

Choosing Your

# Church Name

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Perhaps the most-exciting and most-significant thing you will do early on as you are preparing to plant is choose a church name. Your name says a lot about who you are, where you want to go and what is important to you. In essence it is a 1-3 word *vision statement*. Your name is a HUGE part of your church's identity and while you are recruiting and fundraising it is *your only identity* so it is critical that your name give an accurate snapshot of your vision.

Over the past 10 years I've been involved in starting and naming four different church/ministries. If I had to do it all over again, it is quite possible that I would name each one of them differently. Presently, I am in the beginning stages of a renaming process of the church I am pastoring, except this time the ministry is 100 years old! Through this process of [re]naming five different ministries, here is what I've learned:

1. Your name should **reflect your vision**. As I said, your church name is like a mini-vision statement. People should be able to get a decent snapshot of who you are just by your name.
2. Your name should **be indigenous**. Your name should say something about the community you're in, the people you're serving, or who you're trying to reach. For instance, *Mosaic* is a great name for an urban community of diverse ethnicity, but it doesn't make much sense for a homogenous small town. When thinking "indigenously" about a name, think a little broader than your vision. For instance, think "city" instead of "street." Think "Africa" instead of "Somali." Think "neighborhood" instead of the *people* in your neighborhood. The reason for this is that it's a lot easier to change your church's vision than it is to change your name and once you get running on the ground for a couple years, you may find out that the people in your neighborhood are different than you thought, you have to relocate or redirect your efforts.
3. Your name should be **spiritual, but not religious**. In a strained effort to be relevant, the 80's and early 90's saw a rash of church names that sounded like suburban subdivisions. I know I may be stepping on toes here, but personally I don't want my church to be constantly mistaken for a country club (as was the case for one church I worked for). What makes a good name for a shopping center doesn't necessarily make a good name for a church. I think this sort of naming is an over-reaction to obscure religious names like "Elim," "Calvary," and "Bethany." There is danger in choosing a name that is either "too religious" that unchurched people have no clue what it means or so "relevant" to the culture that it means nothing at all. Rather, your name should communicate that is a *place for spiritual seekers* in a way that non-religious people can understand. I named a church plant I led in St. Paul *Loungedivine* because I wanted to communicate to seekers in our neighborhood that it was a comfortable place to explore spirituality. There are a lot of cool words and names that convey spiritual significance without being "churchy."

4. Your name should be **unique, but not too unique**. Ah hem... Speaking of *Loungedivine*... Unique is good, but if your name is *too unique* you really narrow your focus and potential crowd, so be creative, but don't let your creativity run away with you. Personally, I think *Crossroads* is a really cool name with multiple meanings, but so do like 1,000 other churches with that name. If you choose a name that's not entirely unique you are at the very least going to have a hard time finding a web domain name.
5. It's good to **involve others in the process**, but that doesn't mean it should be democratic. It's good to bounce ideas off of others, ask for suggestions and brainstorm together, but that doesn't mean that everyone's opinion matters. Ultimately, the final decision on a name needs to come from the person who's casting the church's vision. If you want to include others in the process then have them help you narrow it down to a Top 3 or 5, then the planter needs to make the call.

Choosing a name is exciting! Sometimes it comes only after much discussion, deliberation and prayer and other times it's a sudden revelation in the middle of the night. Whatever the case, don't take this privilege lightly! Mull over your vision, hangout with the people you're trying to reach, and do some research. Your name is the first impression others will have of you and you never get a 2nd chance to make that first impression.