

ORCHARD GROUP



The Orchard Way



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Introduction	3
Distinctive 1: We are focused on planting churches in cities	4
Distinctive 2: We are highly selective with lead church planting candidates	6
Distinctive 3: We share the fundraising responsibility with the lead planter	7
Distinctive 4: We form and lead Management Teams that remain fully engaged	9
Our Values	11
Our Vision	13
The Orchard Way: Visualized	15

Introduction

Staff

Every member of Orchard Group's executive team has a graduate degree in theology/ministry. Together, we have decades of church planting experience in cities across the country and around the world. Our team members joyfully serve lead planters and church partners behind the scenes so that people are reached with the gospel and Jesus is glorified.

The Orchard Group staff has been strategically organized around the following four distinctives:¹

The Four Distinctives

We are focused on planting churches in cities.

The 4 Ds • Based on our long history of ministry in New York City and other similar cities, we feel called by God to steward our learning and resources in places marked by population *density*, ethnic *diversity*, economic *disparity*, and spiritual *difficulty*.

We are highly selective with lead church planting candidates.

Top Recruits • We recruit and select lead planters who have the character, gifting, training and experience to start dynamic churches in challenging places.

We share the fundraising responsibility with the lead planter.

All In • Rather than committing a certain amount of support or specific services and leaving the rest of the fundraising work up to the lead planter, we actively and assertively help to raise funds until a new church is fully funded.

We form and lead Management Teams that remain fully engaged with a new church.

The '3 Selves' • While a big part of the work of church planting happens leading up to the launch of a new church, we do not consider our work to be done until several years after launch when the new church is self-supporting, self-governing, and self-replicating.

¹ While some church planting organizations may share one or two of these characteristics to some degree, we are not aware of any church planting organization that practices all of these values as we do.

Distinctive 1: We are focused on planting churches in cities

Why plant churches?

New churches are effective at reaching the next generation by expressing the good news of Jesus in fresh cultural ways. New churches reach new residents who are searching for community because existing churches often have unintentional social barriers that make it more difficult for new people to find a welcoming home. New churches reach people who may not resonate with the expressions of the gospel that already exist in their neighborhood or city. New churches tend to be outward focused by their very nature. They cannot grow and won't exist if they don't find ways to reach out to the people around them. For these reasons, starting new churches is one of the most effective means we have for sharing the gospel.²

Planting churches is also important simply because existing churches are closing. In the United States alone, nearly 4,000 churches per year close their doors.³

The way the gospel spread throughout the ancient world as recorded in the New Testament is that a leader or leaders would move to a city, gather believers, share the gospel with non-believers, disciple new believers, develop leaders, and appoint them to oversee the new church that had been formed. We believe this model is still the most effective way of seeing the gospel spread in our day.

Why cities?

People matter to God. The highest concentrations of people in our world are found in cities. Cities are places of high population *density*, ethnic *diversity*, economic *disparity*, and usually lower numbers of churches per capita, meaning an increased spiritual *difficulty* for new ministries to become established. People are moving to cities at a record pace. In 1950, 30% of the world's population was living in cities. By 2000, 50% of the world population was living in cities and by 2050 it is estimated that 70% of the world population will be living in cities. We need churches growing where people are going.

Cities are also hubs of cultural influence. Art, media, law, government, banking, business – all of these areas that end up shaping our culture at large are disproportionately located in major cities. If we want the gospel to influence our culture, we need gospel-centered churches reaching and discipling people who shape culture.

² For more information and statistics, see *Why Plant Churches* by Timothy Keller.

³ See the Pintetops Foundation's "The Great Opportunity" report.

Cities are comprised of people of widely different backgrounds – ethnic, linguistic, religious, cultural, and economic. While this presents some challenges, it also provides a remarkable opportunity for a new church to exhibit the power of Jesus to bring diverse people groups together and for those who will be impacted to take the good news to their own culture, country or community.

Cities are often prohibitively expensive. The cost of living and the price of real estate has made it more difficult for churches to start and thrive in cities. We believe it would be counterproductive to let these challenges keep Christians from focusing on ministry in cities.

Even in the first century AD, the strategy for sharing the gospel around the world was focused on cities. Churches were planted in cities and the gospel spread from the cities to the surrounding regions.

If the church is going to make a difference over the long-haul, then it must be present where people are and where culture is generated: in the world's cities.

Why Orchard Group?

Orchard Group was started in 1948 and focused on starting churches in and around New York City from the very beginning. Based on our long history of ministry in New York City and other similar cities, we feel called by God to steward our learning and resources in places marked by population *density*, ethnic *diversity*, economic *disparity*, and spiritual *difficulty*.

Orchard Group has an exceptional track record of planting churches in cities. Over 95% of churches started by Orchard Group become independently viable. Currently, churches planted by Orchard Group that are under five years old are reaching over 300 people on average; churches five to ten years old are reaching over 600 and churches ten to twenty years old are reaching nearly 1,200.

Distinctive 2: We are highly selective with lead church planting candidates

Importance of church planter selection

We strategically choose to work with the best and brightest church planters that we can identify, taking time to vet them objectively through formal assessments and subjectively through relational time together. After prayer and the work of the Holy Spirit, the single most important factor in the health and growth of a new church is the selection of the lead planter. A new church may have a great plan and be well resourced but if the lead planter lacks the character, calling, or gifting to start and lead the church, the chances of success are extremely low. Conversely, if the right lead planter is in place, the church will be positioned to overcome and thrive even when setbacks and obstacles occur.

In our experience, the best lead planters also attract the best staff members and volunteer leaders. Strong teams are always better than solo leadership and strong teams are most likely to develop around the best lead planters.

We also have a high regard for the investment that partner churches will be making in a new church project. We always want to be able to recommend a lead planter to a potential partner without hesitation or reservation, believing that the lead planter is worthy of a generous investment.

For these reasons, we actively recruit and carefully select church planters who are uniquely equipped to start and lead churches in cities.

Church Planter Characteristics:

The best church planting candidates will demonstrate the following characteristics:

- Theological alignment with our beliefs, character and integrity, humility and coach-ability, and high/sufficient marks in the majority of the following 15 characteristics:
 - Indigenous to target area
 - Relevant ministry experience
 - Entrepreneurial orientation
 - Gifted to preach
 - Leadership skills
 - Winsomeness/attractiveness
 - Social media savviness
 - Cultural fit
 - Maturity born from difficulty
 - Spousal support and contribution
 - Grit/resilience
 - Accurate view of self (self-awareness)
 - Emotional intelligence/empathy
 - Theological awareness
 - Focused and skilled at engaging non-Christians

Distinctive 3: We share the fundraising responsibility with the lead planter

Funding

Appropriate outside funding is essential to the launch and growth of a new church. Because of this, we choose to be *all in* with new church planters during the fundraising process. While there are always exceptions to general principles, studies have shown that new churches that are underfunded or overfunded during the first years struggle to become independently viable.

For specific church plants, we share the responsibility with the lead planter in order to ensure that the project is adequately funded to suit the vision and the context. And for the overall church planting mission, we provide pathways for meaningful giving for individuals, select churches, and foundations through initiatives like Global Cities and Seed Fund.

Value for the Partner:

Stories of impact • The stories of life change, new faith, community impact, compassion, and justice that happen in new churches serve as powerful examples of God's continued work in our world. And they serve as tangible examples of the difference that partners make. These stories are shared with Management Teams and through our communications channels, and in turn are re-told within partner congregations, foundations, and to friends.

Every year, churches planted by Orchard Group reach more than 25,000 people in cities around the globe. Every year, thousands begin giving time and resources. Every year through new churches, many people who might have never encountered Jesus at all, are presented with his story and begin to find his work credible. Every year, hundreds of people are baptized into new faith in Christ. When churches are established, lives are changed!

Investment in the Kingdom • Almost every existing church has a mission and vision for the Great Commission. Partnering with Orchard Group provides a way of *engaging* and *expanding* that mission out to the world, taking the local church's vision far beyond its own context.

While the upfront capital for starting a new church can be significant, especially in an expensive city neighborhood, from a Kingdom perspective the return makes it one of the most reasonable missions investments possible. It is not uncommon for a new church to give more money away to external missions causes by its tenth birthday than it received from outside partners as it was getting started. By investing

in a new church plant, a partner (church, foundation, or individual) can help to reach people in a city *and* broaden the base of missions giving well into the future.

Value for the Planter:

Aligning gifts • Most lead planters do not choose to start a new church because they are passionate about fundraising. They answer the call to plant a church because they care about reaching people. Unfortunately this can mean that, without guidance and support, they tend to move on too quickly from the fundraising phase to focus on gathering and reaching people. This ends up being short-sighted when external funding ends before internal funding increases enough to make up for the loss. Too often new churches get started but can't be sustained. By making the commitment to be “all in” with a lead planter on the fundraising phase, we can see to it that this undesirable outcome is less likely by helping a new church to start out on solid financial footing.

Bridging the gap • In some cases, lead planters do not have connections to churches that have both the ability and desire to provide funding for the new church they will plant. We believe God has positioned Orchard Group to bridge this gap by providing partners who are majority-culture or from “churched” regions a way to invest in lead planters who can connect with people that might not otherwise be reached.

Distinctive 4: We form and lead Management Teams that remain fully engaged

Launch vs. Establish

We don't want to merely *launch* new churches; we want to *establish* new churches. While a big part of the work of church planting happens leading up to the launch of a new church, we do not consider our work to be done until several years after launch when the new church is self-supporting, self-governing, and self-replicating.⁴ This three-self formula creates strong churches that flourish over the long term, and it requires the strength of good leadership and accountability during the opening years. This leadership is provided by a *Management Team*.

Stronger Together

Church planting can be an extremely challenging and lonely adventure for lead planters and their families. It's hard enough to launch a church from scratch, and the setbacks and obstacles new churches face during the first three or four years can leave leaders feeling disheartened and discouraged. Without a strong network of support around them many lead planters would be left vulnerable and may choose to simply give up. Management Teams often help the lead planter stick with it through the tough times early on in order to see the church thrive on the other side of early struggles.

Relationship and Accountability

Partner churches who give to support a new church are understandably interested in seeing that their financial investment is used wisely in order for the new church to achieve what it intends. Management Teams provide a level of accountability that serves the lead planter well and satisfies the desires of partner churches.

It is short-sighted to help churches launch without helping them reach a place of stability. It often takes 3-5 years (longer in some contexts) for a new church to reach enough people to support the ministry financially and to raise up the right leaders to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the lead planter in providing oversight for the church. Management Teams fill a much-needed role during those early years.

⁴ The Three-Self Formula has endured in church planting since the mid 1800s when leaders of the largest mission societies began implementing its principles globally.

Modeled in the First Century

In the earliest history of the church as recorded in the New Testament, new churches needed apostolic leadership from established churches for oversight. Once established, these new churches appointed elders to function as overseers and shepherds. Management Teams provide the support, accountability, and oversight new churches need until suitable local leaders in the new church can take on these responsibilities.

Our Values

Since 1948

Orchard Group has maintained the same simple statement of beliefs since our beginning in 1948. These convictions have been passed down by each generation of leaders. While this is certainly not an exhaustive list, we continue to affirm the following:

- The inspiration and authority of the whole Bible (Old and New Testament) as the revelation of God by the Holy Spirit.
- The deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, His incarnation by the virgin birth, his substitutionary, atoning death on the cross, his bodily resurrection, and his personal return as taught in the New Testament.
- The necessity of the new birth through the Holy Spirit for entering the Kingdom of God.
- The obligation upon all believers to be witnesses of the Lord Jesus Christ and to seek the salvation of others through faith in him.

Values

As an organization, we want our work to characterize and espouse the following values:

Relationship • Joining Orchard Group as a planter or partner is like being adopted into a big, extended family. Relationships are marked by honesty, trust, reciprocity, and fun. We want retreats and gatherings to feel like family reunions.

Custom-building • We think of our church planting efforts as “custom building” and our staff as “master craftsmen.” One result is that we favor a culture of asking, not assuming. Rather than assuming we know what will be the right strategy in a particular context, we force ourselves to start from scratch and ask good questions. It also means that we do not import a particular strategy template onto a lead planter, but instead we try to draw strategy out of the planter as they ask good questions specific to their city and target demographic.

Humility • We work with leaders who are highly capable and want to help their peers succeed. A big part of what makes Orchard Group unique is that those who are a few steps ahead are willing to help those who are rising up behind them. We’re at our best when leaders voluntarily and joyfully provide coaching, support, ideas, counsel, and more to their church planting peers.

Steadfastness • We keep our commitments. We are careful not to promise what we can’t deliver, and we are deliberate about doing what we say we will do.

Perspective • While the goals of seeing new churches become self-supporting, self-governing, and self-replicating require that we carefully track things like attendance and giving, we acknowledge that some very important outcomes are hard to count: discipleship, spiritual growth, community impact, etc. We never want the former to come at the expense of the latter.

Cultural agility • It is important that our team members and church planters demonstrate cultural agility. Cities contain a wide variety of demographic groups: ethnic, linguistic, economic, religious, etc. Planters must constantly navigate these changing social contexts. In addition, planters must be capable of connecting well with partners who may be located in social settings quite different from their own.

Refinement • We are intentional about learning from our mistakes. That doesn't mean we don't make new mistakes, but that we are less likely to make the same ones.

Dignity • We treat people with respect and dignity. Two practical examples: 1) We know church planting families make major sacrifices to carry out God's call on their lives. We don't want unbearable financial burdens to add to their challenges so we are intentional to see that salaries are appropriate to each context. 2) We work with a diverse group of church planting leaders so we take care to see that various viewpoints on non-essential issues are handled with tact and grace. We believe that doing so makes us all more compassionate and culturally aware.

Partnership • At the conclusion of every project, we want every partner and every planter to say, "That was a great experience. I want to work with Orchard Group again."

Our Vision

A Picture of the Preferred Future

We believe that sticking to our key distinctives and practicing the values outlined above will lead to an ever-increasing network of churches in cities around the world that are reaching their neighborhoods with the good news of Jesus and investing in additional new churches in their own cities and beyond. We believe we will precipitate an ever-increasing number of “church planting hubs” in which churches we have helped to plant will accept responsibility for ongoing church planting efforts in their regions without requiring our help. Just as we want individual churches to become independently viable, we want the multiplication efforts of these new churches — partnered together — to become independent of requiring our support.

This is not merely theory. We are seeing this become a reality in New York City, Baltimore/Washington, coastal California, and major cities in Japan.

The undeniable key to seeing this future become a reality is starting specific new churches and helping them thrive. If vibrant churches are started that can start other churches, true multiplication can happen. So we focus on planting churches in cities with exceptional leaders who are appropriately funded and walk with them until they are strong enough on their own. These new churches will bear fruit and the seeds of the future are in the fruit. Before too long, with a little nurturing and a lot of God’s provision, you get an orchard. *Orchards*. All around the world.

The Orchard Way: Visualized



We want people everywhere to know Jesus.



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