

Discipleship Births Multiplying Churches

It is always exciting when a church is getting ready to send a planting team. Every plant begins when someone obeys the command to make disciples. Our world can only be transformed by transforming lives with the Gospel. We want to make disciples who make disciples, and our vision is to see healthy churches multiplying into new churches.

This is the story of three generations of disciples and how a new church was formed.

A few months ago, the SBC Virginia experienced a historic moment for two SBCV churches in the Richmond area. It was Church Planter Assessment and Training Day. Brother Celso Henriquez and his wife, Lourdes, were training for their future church plant. Their pastor, Diego Fernández, was with them that day to represent the sending church, Iglesia Bautista Vida Nueva in Richmond. Pastor Fernández is not only Celso and Lourdes' pastor; he has personally disciplined Celso, walking with him in his spiritual and ministerial growth. Celso recalls that his mentor has challenged him many times to step out of his comfort zone to do whatever it took to minister to others. Sometimes it was about praying in public or welcoming others, sharing his faith with unbelievers, leading a group, or leading other leaders. All of these challenges helped Celso and Lourdes take the step of faith to leave their church to plant another church. Pastor Fernández describes Celso as one of his most trusted leaders. Although it is hard to send out trusted leaders, the church at Antioch did a similar thing through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. They were willing to let go of two of their best, Paul and Barnabas, for the work of the Gospel (Acts 13: 1-3).

Jason Carlisle came to help with assessment/training day. Carlisle has been used by God to disciple several men, many of whom are now serving in ministry. One of those men is Pastor Diego Fernández, Celso's mentor! When Carlisle told the story of how he

disciplined Fernández, there were many similar elements: Carlisle also challenged Fernández to get out of his comfort zone, to take steps of faith, to minister others, and to preach even when he was nervous and did not feel ready. Carlisle also accompanied Fernández when God called him to plant Iglesia Bautista Vida Nueva. Like Carlisle, Fernández has a strong passion for missionary work in Virginia and to the ends of the earth. Ultimately, discipleship is simply the transmission of life.

This assessment/training day was a picture of the power of discipleship. Carlisle disciplined Fernández, Fernández disciplined Celso Henriquez, and now they are sending Henriquez to start a church that will reach an area of Richmond with the Gospel, making disciples who will make disciples.

Clint Clifton, author of the book, *Thresholds for Church Planting*, lists some principles to remember when sending disciples to plant a church:

PREPARE them; don't expect them to prepare themselves (2 Timothy 2:2).

PRAY for them; don't neglect to plead with God on behalf of those you send (Colossians 1:9; Ephesians 1:16).

SUPPORT them; don't expect them to figure everything out on their own. There is a difference between starting a church in a school and having your own building. We certainly learned this during the pandemic! There are circumstances that someone with experience can help them navigate.

ENDURE with them; don't neglect ongoing burden-bearing after they leave. Every team, every church planter will go through trials; let's make sure they have a sending church that is praying for them and with them and also gets in touch with them to see how they are doing through the storm.

CELEBRATE with them; keep your people informed about the problems and progress of the ministry.

Sending out missionaries to plant a new church plant is an important milestone for a congregation, and it all begins with the transmission of life and passion that discipleship brings. Paul sent his spiritual son, Timothy, to pastor a church, and this was his advice:

2 Timothy 3:10-11, "You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me." ■

Roundtable discussion with Sergio Guardia (standing)

