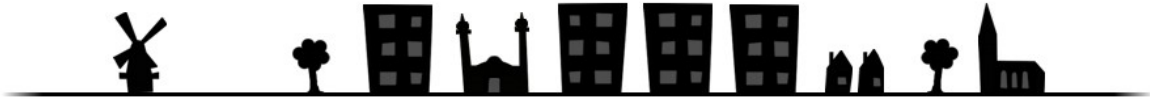


NEW CHURCHES IN A NEW CONTEXT

RESEARCH ON CHURCH PLANTING IN THE NETHERLANDS
AND THE ROLE OF CONTEXTUALIZATION



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The complete report (in Dutch) is downloadable from www.emergingnetwerk.nl.

SUMMARY 'NEW CHURCHES IN A NEW CONTEXT'

The Netherlands are changing fundamentally. The transition to postmodernism and the marginalization of the church mean that a new context is emerging. There is growing interest in church planting within this new context, also from some of the big denominations in the Netherlands. Nevertheless there hasn't been done much factual research on church planting. This makes it hard to learn or work together. The central question in this research is: "What is the nature and size of church planting in The Netherlands and what is the role of contextualization?"

This research was carried out during a period of nearly a year, from June 2007 to May 2008. I've studied literature, published press releases, contacted all kinds of denominations and used an internet questionnaire for people involved in church planting. I have been looking for church plants from 1990 and onwards, and I have excluded church plants that originated out of conflicts, or mergers from my research. Migrant churches were also excluded.

In the end I found 281 church plants within the delineation of this research, although the real numbers will be higher (estimated between 300 and 500). There were 115 valid responses to the internet questionnaire. Approximately 60% of the church plants have an Evangelical or Pente-costal background. Reaching people with the gospel is the biggest motivation for most church planters. Renewal of existing churches isn't important to 67% of the respondents. Most church planters are between 30 and 39 years old and circa 43% of all core group members are women. In 43% of the cases there is nobody with formal theological education in the core church planting group. Bill Hybels, Tim Keller and Rick Warren turn out to be the main sources of inspiration. Church planters perceive finding dedicated, mature people to help in planting a church as the biggest problem. The second biggest problem is developing a shared vision, staying united as a team and making all kinds of practical and theological decisions.

From a historical point of view, but also from a theological and a practical point of view, contextualization turns out to be a theme of major importance. With a new context emerging in The Netherlands, it should be one of the main focuses. Nevertheless my research gave indications that contextualization is not a big issue for most church planters. Only 22% of the church plants did a lot of research on their contexts and only half of the church plants has some sort of target group. Out of the questionnaire I also got an indication that most church planters (81%) have quite a conservative attitude towards contextualization.

Though reaching people with the Gospel is the biggest motivation for church planters, there are several indications that in practice it's quite hard to be missional. This needs further research.

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