

Replanting focuses on giving struggling churches new life

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HOUSTON—Pastors who want to breathe new life into struggling churches by replanting them—rather than starting new congregations—need a special set of skills, attendees learned at a recent conference at Houston’s First Baptist Church.

About 50 people from throughout the United States who want to help churches in decline attended the conference that challenged them to ask, “Am I a replanter?”

The conference represented a collaborative effort between the Baptist General Convention of Texas, Union Baptist Association and the Southern Baptist Convention’s North American Mission Board.

“We need to figure out how we can draw people to be replanters themselves,” said Tom Howe, associate director of missions for Texas Baptists. “How do we call people to meet this need? This conference came out of that question, to help people see what it is and to learn about the skills needed.”



Participants of the Spanish-

speaking cohort at the Replanting Conference in Houston share advice with one another.

Conference participants included current replanters and those interested in becoming involved with a replant. During the two-day event, experienced replanters led general sessions that addressed various attributes replanters must have and the challenges they face.

The attendees divided into small groups to discuss the specific challenges faced by urban, suburban, rural/small town and Spanish-speaking replanters, as well as replanters' spouses.

‘Visionary shepherds’ needed

Jimbo Stewart, a replant pastor of Redemption Church in Jacksonville, Fla, spoke about the attributes needed to persevere through being a replanter. Stewart, who has been at Redemption Church for five years, warned that replanting can be challenging—especially through the first few years.

Replanters need to be visionary shepherds, always looking ahead to how things can be improved, but never forgetting about the flock they still need to minister to now. He also discussed “pastoral grit” and being strong enough to continue despite setbacks and hardships.

Even so, the hardships are worth it, he insisted.

“Every time a local church dies in a neighborhood, a gospel light goes out,” Stewart said. “That is not OK with us. Those churches are in places that desperately need the gospel.”

Replanting is not a new trend or unprecedented approach, he added.

“In fact, we’re going back to the oldest way of doing things, centering it all

on Jesus Christ. It's a dependence on Christ to do what you cannot do," he said.

A powerful picture of rebirth

Keelan Cook, associate director of Union Baptist Association, noted plateaued or declining churches are on the rise in the United States. It is important to address the problem head-on, instead of waiting until it is too late, he asserted.



Keelan Cook, associate director of Union Baptist Association, welcomes attendees of the "Am I a Replanter?" conference.

Cook emphasized that each replanted church is a place with people who are getting important spiritual nourishment and fellowship because of them, he told the replanters.

"I think replanting is one of the most significant conversations we need to be having in North American missions today," he said. "We have a wave of plateaued churches that are on the cusp of dying, and as that happens, we need people to think of replanting and revitalizing that church as their calling."

For Cook, one of the most powerful pictures of salvation can be found through replanting.

“Church replants do a really good job of talking about rebirth,” Cook said. “The gospel is about bringing dead things back to life. And replanting is a great example to the community of what that looks like.”

In an effort to help more churches thrive, the BGCT expanded its replanting ministry in recent years, Howe noted. Nine churches currently are going through the replanting process with Texas Baptists, and Howe extended an invitation for interested churches to reach out. Texas Baptists will walk with churches through the replanting process and offer support, he said.

For more information about church replanting, email Tom.Howe@txb.org.