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Comprehensive Study Finds Church Planting Momentum Is Bigger, More Diverse and More Successful than Previously Realized

DALLAS, TX (October 29, 2007)— A just-released, major research study commissioned by Dallas-based Leadership Network has uncovered striking changes in the number and type of new churches started in the United States. These developments promise profound implications for the future.

The “State of Church Planting USA” study was based on interviews with more than 100 denominational leaders (representing dozens of different denominations), 200 church-planting churches and some 45 church planting networks. Ed Stetzer, director of research at Lifeway Research, headed up the project. Stetzer reports that the results surprised him in many respects: “Church planting has grown in its scope, diversity and impact. North American churches, networks and denominations are making church planting a growing priority. Such emphases push the church closer toward a movement—where churches plant churches that plant churches across North America and the world.”

Dave Travis, managing director at Leadership Network, observes, “Most church-planting studies tend to look at either a very narrow slice of church planting or developments on a global scale. In commissioning this study, our goal was to review the current state of U.S. church-planting efforts—and begin to assess what today’s reality means for the next generation of planters.”

Key findings of the 6-months-long effort include the following:

1. *Interest is growing rapidly.* The pace of church planting has accelerated dramatically in recent years. For example, a simple Google search on the term “church planting” now returns over one million hits. And, while only two mainstream books were published on church planting from 1996 to 2002, no fewer than ten have been released in the last five years, with several more on the horizon. Equally important, church planting has now become a preferred ministry option, not a consolation prize—both denominations and individual churches report that many of their “best and brightest” leaders are pursuing church planting as a primary ministry focus.
2. *Local churches and church planting networks are driving the charge.* Historically, church planting has been a denominationally driven activity. Today, the picture is quite different—with much of the energy centered at the local level. Many of the country’s most vibrant congregations see church planting as one of their central purposes. “Church-planting networks”—loose affiliations of churches that may or may not be tied by denomination but do share a commitment to launching new,

like-minded congregations—are also at the forefront of the movement. As a result, denominational offices are increasingly taking a more subordinate role—equipping rather than directing local congregational efforts.

3. *“Affinity” strategies dominate.* Church planters once based their efforts on geography—the goal was to place new churches in “unserved” communities and areas. Today’s church planters are much more sophisticated. As Dave Travis notes, “Through this study, we learned that most successful church planters today are specialists who emphasize a particular style of worship or a specific demographic. For example, they may exclusively plant house churches or ethnic churches—or perhaps build purpose-driven, seeker or missional churches. And the trend toward specialization is likely to continue as more tools and resources that serve specific types of planting strategies are developed.”
4. *Survival and success are markedly greater than realized.* Observers have long assumed that most church plants fail within the first year—as many as 80%-90%, by some estimates. Research reveals a very different picture—suggesting that 68% of the roughly 4,000 churches planted each year are still functioning four years later. These baby churches may not yet be self-sufficient, but the congregations themselves are alive and many are thriving.

What do these results mean for the future of the U.S. church? Dave Travis says, “I am hopeful that this study and the growing number of outstanding church planting conferences and resources will inspire a new wave of planters in the years ahead. That would be very good news indeed. Launching vibrant new congregations is often a more feasible and more fruitful strategy than attempting to revitalize struggling congregations.”

Leadership Network has created four free reports that summarize different aspects of this groundbreaking study:

- *Church Planting Overview*
- *Who Starts New Churches?*
- *Funding New Churches*
- *Improving the Health and Survivability of New Churches*

All can be downloaded at www.leadnet.org/churchplanting. A 25-minute podcast interview of Dave Travis and Ed Stetzer is also available as a free download at www.leadnet.org/podcasts.

About Leadership Network: Based in Dallas, Texas, Leadership Network is a non-profit public charity that fosters church innovation and growth in furtherance of its far-reaching mission to *identify, connect and help high-capacity Christian leaders multiply their impact*. Church planting is one of many areas in which the organization works. For more on Leadership Network, see www.leadnet.org, www.halftime.org and www.successtosignificance.com or contact Rick Long at 1.800.477.6698 x 102 or rlong@sourcepub.com.