

# I. AUTOPSY REPORTS

## A. **Of Failed Churches** (*Association of Vineyard Churches Church Pathology Report*. December 1986. Research by Todd Hunter)

The questions on this survey form were derived from my readings of Donald McGavran and Peter Wagner, from John Wimber's *Church Planters' Profile* in *Expanding the Kingdom Now* and from my own experience in church planting.

I've tried to make the questions narrow enough to give accurate information, but broad enough to be descriptive. With one or two exceptions, all the information was obtained from second hand sources (area or regional overseers). I think this is good in one sense. It gave us what ought to be objective answers to some rather hard questions. On the other hand, it may seem inadequate in that some of the questions may have been better answered by the people themselves. We started out trying to contact them, but many of them moved. The one or two that I did talk to were at times unable to be really objective about their situations and therefore the information was poor. Questions were all asked in survey form during phone interviews. In my estimation, this kept the questions from being asked in an unfair manner.

Keep in mind that none of the descriptions were weighted; which is to say that each description is not necessarily equally important. After discovering the ten most common weaknesses, perhaps we would want to give a weight to the top ten.

Because the survey questions were primarily objective in nature, we couldn't deal with some less measurable elements such as spiritual warfare very well. Hopefully issues like spiritual warfare and a person's ability or inability to deal with them-issues like children, poor job selection, going to Sundays too early, etc.-can be found if you look discerningly at the survey within the context of several of the questions that were asked.

Another important bit of information is that it was unclear at times whether or not one of the churches that had gone defunct was really ever released officially or not. Secondly, it was unclear at times whether or not they were a plant or an adoption or some mixture of the two.

### **Introduction**

The column entitled "Description" is a more full description of the survey questions I asked over the phone. At times I had to ask several follow-up questions in order to get accurate information. These descriptions represent the full thought behind the questions. The column entitled

“Ratio” informs you of the number of churches out of the 22 contacted that was affected by the particular description on the left hand side of the page. The column entitled “Percentage” tells you the percentage of churches affected. The column entitled “Rank in Category” tells you the rank of the churches within the appropriate category (either the pastor/planter profile or the church profile): the number 1 (one) being the most common fault. The column entitled “Overall Rank” tells you the rank considering a specific description within the context of the combined categories.

## PASTOR/PLANTER PROFILE

DESCRIPTION	RATIO	%	RANK IN CATEGORY	OVERALL RANK
1. The pastor/planter had no (not enough) proven track record under supervision or authority.	16/22	73%	4	4
2. The pastor/planter had no (not enough) indigenous support system/no lifeline to Anaheim	14/22	64%	6T	6T
3. The pastor/planter had no clear plan (objective reality), too idealistic, naive or mystical, therefore worked hard at wrong things or had priorities out of order or was a scattered thinker and worker rather than having single minded focus and obedience.	17/22	77%	2T	2T
4. The pastor planter had ego strength problems-success or failure too tied to self image	12/22	55%	9T	10T
5. The pastor/planter had a weak marriage or his marriage was weakened in the process of planting.	4/22	18%	18T	22T
6. The pastor/planter was in a non-growth, non-learning posture/climate and was therefore unable to change himself and pay the price for his role as change agent.	7/22	32%	14	15T
7. The pastor/planter was not sure of his call.	11/22	50%	11	12
8. The pastor/planter had no clearly defined objectives.	6/22	27%	15T	19T
9. The pastor/planter did no discerning research (i.e., demographics, psychographics, etc.).	14/22	64%	6T	6T
10. The pastor/planter used wrong/ineffective methods of gathering or evangelism (or methods that were not rooted in values) and was not ruthless at the point of evaluating the results of the methods.	17/22	77%	2T	2T
11. The pastor/planter lacked an attitude of optimism and faith.	4/22	18%	18T	22T

12. The pastor/planter suffered from inordinate loneliness (i.e., long distance planters) and depression set in which lessened his effectiveness.	8/22	36%	13	14
13. The pastor/planter family (especially wife and children) were not supportive (i.e., “couple” didn’t feel called.	3/22	14%	20	25
14. The pastor/planter was not a good leader; knowing what the Spirit was saying, where the group was going and how to get there.	13/22	59%	8	9
15. The pastor/planter could not identify, recruit, train, deploy, monitor and nurture workers and leaders.	21/22	95%	1	1
16. The pastor/planter had low social skills (i.e., was not friendly and easily liked).	5/22	23%	17	21
17. The pastor/planter did not have our values, priorities or philosophy of ministry.	10/22	45%	12	13
18. The pastor/planter was unable or unwilling to appropriate authority.	6/22	27%	15T	19T
19. The pastor/planter did not take responsibility church to grow (i.e., was “waiting” for it to happen).	11/22	55%	9T	10T
20. The pastor/planter was unable or unwilling to work hard.	2/22	9%	21	26T
21. The pastor/planter was a nurturing enabler/facilitator rather than an assertive leader.	15/22	68%	5	5

# CHURCH PROFILE

DESCRIPTION	RATIO	%	RANK IN CATEGORY	OVERALL RANK
1. <i>Primary Group Problems (koinonitis).</i> The people were unwilling to pay the price for absorbing new people into the church.	7/22	32%	2T	15T
2. <i>Homogeneous Unit Problems.</i> The church/pastor suffered from people blindness. They could not see who they were and therefore who they could readily attract. They tried to marry groups that were too divergent (social, economic, racial, etc.).	7/22	32%	2T	15T
3. <i>Back Door Problems.</i> The church could not develop multiple options for adult fellowship (i.e., celebration, congregation, cell dynamics). There was no direction for new people to get involved.	4/22	18%	5	22T
4. <i>Ethnicitis Problems.</i> The church was trying to minister to a “prior” population in a “new/changing” town or part of town.	1/22	5%	7	28
5. <i>Hyper-cooperativism Problems.</i> The church got going in too many different directions and didn’t stick to the one or two things they did best (or were called to).	2/22	5%	6	26T
6. <i>Sociological Strangulation Problems.</i> The physical facilities were too small to facilitate growth (i.e., seating, parking, Sunday School, nursery, etc.).	7/22	32%	2T	15T
7. <i>Saint John’s Syndrome.</i> The church attracted too many nominal/hurt Christians who were unwilling or unable to change and grow (i.e., church hoppers, burned out leaders, the chronically hurt, etc.).	14/22	64%	1	6T
6. <i>Sociological Strangulation Problems.</i> The physical facilities were too small to facilitate growth (i.e., seating, parking, Sunday School, nursery, etc.).	7/22	32%	2T	15T
7. <i>Saint John’s Syndrome.</i> The church attracted too many nominal/hurt Christians who were unwilling or unable to change and grow (i.e., church hoppers, burned out leaders, the chronically hurt, etc.).	14/22	64%	1	6T

## SUMMARY/HIGHLIGHTS

The consensus of the area pastoral coordinators that were interviewed pointed to these main or most common reasons for failure.

1. The pastor/planter could not identify, recruit, train, deploy, monitor and nurture workers and leaders.
2. The pastor/planter had no clear plan from which he was working.
3. The pastor/planter used ineffective gathering and/or evangelistic methods.
4. The pastor/planter had no (or not enough) proven track record under supervision with us.
5. The pastor/planter was a nurturing enabler/facilitator rather than an assertive leader/equiper.
6. The pastor/planter had no (not enough) indigenous support system/no lifeline to Anaheim.
7. The pastor/planter did no discerning research (i.e., demographics, psychographics, etc.).
8. The church attracted too many nominal/hurt Christians who were unwilling or unable to change and grow (i.e., church hoppers, burned out leaders, the chronically hurt, etc.) - *Saint John's Syndrome*.
9. The pastor/planter was not a good leader.
10. The pastor/planter had ego strength problems-success or failure too tied to self image.
11. The pastor/planter did not take responsibility for the church to grow (i.e., was "waiting" for it to happen).

In many cases (perhaps as much as half), the area pastoral coordinators seemed to think that the people involved were salvageable with some training and experience, and if they were sent out with a plan. It seems that at some times we didn't necessarily have the wrong family, but we had the wrong time (too early) and the people really didn't get a fair chance. When I consider the top problems that the survey pointed out, I see the need for specific training and some specific experience in the area of church growth. None of the 22 people that I researched seemed to have done any significant research or training within the discipline of church planting/church growth.

I think we also need to keep in mind the growing formulation of the Association of Vineyard Churches. Many of these people were people who were sent out when the Association had very little structure to it and those of us who were working in the field had much less training and experience by which to help these families. Hopefully our growing experience and the growing structure of the Association together with examining the pathology of these failures, will make us better at discerning who should go and when.

## **B. Of Successful Churches**

The purpose of this half of the pathology report is to discover the similarities of twenty of our most successful church plants; to see what characteristics of leadership, life and training they held in common. I wanted to know what correlation, if any, there might be between the findings of the former report (dead churches) and this report. We also wanted to determine the “10 most important” criteria a church planter should meet before he/she is sent out.

Keep in mind that all twenty-eight issues are important and could be potentially lethal. Yet, it is possible, as you will see, for a church planter to have had one or more of the problems we’ve isolated and still survive. What seems, in most cases, to have been the difference between success and failure is the ability to creatively work through and solve problems.

For the most part, the people I chose to interview/research were our best church planters (although I might have left out one or two). I have included five or six that have varying degrees of made-it-ness; people who have struggled from day one. I did this in order to get us more rounded information (i.e., dead churches, struggling churches, and super churches).

In the Summary/Highlights section you will find the top ten, the weighted top ten, a section on surprising statistics (with possible explanations), a summary of types of churches started, some conclusions we can draw from this study and a list of experiences and material a potential church planter should have.

## **Introduction**

The column entitled “Description” is a more full description of the survey questions that I asked over the phone. At times I had to ask se follow up questions in order to get accurate information. These descriptions represent the full thought behind the questions. The column entitled “Ratio” informs you of planters/churches out of the twenty contacted that was affected by the particular description on the left hand side of the page. The column entitled “Percentage” tells the percentage affected. The column entitled “Rank in Category” tells you the rank within the appropriate category (either the pastor/planter profile or the church profile); the number 1 (one) being the most common fault. The column entitled “Overall Rank” tells you the rank considering a specific description within the context of the combined categories.



## PASTOR/PLANTER PROFILE

DESCRIPTION	RATIO	%	RANK IN CATEGORY	OVERALL RANK
1. The pastor/planter had a proven track record of ministry under supervision	10/20	95%	2T	3T
2. The pastor/planter had indigenous support or a lifeline to a regional church	16/20	80%	9T	10T
3. The pastor/planter had a clear, written plan (objective reality) that they were working from.	12/20	60%	13T	17T
4. The pastor/planter did not have ego strength problems (i.e., self image too tied to success or failure).	10/20	50%	17T	24T
5. The pastor/planter had a strong marriage and remained solid during the planting process.	16/20	80%	9T	10T
6. The pastor/planter was in a growing/learning posture, was able to change and help others change.	12/20	60%	13T	17T
7. The pastor/planter was sure of his call.	19/20	95%	2T	3T
8. The pastor/planter had clearly defined objectives to work toward.	14/20	70%	11T	14T
9. The pastor/planter did discerning research (i.e., demographics, psychographics).	10/20	50%	17T	24T
10. The pastor/planter used effective gathering methods and was ruthless about evaluating them.	10/20	50%	17T	24T
11. The pastor/planter had an attitude of optimism and faith.	19/20	95%	2T	3T
12. The pastor/planter did not suffer from inordinate loneliness or the depression that can follow, thus resulting in lessened effectiveness.	11/20	55%	16T	21T
13. The pastor/planter felt called as a couple.	18/20	90%	7T	8T
14. The pastor/planter was a good (strong) leader; he/she knew what the Spirit was saying, where the group should go and how to get there.	11/20	55%	16T	21T

15. The pastor/planter could identify, recruit, train, deploy, monitor and nurture workers and leaders.	12/20	60%	13T	17T
16. The pastor/planter had good social skills; was friendly and easily liked.	19/20	95%	2T	3T
17. The pastor/planter had our values, priorities and philosophy of ministry.	18/20	90%	7T	8T
18. The pastor/planter was able and willing to take appropriate authority.	11/20	55%	16T	21T
19. The pastor/planter took responsibility for the church to grow (i.e., was not “waiting” for it to happen).	19/20	95%	2T	3T
20. The pastor/planter was a hard worker.	20/20	100%	1	1T
21. The pastor/planter was an assertive leader/equiper rather than a nurturing enabler/facilitator.	14/20	70%	11T	14T

# CHURCH PROFILE

DESCRIPTION	RATIO	%	RANK IN CATEGORY	OVERALL RANK
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3. <i>Back Door Problems.</i> The church could not develop multiple options for adult fellowship (i.e., celebration, congregation, cell dynamics). There was no direction for new people to get involved.	10/20	50%	6	24T
4. <i>Ethnicitis Problems.</i> The church was trying to minister to a “prior” population in a “new/changing” town or part of town.	20/20	100%	1	1T
5. <i>Hyper-cooperativism Problems.</i> The church got going in too many different directions and didn’t stick to the one or two things they did best (or were called to).	16/20	80%	2	10T
6. <i>Sociological Strangulation Problems.</i> The physical facilities were too small to facilitate growth (i.e., seating, parking, Sunday School, nursery, etc.).	8/20	40 <sup>^</sup>	7	28
7. <i>Saint John’s Syndrome.</i> The church attracted too many nominal/hurt Christians who were unwilling or unable to change and grow (i.e., church hoppers, burned out leaders, the chronically hurt, etc.).	15/20	75%	3	13

## Summary/Highlights

These are the most common characteristics of successful Vineyard church planters.

1. They were hard workers.
2. The church did not suffer from ethnicitis (a terminal disease according to C. Peter Wagner).
3. They had a proven track record under supervision.
4. They were sure of their call.
5. They had an attitude of optimism and faith.
6. They had good social skills, were friendly and easily liked.
7. They took responsibility for the church to grow.
8. They were called as a couple.
9. They had our values, priorities and philosophy of ministry.
10. They had indigenous support; a lifeline to a regional church.
11. They had a strong marriage that remained strong during the planting effort.

## The “Weighted” Top Characteristics

Based on the two studies, what are the most important characteristics for a potential church planter to have? I see it as follows:

1. Strong, visionary leadership.
2. The ability to identify, recruit, train, deploy, monitor and nurture.
3. A proven track record under supervision.
4. An indigenous support group or a solid lifeline to a regional church.
5. A clear, written plan.
6. The pastor/planter must take responsibility for the church to grow.
7. The issue of “coupleness” and a strong, supportive marriage.
8. Effective gathering techniques and ruthless evaluation of them (if you can’t start, you can’t grow!).
9. Able to think and problem solve, i.e., sociological strangulation problems, etc.
10. Someone who is sure of their call and full of optimism and faith.

The issue of values, priorities, etc., is important, but in itself is not a general church planting requirement inasmuch as someone could plant a church with any given set of values, etc. Our requirement though is that if someone is going to plant a Vineyard, it must be with our values, priorities and philosophy of ministry.

## Surprising Statistics

Some of our most commonly held and highly valued ideas about church planting were broken by our early church planters. The following are examples and explanations.

<b>Example</b>	<b>Possible Explanation</b>
1. Forty percent said they were not good at identifying, recruiting, training, deploying, monitoring and nurturing.	1. The successful ones probably did it <u>intuitively</u> without the language or conceptual basis for it. The struggling ones may have <u>struggled</u> just for this reason.
2. Forty percent said they did not have a clear, written plan to work from.	2. They had an idea in their head and were <u>persistent</u> and <u>creative</u> enough to get it done anyway. <u>Personal charisma</u> probably helped take up the slack for lack of <u>communication</u> concerning <u>objectives</u> .
3. Forty percent said they were not in a growing/learning posture.	3. Doing the <u>one</u> thing they did best was probably enough to get them by until they entered a new growth curve.
4. Fifty percent said they did no demographic research.	4. The <u>sovereignty of God</u> was probably the key issue here. They heard from God and were <u>the right people at the right time in the right place</u> .
5. Fifty percent said they suffered from ego strength problems (i.e., their self image was too tied to their success or failure).	5. God has always used corny people!! Look at us!!
6. Fifty percent said they used ineffective gathering tools.	6. Their <u>personal and charisma and style</u> probably helped them <u>attract</u> people versus <u>gathering</u> them programatically. They may have been in a fast growing, highly mobile community.
7. Forty-five percent suffered from loneliness and depression.	7. <u>Obedience</u> to their call, <u>resilience</u> in their <u>character</u> and a <u>strong marriage</u> probably saw them through.
8. Forty-five percent had a hard time taking appropriate authority.	8. May have started out <u>immature</u> and therefore <u>fearful</u> which could have led to either abdications or authoritarian behavior. They must have <u>adjusted</u> as they <u>grew</u> into their leadership role.

9. Fifty percent had “back door problems.”	9. They eventually were able to provide <u>multiple options for adult fellowship</u> and clarify how someone could <u>get involved</u> with them.
10. Sixty percent had sociological strangulation problems.	10. They were <u>thinkers; resourceful</u> and <u>creative</u> enough to keep one step ahead (ideally) of growth.

## Summary of Types of Churches

Deaths	Successes
Long Distance - Most (10-12)	Long Distance - 8*
Near By - The Rest (8-10)	Near By - 8
Spin Off - (1 or 2)	Spin Off - 3
Catalytic Team - (1 or 2)	Catalytic Team - 0
Transferred Nucleus - 0	Transferred Nucleus - 1
TOTAL: 22	TOTAL: 20

\*These were our best, most experienced people; most of them are Regional Overseers or Area Pastoral Coordinators.

## Conclusions

1. The sovereignty, call and blessing of God are obviously the most important aspect of this work. We must get better at recognizing (by track record, ability, etc.) who has it and who doesn't. Church growth people talk about having "Church Growth Eyes"; as it relates to this, we need "Leadership Eyes".
2. Kenn [Gulliksen] has done a good job of laying out some basic qualifications and prerequisites for church planters. Attached is a suggest list of experiences and materials a church planter should have.
3. An issue not raised specifically in the survey but nevertheless important is site selection, both city and facility. It probably helped some and hurt others. Careful planning with a demographic study will help us locate where the people are we're trying to reach. Accessibility, visibility, flexibility and surplus parking are essential elements of facility selection.
4. More training, education, more oversight and relationship from area and regional overseers will greatly improve our chances for successfully starting more churches.
5. Nearbys and spin-offs are our best bets. Spin-offs cost much more however. Our plans ought to be to cluster around existing area or regional churches.
6. Distance is a big issue. As said before, only our most experienced, best trained people should attempt a far away pioneering work (with rare exception).



# Appendix

## Experiences:

1. Has worked in all areas of ministry in a church.
2. Has successfully started, gathered, multiplied, left and nurtured kinships.
3. Has been on ministry trips.
4. Has successfully IRTDMN workers and leaders.
5. Has written a plan and successfully carried it out.
6. Has had preaching experience.
7. Has had counseling experience.
8. Has completed all necessary (available) training.
9. Has recently led people to Christ and into a group.
10. Has done a demographic study on his/her targeted city.
11. Has demonstrated ability to solve problems and confront others.
12. Has proven himself/herself a hard worker under trying circumstances.
13. Has proven himself/herself to have good social skills (with staff leaders, etc.).
14. Has been to CIM, parts 1-3.
15. Has good relationship with area coordinator.

# Materials

## Tapes:

1. Expanding the Kingdom Now
2. Five Year Planning
3. Wimber on Wagner
4. Church Growth Leadership in the 90s
5. Others available through the Charles E. Fuller Institute for Church Growth

## Books:

1. *Your Church Can Grow* (Wagner)
2. *Leading Your Church to Growth* (Wagner)
3. *Church Growth - State of the Art* (Wagner)
4. *The World's 20 Largest Churches* (Vaughan)
5. *How to Grow a Church* (McGavran and Arn)
6. *Ten Steps for Church Growth* (McGavran and Arn)
7. *Your Church Has Real Possibilities* (Schuller)
8. *The Complete Book of Church Growth* (Towns)
9. *Effective Church Planting* (Schaller)
10. Others available through the Charles E. Fuller Institute for Church Growth