SHOULD ANABAPTISTS CONGREGATE IN CITIES AND ATTEMPT CHURCH PLANTING?

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Why I discourage Anabaptists and other conservative Christians from converging into a city to be part of a church plant, until the number of "local converts" far outnumbers the percentage of "transplants".

1. *I think it works against autochthonous or indigenous church planting.*
2. *With lots of families from a similar Christian culture, the church community is much more self-sufficient, and they have less need for the contribution of locals in the community and church.*
3. *It is hard for transplants to bond to the locality/community if they have friends of similar faith background to relate to when they arrive.*
4. *The leadership of the church often gets focused on discipleship needs among the transplants rather than being able to give their attention to those who do not yet know the Gospel.*
5. *Anabaptists and other conservative Christians have a lot of strengths, but when they congregate together in a church plant setting, their weaknesses can become more pronounced, which will be a detriment to the establishment of a solid, Biblical church comprised primarily of local people.*
6. *If the majority of the group is transplants, the size of the church group can really dwindle when there are events or holidays, and the transplants head off to be with their families and friends. If half the people are gone, it can give the message to locals that the church family is not their primary family.*
7. *If there are interpersonal difficulties or issues to work through among the transplants, it is easy for those who struggle with having deep, long lasting,*

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trustful relationships, to "latch on to" the new people who are moving in, rather than learning to really love those they have differences with.

8. *More families moving in can be a blessing in some ways, but it often results in more financial needs, more relational challenges (both with children and with adults), more schooling needs, more pastoral needs, etc.*
9. *More transplant families joining the church can give the church a feeling that they are growing and expanding the Kingdom of God, whenever in the big picture of things; it is something akin to playing musical chairs and it is likely discouraging local people from joining the church.*
10. *Transplants can be part of an urban church for awhile, and be sent to do church planting throughout the world, without knowing how to bring local people a part of the church, keep them in the church, and help them take ownership for the church.*

After being presented with facts like this the following questions are sometimes asked. These questions are legitimate questions and I attempt to answer them. There may be better answers.

A. There are many people in Anabaptist churches who have spiritual needs or want to have church life more like the early church. Aren't these people just as important as the lost?

Yes, they are just as important. But to work on those needs in the same setting as the unchurched, almost always results in the Anabaptists taking over. Much of the church planter's energy gets invested into discipling the people who are moving in, and he is not able to invest as much into the locals. When this happens, it becomes very unlikely that the local people will take ownership of the church and make it into a thriving indigenous church.

B. How can a church be a church if it discourages people from joining who want to join? Can a biblical church actually do that?

When people from Judea went to Antioch and interfered with the work God

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was doing in the Antioch church, they were reproved.
When we read the letters to the churches in Revelation, Jesus does not encourage the faithful to join another church. He encourages them to be faithful.
Imagine how different the Acts story would be, if Jewish believers, who were looking for a different church experience than what they had at home, would have moved to the new churches that Paul & Barnabas and Silas had started throughout Asia, because it looked more exciting than being a missionary at home.

C. If someone knows something about church planting, why wouldn't they be glad to share this with others?
There is a definitely a time and place for church planters to share what they have learned about church planting. If a few people can apprentice along-side of a church planter, that is wonderful.
But the church planters need to first have a working model that is worth duplicating. If a church planter is not able to disciple converts into the church because of his relational style or his worldview, he will not be able to mentor others well.
Another option for apprenticing is to have would-be-church-planters start a "sister congregation" in a nearby area. The church planter can then share advice and tips and have a bit of fellowship back and forth, without the "transplants" interfering with the establishment of an indigenous church.

D. Didn't the Moravian communities at Herrnhut and Bethlehem do the exact opposite of what you are promoting? Didn't they welcome people from all sorts of churches to congregate in one area and be part of a missionary sending church community? Didn't some Native Americans Christians join this community?
Yes, there are illustrations of this throughout Christian history. For every "successful" community, there are probably 99 unsuccessful ones. It is important that church planting teams understand which model they envision before moving to an urban area to plant a church. Communities

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that had a measure of success almost always had some strong, capable, leaders whose vision held the community together. When those leaders became "lords" or passed off the scene, the community dwindled or dissolved. I would suggest that one reason these communities generally die out is that too many of those who joined these communities had not first learned all that God intended for them to learn in their home communities. However, God does work in spite of our mistakes, and can still use these efforts. There are probably still churches today that are the direct result of the work of missionaries that were sent out by these communities.

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