

Adopt a Church Planter Family and Minister to Them Regularly During the Year

Your church, Sunday school class, small group, mission group, or an individual, can connect with a specific Send North America church planter and his family. You will have opportunity to minister to them, celebrate special events in their lives such as anniversaries and birthdays, and connect with them in other ways throughout the year. Prayer is required and a guide is provided separately. However, this guide will provide ideas on ways your church can come alongside a church planter for an extended period of time; most Send North America partnerships should last three to five years.



Adopting a church planter family is a care ministry. Whoever participates or even leads the effort for a church does not have to be a professional family counselor or have years of pastoral consulting. However, it wouldn't hurt! Providing training for those who connect with a church planter family is very considerate in order to effectively meet needs.

Understanding who they are will make a big difference. Begin by establishing a ministry-focused dialogue.

- Church planters often move into cities that are very unfamiliar. Southern Baptists tend to be southerners, rural or suburban, largely from predominately Christian communities, and part of tight-knit family or friendship network. Send North America is focusing on the least Christian places, typically outside of the south, with planters living far from family and friends in some of the biggest cities in the world.
- Wives of church planters are intimate partners, sharing in every aspect of the work or they wouldn't be there in the first place. Some have children, many do not at least have children living at home.
- Children of church planters have a variety of needs based on their age or life experiences – going to a city school, competing against new challenges or challengers, missing “home,” and yet being pressured to excel in school.

Being sensitive to these inputs, pressures, and influences can be a good starting point for ministering to each church planter family member. Being able to allow them to share will take time, but as the relationship forms, the church can minister appropriately.

Length of time on the field impacts the church planter family:

- Newly arrived: loneliness, isolation, homesickness, culture shock, and being overwhelmed by the city. There are relocation issues for schooling, medical care, and simply knowing where to pay bills. Who do they trust?
- Veterans: frustration, rejection, hopelessness, depression, losing sight of the big picture, missed opportunities, broken relationships, ministry mistakes, costly financial decisions, temptations, marital stress, aging parents, and the constant influx of new people who go

without experiencing Christ. Victories may go uncelebrated.

Church planter families walk closely with the Lord, so connecting to the Lord through prayer is always the best, most consistent way to provide care.

Listening to the church planter family members that take the initiative to call you is important. Prioritizing them by quietly listening and then praying with them is important. Resisting the urge to play rescuer or solve things by sending money is another way to help.

There are multiple connection points that should not be overlooked. Look for more!

- Do you know each person's birthday?
- When is the couple's anniversary?
- What does the family like to do together for recreation?
- Can your church sponsor a family vacation for the whole family?
- Are there books, DVD series, or a particular author that each person prefers?
- Are you on the family's prayer newsletter?
- Would your church be willing to manage mailings and their Web site for them?

Connecting in person may mean visiting in person. This may mean traveling across the continent to participate in a strategic mission trip. At other times, it might mean making speaking opportunities for them in your church.

Just like a "prayer partnership," adopting a church planter family can be done formally by the entire church and it can also be done through a Sunday school class, WMU group, or other group within a church. In fact, by using this approach, the church can adopt and encourage more than one church planter family and their church planting efforts.

It is recommended that the church/group adopt a church planter family for at least a year. The Send North America emphasis is encouraging churches to have a three to five year commitment.

Flexibility is needed. Sometimes there can be a point when the family and the church need to stop the relationship—or put it on indefinite hold. Be sensitive to the requests of the church planter family. It may be that another individual, church, or ministry might be more effective during a specific "season" of life or perhaps when a family crisis arises. Follow the church planter's lead with the intent of remaining a blessing to the family in the short-term and certainly the long-term.

As with the prayer partnership, there is no financial obligation. As Southern Baptist churches this is fulfilled through gifts to the Cooperative Program and to the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering®.

Recommended resource: "Adopt a Plant/Planter Prayer Partnership"