

Chapter 3

Planters and Pioneers

The background of the page features several overlapping, wavy, light gray lines that create a sense of movement and depth. These lines are positioned primarily in the lower half of the page, with some extending upwards towards the title area.

In 1989 with my wife Jane and a gaggle of toddlers in tow, I began a new work in North-Western Sydney. At that time church planting literature was thin on the ground. So without 'church planter inventories' and 'gift assessment analyses', we simply plunged in and intuitively drew a core group together.

Had coaching and training been available we would have readily availed ourselves of such support. Many avoidable mistakes, heartache and misunderstandings would have been averted.

Experience has also taught us that any person called by God, lay or ordained, can be equipped and deployed as a church planter. Age, gender and health should not present as barriers.

Those whom God calls and equips seem to exhibit certain skill-sets, gifts and character traits. That they have already exhibited certain ministry skills is all-important.

People who start mission-shaped ministries will be women and men who've been actively involved in evangelism and disciple-making ministries in local churches. They'll be people with an excellent track record in leading small groups, in articulating the gospel with conviction and clarity, and in Christian character.

Paul's instructions to Timothy - in I Timothy 3:1-10 - concerning the selection of 'overseers' and deacons are, in my opinion, an excellent starting point for identifying potential pioneer ministers and church planters.

Those who are not recent converts and who have a good reputation with outsiders must also be:

- Above reproach.
- Faithful to their spouse.
- Even tempered and self-controlled.
- Respectable and hospitable.
- Able to teach.
- Responsible and temperate with alcohol.
- Neither violent nor quarrelsome but gentle.
- Someone who is not a 'lover' of money.
- A person who has nurtured and managed well their own family.
- Clear about the 'deep truths of the faith'.

A recent (2005) Church of England report⁴¹, helpfully lists a schedule of 'Core Elements' that church planters should (and generally do) exhibit. The latter informs sections of the following table.

I have added a simple self ranking scale to help potential planters identify strengths and/or areas in their life and ministry that will require attention. Note: I use terms 'pioneer' and 'planter' interchangeably from this point.

I would strongly urge potential planters to ask three other people who know them well to rank their skills, experiences and giftedness against the 'Core Elements' schema.

⁴¹ Guidelines for the identification, training and deployment of Ordained Pioneer ministers 2005, 13-14.

'Core Elements' in pioneering ministry

(with self assessment ranking)

A Vision for planting churches within contemporary culture and an ability to clearly articulate such a vision in an engaging, winsome, Christ-honouring manner.

Low

1	2	3	4	5
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 High

An authentic, integrated understanding of the particular ministry (and target group) envisaged.

Low

1	2	3	4	5
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 High

A passion for connecting with those outside the church.

Low

1	2	3	4	5
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 High

Capacity to innovate and initiate and to recover well from setbacks and failure.

Low

1	2	3	4	5
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 High

Mature and well developed devotional life for the pioneer/planter and his/her spouse.

Low

1	2	3	4	5
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 High

Well developed abilities to initiate change in a balanced and creative way (as evidenced in other evangelistic/disciple-making contexts).

Low

1	2	3	4	5
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 High

Demonstrable maturity, robustness and resilience to face the demands of pioneering mission and ministry (for the planter and his/her family).

Low

1	2	3	4	5
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 High

Highly motivated, faith-filled and prayerful.

Low

1	2	3	4	5
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 High

Well-developed understanding of the interaction between gospel and culture.

Low

1	2	3	4	5
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 High

A clear (and Biblical) theology of mission; a confidence in the efficacy of the gospel.

Low

1	2	3	4	5
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 High

A willingness to work with and/or partner other groups engaging in similar ministries.

Low

1	2	3	4	5
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 High

The ability and desire to work in a team, to create cohesion and to develop the gifts of others.

Low

1	2	3	4	5
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 High

Note: The above schema is indicative only. It is not predictive (re suitability or outcomes). As I stated earlier, God can and does use all kinds of people to build the Kingdom.

That said, 'low scorers' would need to have a 'call' very clearly confirmed by elders and denominational leaders prior to moving ahead in pioneering ministry.

I'd also strongly urge interested planters to seek 'coaching' and ongoing supervision from a consulting organisation like Church Army Australia, for example.⁴²

Readers might also consider the very fine tool, The Church Planter Assessment Guide prepared by North American church planting doyens Bob Logan and Dr. Charles Ridley, Psychology Professor and organizations consultant at Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana.⁴³

Chapter 3 - think it through for groups and individuals...

Do you agree with the statement, "*People who start mission-shaped churches will be women and men who've been actively involved in evangelism and disciple-making in local churches...with an excellent track record in leading small groups, in articulating the gospel with conviction and clarity, and in Christian character*"? How might this statement apply in your context?

Set aside 20 minutes or so to individually work through the 'Core Elements in pioneering ministry' schedule. In the course of the next week invite three other people to rank you (and you have permission to photocopy the page). Do the 'external' rankings match your own assessments? How do you interpret the results?

Do you believe you are 'called' of God and suitably equipped to start a mission-shaped church? List reasons for your response (and share with the group if appropriate).

As a result of reading this chapter I/we intend to

⁴² <http://www.churcharmy.com.au>

⁴³ <http://www.churchplanting4me.org/ridleyfactors.htm>