

Small Town & Rural Church Planting
Kent Suits - Christ Community Church
Batesburg-Leesville, SC - ChristCommunityBL.com

1. It's Different:

- **Slower, Longer Process.** Seed Church Plant vs. Pop-Up Transplant. Not as many people. Invest in people. You'll see the fruit eventually. People aren't moving there and looking for church. You have to actually reach the people who are there.
- **Possibly more expensive.** More long-term support needed. Evaluate the "3 year model"
- **Smaller.** We may need to redefine "self-sustaining" or "successful" size for rural plants.
- **Lonely.** You're not with your "tribe." Not even the majority of the people you minister to and with are in your tribe. You most likely will not have multiple staff members.
- **Accessibility to the Community and it's Leaders.** Volunteer opportunities.
- **Respect and Ease of Entry.** Most of the culture still has a high view of pastors.

2. It's Hard:

- *Like a good BBQ, the process of church planting in small towns and rural areas is **Low & Slow.** And sometimes you have to wait through "the stall."* (https://www.ruralchurchdevelopment.com/expectations/98j6ij3gq3o43fu84ciwnq6gj0outb?fbclid=IwAR0qR2NEZLfOD6jRnbYPuiDkbipwoAcy_xrgpuRZO8zNKNM-UsVPn7mQOCM)
- **People think they're already saved. They're "good Christian people."**
 - "The hardest person to reach with the gospel is the one who thinks he is saved, but is not. He cannot be converted until he knows he is lost. Until then, he does not know that he does not know."
 - "Small Town Ministry cannot be a stepping stone if it's going to work." - Donnie Griggs, Author of Small-Town Jesus
 - "God Has a place in heaven for a small town Southern man," - **Small Town Southern Man** by Alan Jackson
 - "Keep the little white church, keep keeping God first." - Jason Aldean (Small Town Small)
 - Matt Chandler on "Ministry in the Bible Belt":
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oluCmOTdwzA>
- **People are filled with pride just about being small town.**
 - "Keeping it Small Town." - Jason Aldean

"A lot of people who are not Christians think they are Christians and have been able to find support in certain churches that would continue to want to strengthen that belief. They are very moral people who live very upright lives. But they don't love the Lord and don't love Jesus. Don't have a relationship with Christ. Don't really interact with the Bible much. But they might be at church every weekend. So you've got a really moral person with no relationship with Jesus Christ who has no intention of fully submitting to the Word of God; who calls themselves a Christian....people already think they're Christians. So when they hear the invitation to receive Christ, they don't hear it. They don't think you're talking to them. Add a layer...you might call yourself a Christian but..."

3. It's Needed:

- **Preaching is Needed.** Preaching the “whole counsel” of the Word. The text. The Gospel.
- **Theology is Needed.** There's been a theological, gospel and pastoral “Brain Drain.”
- **Pastoring is Needed.** Humble leaders who talk about their own sin and the need to repent.
- **Discipleship is Needed.** Leaders who lead and train. Mentors who mentor. Evangelism. Biblical model of manliness. Male spiritual leadership. Following Jesus.

How to Talk about the PCA outside of our bubble:

“Faithful to the Scriptures. True to the Reformed Faith. Obedient to the Great Commission.”

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“We Believe the Bible, in the grace of God and in telling people about Jesus.”

4. It's Promising:

Excerpt from: **“Dollar General - Small Towns, Big Business”**

<https://seekingalpha.com/article/4002812-dollar-general-small-towns-big-business?page=2#>

- Dollar General shields itself against competition with 70% of its store base concentrated in towns smaller than 20,000.
- The company is an economically defensive investment with 26 consecutive years of same-store sales growth, including 9.0% and 9.5% during the depths of the Great Recession in 2008 and 2009.

Everyday Customer Value

Imagine a drive through small town America. Painting the landscape along the journey are a few staple rural chain stores, which have crafted highly profitable, billion-dollar businesses by **setting up shop in perennially underserved communities**. Chief among these is Dollar General (NYSE:DG), a retailer with **70% of its 13,000 small-box stores located in markets with populations smaller than 20,000 across the 43 states where it currently operates**.

While Dollar General faces competitive threats from continued expansion of the small discount retailer format which has been gaining traction in the past few years, **its strategic positioning in smaller towns helps shield it against larger competitors, many of which focus primarily on more densely populated urban areas**. While the concept of a supermarket or other large-format retail operation may be a foreign concept to customers in the smallest markets, they can just as easily derive value by obtaining valid substitutes for supermarket-type items from their local Dollar General store.

The business is beautifully simple: the company's small format enhances convenience of shopping, enabling customers to locate products, check out, and carry on with their daily lives in short order. **Customers also receive quality products at a great value** because Dollar General supports its low-cost strategy by maintaining a minimum number of items per merchandise category, enabling higher-volume purchases and greater buying power with vendors. Further, **its stores require a low initial investment**, keeping costs down and allowing for faster-paced expansion. **And its staffing is light: one store manager, one or more assistant managers, and three or more sales associates. A modest location could support store operations with as few as five or six employees.** Customers value the quality merchandise, low prices, and fast, convenient shopping that are facilitated by Dollar General's efficient operations.

The model has worked well for the company. So much so, in fact, that Dollar General has claimed its place among **the most economically resilient business models in retail along its way towards recording 26 consecutive years of same-store sales growth**. Clearly, **the value offered by Dollar General has resonated deeply and consistently with its customer base...**

Discussion Points:

1. Why do we need Church Plants in Rural Areas and Small Towns?

- a. Small-Towns/Rural areas are Gospel Deserts. Biblically Illiterate. Not reformed. Dying churches.
- b. *57 Million* people live in Rural & Small Towns. 17% US population. Small Towns are growing fast.

Follow Up: What do we mean by Rural/Small Town?

- b. A Small Town is technically 10,000 people or less in population. Rural is considered 2500 or less.
- c. A lot of what people consider Small-Town/Rural is technically metro/city/suburban/urban (10,000+). So the need is likely much higher. *100-150 Million*.

2. What are some unique *challenges* to Rural Church Planting? (Not cool. Not convenient.)

- a. Leadership Development. Little to no Gospel, Reformed (let alone Presbyterian) backgrounds.
- b. Blue collar, hard working and busy, but not well disciplined people with a different view of church.
- c. Not readers/academics/white collars. A lot GED's and high school diplomas.
- d. Access and Convenience to activities, resources, coffee shops, barbers, craft beer, applebees, etc.
- e. Finances and size. 50-75 is a "big church." Bi-vocational ministry might be legitimate or necessary.

3. What are some unique *advantages* to Rural Church Planting?

- a. Pastors are still highly respected. Like a mini-celebrity.
- b. Access/Involvement to businesses and schools is still welcomed and encouraged.
- c. A lot of ecumenical advantages. Ministerial cooperation (pros/cons)
- d. Bad school system? Bad education? (None of our schools are teaching CRT, transgenderism. And they still encourage abstinence and other Judeo-Christian values. A lot of our teachers and administrators still profess Christianity.)

4. What type of person should consider Rural Church Planting?

- a. Someone willing to sacrifice for the Kingdom. Creative. Flexible. Easygoing. Patient. Loyal. Committed. Not too pushy/agenda driven.

Follow up: Personality, gifts, experiences, joys, hobbies, etc.

Follow up: Do we need to rethink assessment for Rural Church Planters?

Helpful Research Links:

> *US Census Observation*: [https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2020/05/america-a-nation-of-small-towns.html#:~:text=July%201%2C%202019.-,About%2076%25%20of%20the%20approximately%2019%2C500%20incorporated%20places%20had%20fewer,million\)%20live%20in%20those%20cities](https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2020/05/america-a-nation-of-small-towns.html#:~:text=July%201%2C%202019.-,About%2076%25%20of%20the%20approximately%2019%2C500%20incorporated%20places%20had%20fewer,million)%20live%20in%20those%20cities).

> *MNA Webinar*: I wouldn't want to repeat everything we covered on the Webinar, but there was some helpful discussion there, and a lot of people might not have watched it. Maybe watch it again as a refresher.

<https://pcamna.org/episode/church-planting-and-renewal-conversations/rural-church-planting-movements/>

> *Dollar General's Growth Strategy*:

https://www.news-gazette.com/business/making-sense-of-dollar-generals-rural-growth/article_a8832456-b870-59ae-80b0-e2e0cfbe601e.html

<https://www.cfra.org/blog/desk-executive-director-dollar-general-seeks-reshape-small-towns>

<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2018/aug/13/dollar-general-walmart-buhler-haven-kansas>

<https://www.npr.org/2017/12/11/569815331/loving-and-hating-dollar-general-in-rural-america>

(Notes: No closer than 2 miles from each other. On average 10 miles apart. Population of 20,000 or less. \$40,000-\$100,000 avg. household income.

Small Staff. Lower operation cost. Fewer Leadership/Management.)

Small Town & Rural Resources:

Online:

- Rural Matters: Rural Matters Institute Conference 2017 on Youtube.
- Billy Graham Center & Ed Stetzer: www.bgcruralmatters.com
- <https://www.ruralchurchdevelopment.com/> (Corey Pelton)
- <https://www.virginiachurchplanting.org/> (PCA Network of Blue Ridge)

Books:

- “Small Town Jesus: Taking the gospel mission seriously in seemingly unimportant places” - by Donnie Griggs
- “Reclaiming Glory” - by Mark Clifton
- “Big dreams in small places: Church planting in smaller communities” - Tom Nebel
- “God's Country: Faith, Hope, and the Future of the Rural Church” - Brad Roth
- “Replanting Rural Churches: God's Plan and Call for the Middle of Nowhere (Replant Series)” - by Matt Henslee
- “Rural Mission: Insights From A Rural Church Planter” - Will Basham
- “Pastoring Small Towns” - Ronnie Martin & Donnie Griggs

Podcasts:

- “Revitalize & Replant Podcast” - Thom Rainer and Mark Clifton

SMALL TOWN PLANTER

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|---------------------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| 1. SAVED & SANCTIFIED | 6. SMART (PEOPLE) | 11. SELF-STARTER |
| 2. SLOW | 7. SMALL | 12. STRONG |
| 3. SIMPLE | 8. STILL & SILENT | 13. SPIRITUAL |
| 4. SELFLESS SACRIFICIAL SERVANT | 9. STORY-TELLER | 14. SOLDIER |
| 5. STEWARD | 10. SAFE | 15. SATISFIED |

SMALL TOWN LEADERS

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| 1. CHARACTER | 4. CAPACITY |
| 2. COMPETENCY | 5. CULTURE |
| 3. COMPATIBILITY | 6. COMMUNICATION |

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