

When a Church Planter Comes to Town ...

Partnering Perspectives

"And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, 'Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people.'" Acts 18:9–10 (ESV)

When a church planter comes to town it does not take long for the word to spread.

"Did you hear? There's a new church starting."

For some, that news brings excitement. For others, it brings questions. And for many, especially pastors, it brings a quiet tension that is not always spoken out loud. Because when a church planter comes to town, it's not just a new ministry opportunity. It is a moment that tests hearts.

There are primarily two sides to every story.

1 The Church Planter's View

The church planter usually arrives with a strong sense of calling and confidence after completing an assessment, receiving a "ready to plant" verdict, and affirmation from the North American Mission Board and the SBC of Virginia.

Oftentimes, he's left something behind—security,

salary, or familiarity. Perhaps the planter has moved a family into a place where few people are known, while the planting team has also relocated, leaving jobs and comfort behind to join the mission. The vision burns brightly, but it carries weighty questions:

- WILL this work?
- WILL other churches welcome me or keep their distance?
- WILL I accidentally step on toes I did not know were there?

Eric Josephson, church planter in Ashland, Virginia

The planter prays for open doors, friendships with other pastors, and reassurance that the work is not being done in isolation. The goal is not competition. The goal is to reach people who are not being reached.



started a new church about two miles from Gwathmey Baptist. Cauthorne is convinced that even Ashland needs more like-minded churches working together to reach the community.

Still, the planter knows how it can look.

2 The Existing Pastor's View

Then there is the pastor who is already in the town.

The pastor has labored there for years. He has married couples, disciplined families, and buried members. He's preached through seasons when the room was full and seasons when it was not. And now, a new church is coming.

Even for pastors who believe deeply in church planting, there can still be a knot in their stomachs:

- WILL families leave?

- WILL the giving drop?
- WILL this divide the relationships I've invested years in?

He may never say it publicly, but the concern is real. Welcoming a church plant is not just theological; it is deeply personal. It can feel like opening your hands and trusting God with the people you love completely.

A Picture of Partnership.

Mike Cauthorne, pastor of **Gwathmey Baptist Church** in Ashland, Virginia, recently welcomed Eric Josephson to the community. Josephson, the lead church planter,

"I'm excited about the opportunity to encourage them and offer them our facility and whatever they need. Our people hear about kingdom growth and advancement, not always about our church growth."

Cauthorne added, "We offered support ... a place to meet, my office, baptismal, and members' meetings. They held a monthly worship service at our church."

This partnership reflects the heart of Acts 18. We thank God for churches across our partnership that welcome new churches into their communities for the sake of Gospel advancement. ●