

Post-Conference Integration Paper

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I am not just giving a summary of “The Exponential Conference”, I am also sharing my feelings and what I will take away from this conference to use in helping me plant the church(s) that God has commissioned me to do. The conference was about teaching people of faith that wanted to know how to plant a church(s) and understand what church planting is really about and the responsibility that comes with it. It was designed to encourage current and new church planters in their church planting endeavors, and how they can best live together for God, with their families, and their teams. I noticed that they were really pushing the idea of not just planting one or two churches, but many. I loved the theme: “Together: Pursuing the great collaboration” and “We are to do the mission ‘together’”. The quote that was used:

“We understand the great commission; and we believe in the great commandment; but we have forgotten Jesus' challenge of the great collaboration in John 17 that we are to do the mission "Together!"

It was estimated that more than 5,500 church planters were at this conference. Thank goodness that the church they were holding the conference at was large enough to hold so many people. The set-up was nice, I like that you were able to meet with your group (if you came with one) first before you heard anyone else. I liked that free food was served and if you didn't want the sandwiches, food trucks were available to serve hot food. Coming together in the sanctuary as a whole to hear uplifting messages was nice. It's nice to worship with like believers, the music choice needs improvement so that the conference can appeal to black believers. I was informed by one of the speakers (A Pastor who was sitting next to me) that he was glad that he was able to

see black faces. He said that he was going to these conferences for about 10 years and that he was the only black face that would show up. Of course, I was not pleased in hearing that.

I pray “The Exponential Conference” will revamp their purpose to include Black African American and Hispanic church planters. I pray the theme that was repeated throughout the conference, will not only mean together in the sense of, coming together to plant churches, but in that Caucasians will come alongside, Black African Americans and Hispanics to do the work of God together without making us feel like we (Black African Americans and Hispanics) don’t belong to partner alongside them. I pray this wasn’t a theme just to look and sound good to attract Caucasians only. I pray that the reality of racism and colorism will be broken in these churches that were represented at this conference. I am digressing a moment to write about what I heard one of the speakers said. The church needs to do a better job in this area.

As a matter of fact, the Pastor that I mentioned earlier, is the Pastor that I am referring to. He mentioned in his sermonette (in the sanctuary) that he was sending people, whom he had been ministering, to churches that he partnered with (church planting) for them to be trained and equipped. What he said about these Churches reaction, when he sent young men and women that were formerly incarcerated, broke my heart. He said they would send them back and tell him, “we don’t want those people” attending our church. “Those people?!

As if they had the plague or implying that they were dirty. Have they forgotten that they too were once filthy and that they were not righteous too? The church needs to be careful and push people away that don’t look like them. I began to weep for them and the church, not just those churches, the body of Christ as a whole. I felt the rejection those poor young people were feeling, I felt their burdens. Although, this particular story wasn’t about racism, it was more

about them being incarcerated, however, if you really look at it, mostly black and brown people are the ones that are incarcerated. Let me get back on track, I had to deal with that.

There were so many booths with information that ranged from different topics. One of the booths that I stopped by was called Passion 4 Planting their goal is to come alongside you to help you manage the launch of your ministry. This is their advertisement: Are you called to plant a church? Do you have a vision for starting new faith communities? Great! Calling and vision are vital in church planting ministry. However, you'll need more than calling and vision to start a healthy church. You'll need well-thought out strategies, a comprehensive plan to implement those strategies, and God's provision to see your vision become reality. That's where Passion for Planting's boot camp steps in. Through our experience in helping start over 260 churches, we've developed an intensive boot camp that prepares and equips leaders to plant healthy multiplying churches.

It sounded like a nice pitch, I picked up two of their brochures, one was advertising a template that helped the church planter to develop and manage their launch plan. They advertised because church planting is hard and there are a lot of things to do, the church planter was given an option to go to Plantrplan.com to access this online service. The purpose was to allow the church planter to focus on leading and serving the people, while this service handle the administration details. The PlanterPlan was created so that you will know what to work on first and what to save for later. The goal is for the church planter to know how to do things that they have never done before using each task's step-by-step instructions with checklists, templates and samples. According to them they have several different templates that you can choose from, one size does not fit all the brochure claims. You can customize the template to fit and match your

calling and context. For tasks, your to-do list is neatly organized to keep things simple. Your church planting Phases are broken down into topical Milestones which contain the Tasks you will be working on.

For those individuals that are visually oriented, the easy-to-read reports and graphs feature will let you know where you are at and what your priorities are. They make it easy to keep your sending organization or oversight team in the loop. They offer premium content, you can get access to extended descriptions and instructions, samples, templates, worksheets, and bonus content for a nominal one-time upgrade. Again, the purpose is so that you can focus on serving the people. It was intriguing to say the least.

The second brochure that I picked up from the same company, offers church planter training boot camp. They equip you with tools needed to turn your vision into reality. The offer is that boot campers will spend 5 days together learning how to plant multiplying churches and developing the strategies that will guide them in this endeavor. The core competencies they offer are, planting nuts and bolts, leadership, legal requirements, fundraising. The purpose is to leave with strategies to plant their church and the strategies that they want you to leave with are, launch vision, launch strategy, fundraising strategy, marketing strategy, outreach strategy, discipleship strategy, assimilation strategy, networking strategy, staffing strategy and budgeting.

They also provide church planter training residency cohort; these are for those believers that are not ready to plant yet. They help prepare the individual with these core competencies, planting nuts and bolts, leadership, legal requirements and fundraising. They provide several learning methods, online: they have online courses, such as, unit content, blogs, podcasts and videos to prepare for Cohort Day. They provide virtual instructions: weekly Cohort Day instruction via web-based video conference from nationally recognized guest speakers. They

provide onsite intensives: 4-day onsite intensives (twice per year) to deep dive into pre-launch critical topics and set the DNA for becoming multiplying churches. They also give the same church plant strategy development that is given to the boot campers.

With these strategy developments, the residents will create and have peer-reviewed strategies tailored to their local context. What was advertised sounded promising and I checked out the link to their website to check out the cost for both programs. I went to the website to and I noticed that they were encouraging sceptics, like myself (because money is involved) the company wanted you to go to a link to see a review regarding if you were wondering whether this type of training would benefit you. The link shared an article written by Ed Stetzer's entitled "the Value of Church Planter Assessment and Training".

I went to this link they gave to view the article regarding church plant boot-camp. The article shared that over 600 seminary graduates who went on to plant churches were surveyed and one of the things that they found was the success rate among those students who had extended training beyond seminary in regard to church planting. The article stated the seminary graduate students that were surveyed were offered a three-day boot training camp to learn how to plant churches, only a few of the students took the course. For the students that took the three-day boot training camp course, they were leading churches that were larger than those who did not take the course. The article went on to say that people who go through boot camp find it to be helpful, because these trainings include intensified instruction in areas that are more specific to church planters. The article went on to identify seven challenges faced by most church planters. These seven challenges were: leadership development and reproducing culture, financial self-sufficiency and viability, team development and volunteer mobilization, systems, processes, and

cultures, Vision casting and avoiding mission drift, evangelism and discipleship, spiritual, physical, and mental health of planter and family are the seven challenges church planters face.

The point they were making, these problems don't exist the same way in established churches, like it is with a newly planted church. For the church plant, these things need to be created, requiring a specific set of skills and tools. They believe boot camp will give church planters tools to help them deal with issues that will come up. The planter will receive ongoing resources to which they can refer back to when they face challenges. After reading Ed Stetzer's "the Value of Church Planter Assessment and Training," I was convinced that this is what I needed to invest in. Passion 4 Planting website gave more strategies than the brochure did and ensured that the individual would learn these strategies: prayer team strategy, launch team strategy, funding strategy, staffing strategy, networking strategy, marketing strategy, outreach strategy, ministry team strategy, assimilation strategy, discipleship strategy. Other teachings sessions include: legal requirements ,facilities and equipment, leadership reproduction, church multiplication DNA, Gospel contextualization, church budgeting/finances, planterplan: project management software tool. I checked out the price for the bootcamp, it was located in Virginia, the cost was around \$900 for the registration and then hotel and plane cost for one week for the summer, maybe a plus. I will have to pray and consider the cost. Right now, I have asked my Pastor to be my mentor and he agreed to help me, so I will see if this route will be cheaper, seeing that he has planted more than two churches.

There were so many break-out sessions to choose from, there were several I thought were interesting. I saw that Allen Hirsch was at the conference and I wanted to make sure that I

was able to stop by one of his sessions to hear him. I wanted to hear him in person, for one of my courses we were made to read one of his books “The forgotten ways”.

I wanted to hear more of him explaining the “APEST” model for church planting. I like his idea, if you are not going the ordained route then believers can do this model. He believes that churches should run as if they have been given all of the what I call the 5-fold ministry gifts mentioned in Ephesians 4:11, and He gave some, Apostles; and some, Prophets; and some, Evangelist; and some, Pastors and teachers. The APEST model is Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Shepard for Pastor and Teacher. He believes all of these gifts can’t exist in one individual and that the Pastor needs to find those individuals who possess the other gifts so that all gifts can be used. I beg to differ; I am sitting under a Pastor that God is using all of these gifts within him and God has told me that He is using me the same way too. This is one of the reasons that God told me to move to New York, I needed to see firsthand a Pastor exercising all of these gifts. I was told for a longtime that this does not occur, and we need to find the one gift that God was calling us to. What God was telling me was different from what I was told, and God had to show me through scripture that I was not believing wrong and then He sends me to a Pastor that actually is used this way.

This was comforting to me, sometimes I think I am losing my mind when God begins to illuminate His word to me. I digressed, let me get back on point. He was using the Apostolic model that he found through the bible to use as a strategy to get the church on a mission mind-set. He sees it as a system and it has six elements, which are: Jesus is Lord, without Jesus it is nothing to begin with. Disciple making, we are to train and equip non-believers, this requires leaving the four walls of the church and going to the community to recruit people to teach the

word of God to (this is what I see). Missional incarnational impulse – seeing God as the model of missionary, He sent Jesus to the world to die so that we can be saved. Apostolic environment, we have to have missional forms of ministry.

This is found in Eph 4:11, Apostle, Prophets, Evangelist, Pastors and Teachers. Organic systems, the organizational system of movement, they all need to work together and not leave one of them out, if one is left out then you will not see church growth. The last one was *Communitas* not *Community* the idea is that a challenge or a task of a mission is to get the job done and that's when your friends become comrades. He sees all six elements as a living system that the church has forgotten.

The other break out session that I attended was by CRU Church Movements. They were teaching on “the changing face of Evangelism the well-being of the city. This wasn't my first choice; I have training on how to win souls. I went through Evangelism training at World Overcomers Outreach Ministry. I ended up choosing this one because the one that I wanted to go to was full. This one had seats available. It was interesting, it taught how to discuss barriers to evangelism with regard to personal, theological, social, cultural, and practical.

The session introduced a spiritual journey-based, equipping paradigm to use as conversational pieces that they called conversational evangelism. This tool was designed to help believers engage with others that they see on a daily basis. We were shown how to use our own personal struggles that led us to Christ. Like I mentioned earlier I was trained in this, however I liked their presentation, Of course, they were selling, and this was one of the things that I noticed at this conference. They had their side hustle going on, I am not knocking it, all I am saying is why do I want to pay for something that I can get for free. I do understand not everyone was able to be blessed as I am in having someone to train and equip me.

There are other sessions that I can mention, we were instructed to give three and if we would use them for our ministry. I will say yes to all of them, including the ones that I have to pay for. I believe these tools can help someone, if they didn't possess these skills already. The conference was worth it and I would go again. I was exhausted, but it was worth it. Like I mentioned before I will use my Pastor David Paul of Spiritual Life Fellowship as my mentor and he will show me how he planted his ministries.