

# RESEARCH REFLECTION

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## *How Many Church Plants Really Survive—and Why?*

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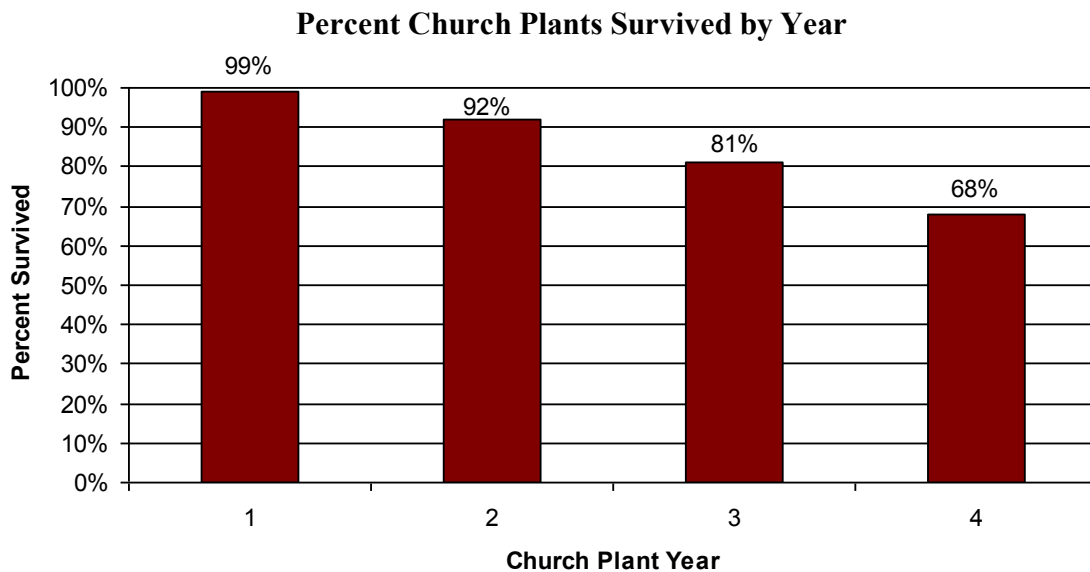


**Center for Missional Research**

## How Many Church Plants *Really* Survive—and Why?

(Part 2 of the Church Planting Survivability and Health Study)  
[\(see part 1 here\)](#)

“Statistics” randomly and regularly quoted have led many to believe that 80 percent of church plants fail in the first year. However, a recent study by the Center for Missional Research showed considerably more favorable results.<sup>1</sup> Twelve denominations and networks participated in the study with over 1,000 church plants’ status of existence determined. With more than 500 completed interviews, the study reveals that 99 percent of church plants survive the first year, 92 percent the second year, 81 percent the third year, and 68 percent the fourth year (see graph below).



Yet, that tells only a part of the story. We wanted to learn not only how many survived, but why. What makes the difference between those that survive and those that do not? When more than 100 factors were analyzed, the following four categories proved to be the best predictors for survivability over 4 years.

### **CHURCH PLANT EXPECTATIONS**

We found that realistic expectations were a significant determining factor of success. When the church planter’s expectations meet the reality of the church planting experience, the chance of survivability *increases* by over 400 percent. Of those who said their expectations were realized, 87 percent of their churches survived compared to only 61 percent of church plants survived among those who did not have their expectations met. It is evident that a realistic picture of the joys and difficulties surrounding church planting is beneficial for both the church plant and the church planter.

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<sup>1</sup> Stetzer, Ed and Connor, Phillip, *Research Report: Church Plant Survivability and Health Report 2007*, (Alpharetta, Ga.: North American Mission Board, SBC, 2007).

## **CHURCH MEMBER LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT**

If the church planter provides leadership development training for new church members, the odds of survivability *increase* by over 250 percent. Of those church planters who provided leadership training to church members, 79 percent of their churches survived compared to only 59 percent of church plants survived among those who did not provide leadership training. Clearly, it's worth the extra effort to develop leaders from the beginning of the church plant.

## **CHURCH PLANTER PEER GROUP**

Those who try to plant a church without the support and counsel of others have greater risk and less chance of survivability. The church planter who meets with a group of church planting peers at least monthly *increases* the odds of survivability by 135 percent. We found that out of those church planters who were part of a peer group, 83 percent of their churches survived whereas only 67 percent of church plants among those who did not have a peer group survived. The old adage, "You can't do it alone" is true. Church planters need to learn from each other and support one another through the blessings and the trials.

## **STEWARDSHIP PLAN**

Church plants that have a proactive stewardship development plan enable the church to become financially self-sufficient. They also *increase* the odds of survivability by over 178 percent. Of those church plants who have a stewardship development plan, 81 percent of churches survived whereas only 68 percent of church plants survived among those who did not have a stewardship plan. Financial self-sufficiency is key to survival and the promotion of financial stewardship among church planters, even early on, is critical to its success.

## **CONCLUSION**

Sometimes seemingly small things can make the difference between success or failure, and that is certainly true in church planting. Expectations might not seem like they would make such a profound difference in the survivability rate, but they had the biggest impact (400%). When realistic expectations are combined with a plan to develop leaders, benefit from others, and develop stewards, the difference is remarkable.

If you're planting or considering planting a church, you can increase your probability of survival dramatically by giving attention to these factors. And don't be discouraged when you hear how many church plants fail. There are a lot more that survive!

Next, in part 3, **Factors for Higher Attendance**

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