

Traits that correlate with happy United Methodist church planting experiences

While few people will possess all of these traits, if you run across clergy or laity with seven or more, they should be persons of interest. In many cases we can **help add experiences*** to their lives that will ready them to serve as planters in the future.

1. **Something in their experience of God drives them to the edge of settled church life to want to reach new people for the kingdom.**

This trait may get them labeled as non-conformists or problem children in a connectional appointive system, even if they are loyal United Methodists. They may be unusually impatient with business as usual in UMC life. They have apostolic zeal. They have led unchurched persons to Christ.

2. **They have history in at least one vibrant, growing church, possibly in a previous healthy new church start.***

To know intuitively what a great church feels like and to know what is normal for growing ministries that are evangelizing people are invaluable experiences for a new church planter.

3. **They are self aware.**

They understand their gifts and talents, personality traits, strengths and weaknesses. They are comfortable in their own skin. They strive for balance in their personal lives and in their relationships with family and friends.

4. **They have a coachable spirit.***

Often, a successful planter or pastor has mentored them on her/his staff. When such a mentor endorses their readiness, they will very seldom fail. They continually strive for personal and professional growth and development.

5. **They have affinity for the mission field.***

They know the territory where they are planting and really love it. They have often lived in the community or in very similar communities or have had previous experiences in getting to know the community, so they begin with good instincts. If not, they team with such people.

6. **They already have a network of relationships in the community where they will be planting.***

These relationships may be largely within the context of a sponsoring or partnering church where they have served on staff for a time before leaving to plant. They may have gone to school in the community.

7. **They and their spouse are at peace and unified about the ministry of new church development and they have embraced the sacrifices entailed.**

New church projects are hard on marriages. Marriages that break early in the plant jeopardize the future of the new church.

8. **Their age at time of appointment is no more than ten years above the median age for the new population being targeted.**

People can plant churches at any age, but good statistical evidence suggests that the age window from 25 to 45 is ideal for a planter on the front end of a project, especially if we want them to attract young adults with children. Older planters assigned to projects may have more difficulty understanding and relating to young adult culture and they may sometimes come with prohibitively high salary price tags.

9. **They demonstrate a vibrant faith.***

The landmark study of successful mainline planters detailed in the book *Extraordinary Leaders for Extraordinary Times* revealed that effective planters have a strong sense of calling, deeply established prayer habits, and keen understanding that church planting is a God thing.

10. **They have demonstrated history of building relationships in the community and leading these friends into church life.**

The best test in assessing high-potential planters is past behavior. No behavior has more relevance than past experience leading unchurched people to Christ and/or to church.

11. **They are catalytic innovators.**

They have a history of leading successful start-ups. This relates to the “entrepreneurial gene” typically found in good planters. It almost always has evidenced itself prior to the church plant. In earlier life they may have started a small business, grown a youth ministry, led a major initiative in their college sorority or a guided a social justice project, mobilizing diverse parties from across the community. They may have started a church before and be ready to do it again.

12. **They are competent vision-casters.***

Though styles and cultural norms vary across racial-ethnic groups, high-potential prospects are good communicators, often able to deliver compelling talks without notes. Good planters typically look you in the eye, talk to you in plain language about real life and how Christ makes a difference and why this new church is the best thing since sliced bread. They come across to unchurched people as down to earth and relevant.

13. **They are deeply committed to The United Methodist Church.***

They are willing to support The United Methodist Church and to plant a church which they eventually will give over to another pastor whom the bishop appoints.

* These traits can be nurtured by The United Methodist Church in potential planters through our intentional investment, mentoring and grooming over the years, prior to a planting appointment.