

The Cost of Discipleship and the Risk of Church Planting

Evangelical Free Church of Mt. Morris | August 28, 2016

The passages presented below do not require us to pursue the specific proposal before us. However, they must be considered because they factor into some common objections.

Being a disciple of Jesus has a cost.

²⁵ Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, ²⁶ “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. ²⁷ Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. ²⁸ For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it?
Luke 14:25-28

³⁷ Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. ³⁸ And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. *Matthew 10:37-39*

While there is real, significant cost, there is always a greater gain in view.

²⁸ Peter began to say to him, “See, we have left everything and followed you.” ²⁹ Jesus said, “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, ³⁰ who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. ³¹ But many who are first will be last, and the last first.” *Mark 10:28-31*

²⁴ “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵ Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.
John 12:23-26

Making disciples has a cost.

⁸ We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰ always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. ¹¹ For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. ¹² So death is at work in us, but life in you. [...] ¹⁵ For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. *2 Corinthians 4:8-12, 15*

Essentially, it is not enough to say that there will be a cost to planting a church. We expect cost! A legitimate question: “Is the cost of planting a church this way too great for us to bear?” A better question: “What price are we willing to pay in order to see the gospel go forward?” Less comfortable: “What are we unwilling to do or give in order to see the gospel go forward?”

Christians walk by faith, so we live with varying degrees of certainty and uncertainty.

We do not always know how things will work out in our immediate circumstances.
We do have confidence in God's absolute authority, his final victory, and our ultimate destiny.
We operate by courageous conviction, with faith, trusting in the character and purposes of God.

Jonathan said to the young man who carried his armor, "Come, let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised. It may be that the LORD will work for us, for nothing can hinder the LORD from saving by many or by few." *1 Samuel 14:6*

¹⁶ Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. ¹⁷ If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. ¹⁸ But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up." *Daniel 3:16-18*

²² And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, ²³ except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. ²⁴ But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. *Acts 20:22-24*

We can ask, "What if a church plant fails after a year or so? Wouldn't that be a big waste?"
Or we can say, "Even if it fails, we can accept that, leaving God's work in God's hands."

There can be a higher cost incurred in the attempt to avoid any risk.

²⁶ And the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, ²⁷ "How long shall this wicked congregation grumble against me? I have heard the grumbings of the people of Israel, which they grumble against me. ²⁸ Say to them, 'As I live, declares the LORD, what you have said in my hearing I will do to you: ²⁹ your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness, and of all your number, listed in the census from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against me, ³⁰ not one shall come into the land where I swore that I would make you dwell, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun. *Numbers 14:26-30*

²² And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.' ²³ His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' ²⁴ He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, ²⁵ so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' ²⁶ But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? ²⁷ Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. ²⁸ So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. ²⁹ For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. ³⁰ And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' *Matthew 25:22-30*

We may not plant a church, but inactivity is not an option. That has the greatest cost of all!

More Frequently Asked Questions

We are exploring the possibility of planting a new church out of EFCMM: sending a small portion of our congregation to start a whole new body of believers in a different community.

What about starting some kind of small group or house church meeting first?

This is sometimes asked for two different reasons: as a way to decide whether or not to do a church plant, or as a way to get started once you are committed to doing a plant.

To the first point, we are asking EFCMM to commit up front to do everything we can to see a new church planted. We do not want to dip our toes in the water—we want to dive in!

It is possible that we could start a small group that would meet in a home in Sterling in the winter or spring, but we do not want to get too far ahead of a church planter/pastor. Those who regularly plant churches through the EFCA recommend bringing a planter/pastor into the process sooner rather than later in order to build a cohesive, focused core group.

How will we decide whether we are doing this or not?

We will meet on Sunday morning, September 25, to summarize the proposal and take a congregational vote. While our constitution would only require a simple majority for this to pass, the elders have set the threshold for approval at 75%.

If we decide to plant a church, when would it begin?

Here is our preferred timeline, but there are many variables that may lead to adjustments:

September, 2016 – EFCMM congregational vote on whether to plant a church in Sterling
October-February – conduct search for church planter/pastor, move him to Sterling
March-August – planter participates in ministry at EFCMM, forms/develops core group
September, 2017 – core group starts meeting independently as new church

What would be EFCMM's investment as a church?

Congregation – up to 10% of congregation, up to 2 elders may leave, some temporarily

Elders/Staff – conducting planter/pastor search, mentoring the planter

Resources – sharing or giving curriculum, equipment, etc.

Finances – significant portion of planter's support for one or two years

\$25,000: raised by EFCMM at fall special offering (November)

\$12,500: raised by planter/pastor from other churches and individuals

\$12,500: earned by planter/pastor in part-time work during early days of the plant

Our current budget includes \$6000 in this fiscal year for various expenses related to the plant.

We now have two churches who have expressed interest in partnering financially with us on this project *before we have done any asking*.