

**Dan Alger, *Word and Sacrament: Ancient Traditions for Modern Church Planting*.** Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2023. ISBN 978-1645073031, xi+323 pp, pbk \$25; also audiobook, EPUB, Kindle.

This book provides a long overdue examination of church planting from an Anglican perspective. The author is a veteran church planter who, since 2016, has led ACNA's Always Forward church planting program and has been the most visible face of Anglican church planting.

The title *Word and Sacrament* alludes to what Alger considers the bedrock principle for the churches being planted by Anglicans today. Like other Protestant movements, a chief motivation of the English Reformation was to make the word of God available to the laity—but unlike most, it retained the sacramental nature of the Western church.

Building on Alger's unique experience leading church planting initiatives, the heart of the book is the detailed section on how Anglican church planters must define their vision and goals. Alger begins the section with eight focused pages explaining his longtime podcast mantra: "ecclesiology shapes missiology." Or as he summarizes it: "before we jump into the nuts and bolts of how to plant a church, we first need to understand what kind of church we are planting." From this he develops key insights, such as how Anglican church planters must expect growth stages and rates to differ from (non)denominations with much larger congregations.

Similarly, Chapter 5 develops an invaluable synthesis of his many arguments for the importance and process of contextualization—how planters adapt the historic faith to a local context. While clearly more worried about under- than over-contextualization, he offers arguments against both extremes.

His discussion of "Who Should Plant?" is the most powerful and practical chapter of the "How Do We Plant?" section—if not the whole book. His cases for assessment, training, and coaching should be required reading for both planters and those who prepare them. His call for each church planter to reexamine their motives for planting is one that should be incorporated into every assessment process: of his eleven "improper motivations to plant," a few may be familiar (need a job, want to be in charge) but most are not.

Another crucial insight is that the church planter must continually balance the processes of evangelizing and forming parishioners. Alger's Reformed perspective emphasizing Christian formation by teaching doctrine matches the dominant view within the ACNA. Alternate approaches will be familiar to clergy from other backgrounds: Anglo-Catholics might begin with the experiential and ascetical discipline of the Daily Office, while REC church planting recommends

combining a Celtic response with *Koinonia* to address 21<sup>st</sup> century postmodernism, one of “belonging and becoming before believing.”

At times the book seems more theoretical than practical—lots of why, and not as much how. The first two chapters are about “Why Should We Plant?”—certainly an important topic for instilling a church planting culture within a diocese, but probably more detail than the average church planter needs. At the church plants I’ve visited, the laity are more concerned with answering “Why is this church plant important?”—one that explains how the plant reaches and forms people not currently being served by other churches.

Similarly, the penultimate chapter—and at 54 pages, the longest one—is “Planting in Sacred Order.” With the detailed theoretical framework, it has nuggets such as explaining how a diocese can both fund church plants and improve their odds of succeeding with those funds. But for the broader topic of how church governance impacts church planting, the heterogeneity between and even within the dioceses of the ACNA makes it impossible to come up with a single formula.

In his summary of familiar mistakes such as launching prematurely, Alger adds the crucial insight that the pre-launch period is one of deep spiritual formation as much as preparing to go live on a Sunday morning. However, after emphasizing the importance of appropriately gathering and evangelizing members, he limits his explanation to two paragraphs because “I do not have the space.”

To be fair, the book’s introduction makes clear that it’s deliberately not a substitute for training, coaching, or mentoring—because no book can be. Always Forward recommends that all ACNA planters attend their four-day church planting intensive.

In this first book, Alger has succeeded in providing a complete overview of Anglican church planting. It’s one that could be the primary book for those sponsoring church plants or others indirectly involved in the launching of new churches. For actual church planters, it provides a valuable introduction or supplement to other materials—such as podcasts, other church planting books, and of course, formal processes of training, coaching, and mentoring.

Joel W. West

Hildegard College

Costa Mesa, California

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