological anxieties. Rather, we left for a new church because our old church wanted us to,” Barnes relates.



The Falls Church wanted Fred and Barbara Barnes to help start a new congregation. The Falls Church is an evangelical congregation formerly associated with the Episcopal Church. The congregation left that denomination in 2005, clearly distancing itself from the liberal direction of that denomination. Now, The Falls Church intends to start a new congregation, Christ the King Church.

“The Falls Church has become entrepreneurial as well as evangelical,” Barnes proudly reports. “It’s in the church-planting business.”

John Yates, pastor of The Falls Church, says that he had wanted to start a new congregation as far back as twenty years ago, but his bishop “wouldn’t allow us to discuss it.” No longer hindered by that bishop, The Falls Church is now planting a new congregation near Alexandria, and Fred and Barbara Barnes are assisting the effort. They are, he reports, among the older folks in the congregation. Most attendees are young Washingtonian types. The way Fred Barnes describes the church, it sounds to be a very energetic and self-consciously evangelical congregation. The church is no doubt blessed to have the Barneses as founding members.

In his article, Fred Barnes explained the concept of church planting to the readers of *The Wall Street Journal*. In his words:

Church planting is a burgeoning movement among evangelicals who are conservative in doctrine (but not fundamentalist) and inclusive in their outreach to nonbelievers and lapsed Christians. It’s a growing missionary field.

There’s a theory behind church planting. It rejects the idea of trying to fill up existing churches before building new ones. Old churches are often “closed clubs” that don’t attract new residents or young people or “the lost,” says the Rev. Johnny Kurcina, an assistant pastor of The Falls Church. Besides, population increase far exceeds church growth in America. This is especially true in cities.

The only strange aspect of this article is the sense that church planting is a new idea. Church planting is indeed a

“burgeoning movement,” but it is not new. As a matter of fact, the church planting movement began in the first century — and was central to the New Testament pattern for the church. If this seems new to some, it is only because they are rediscovering a very old idea.

On the other hand, there is something newly energetic about the church planting movement. Younger pastors are increasingly attracted to the vision of starting a new congregation and seeing it established with solid conviction, deep passion, evangelistic commitment, and strategic focus. They see the need and are ready to take up the challenge.

They also understand the New Testament’s impulse toward reproduction. Christians are to reproduce themselves through witness and evangelism, and churches are to reproduce themselves through missions and church planting. Growth leads to growth.

As a seminary president I am very aware of the fact that an unprecedented number of students currently preparing for ministry are interested in planting a church. There is great gain and potential in this resurgence of interest. This is an intrepid generation driven by a bold vision and grounded in deep biblical convictions.

But, even as the church planting movement is a sign of such great promise, we cannot forget the multiple thousands of existing congregations that desperately need the leadership and influence of these young pastors. We need a generation committed to both church planting and church recovery — a generation that sees the glory of God in planting new congregations and in leading existing congregations into deeper conviction, bolder vision, and greater faithfulness.

The most powerful ideas are rarely new, but these same ideas must be captured anew again and again. Jesus Christ promised that the very gates of hell will not prevail against His church. This new generation of young pastors intends to push back against hell through bold and visionary ministry. Expect to see the sparks fly.

